Meandering through Policy Development: Observations on Vocational Education and Training in Albania

Matthias Jäger

Introduction

Albania has a serious skills gap in almost all economic domains, and at almost all qualification levels. At present the formal skills supply system primarily focuses on educational attainments, and it contributes little to closing the skills gap. In reality skills development is widely left to market forces, which react with ad-hoc measures. Thus, at this stage of development, the leading question for policy development would be, how, when, and by which means Albania wants to close this skills gap. Vocational education and training (VET) policy development would have to follow such a vision.

Starting from the early 90ies, Albania has received substantial and continuous international support to various dimensions and aspects of vocational education and training, including support to systems reform and policy development. As a result of an EU project, Albania adapted in 2010 a law on the introduction of an Albanian Qualifications Framework.

However, systems deliverables and outcomes still produce mixed results. This makes it an interesting case for observations on policy development, the contributions of internationals and the role of the Albanian Qualifications Framework.

The first visit of this writer dates back to early 1998. Thereafter he had regular assignments as short- and long-term consultant in various aspects of vocational education and training. This included participation in and contributions to national working groups, workshops and conferences.

Historical development of the VET system in Albania

In earlier days, under the centrally planned economy, Albania had a vocational education and training system which prepared the workforce for the then existing world of work. Vocational schools, many of them established in or attached to industrial estates, in rural areas to cooperatives, represented the backbone of the then system. The system featured a dual element, in that vocational schools provided theory classes, whereas for practice learning students went on internships to state enterprises. Such internships were regulated by the state, and the participation of enterprises was compulsorily enforced by law.

Though vocational secondary education, in 2- and 4-years cycles, was the backbone of vocational training, the system as a whole was more comprehensive. Post-secondary programs for advanced qualifications and company-internal schools for adult education complemented the portfolio. Vertical paths and career advancement were facilitated through a system with originally 7 qualification levels. This system was implemented in-company. Upon completion of compulsory education, workers entered the scale at level 1. Upon completion of a 2-years vocational program, the entry level was 4, and technicians upon completion of 4 years technical education could enter directly at level 6. Advancement from one level to the next was possible at the earliest after 9-12 months with an examination in front of a panel. Admission to such examinations required a recommendation from the workplace, and participation in respective in-company qualification measures. The examination panel consisted of the director of the concerned enterprise, its chief engineer, an additional engineer, the department head, the chief of personnel, 1-3 qualified workers, and representatives from the trade union.

Work experience and advancement was recorded in a workers book, another systems element for facilitating vocational paths.

1 Republic of Albania, Council of Ministers: Udhëzim Nr.3, datë 7.2.1963, Disa rregulla për provimin e punëtorëve me rastin e klasifikimit të tyre, Article 4
At the beginning of the transition period, the share of students attending vocational schools was as high as 60%. Whereas the general education system survived the transition structurally and was ‘only’ challenged to develop into a quality system in line with international standards, the vocational education and training system collapsed. With the disappearance of state enterprises, vocational education lost its orientation and its natural partner. This implosion is drastically illustrated by the below graph².

Thus, with the beginning of the transition, Albania had to rebuild vocational education and training from scratch. Like in almost all walks of life in Albania, the serious civil uproar in 1997 in the aftermath of the collapse of a pyramid saving scheme, widely destroyed first achievements of transition. In many respects, including vocational education and training, the transition process restarted in 1998 almost afresh.

**Bricks for VET systems design**

As mentioned above, Albania had to rebuild its vocational education and training system from scratch. At the time of writing this article, the vocational education and training system is still a big construction site. Albania doesn’t have yet have a coherent system in place, which “links and matches with labor market requirements, attracts participants, strives towards European standards, and thus contributes to economic development and poverty alleviation”³. But it has a number of bricks and elements potentially contributing as puzzle stones to future systems design.

**VET providers**

As regards training provision, the Ministry of Education represents the main player in vocational education and training. Out of its estimated 300 vocational schools at the beginning of transition, 41 have survived until today. Their core business is secondary vocational education leading to a double qualification in an occupational profile and the matura. Occasionally some vocational schools have been involved in providing short courses, and some of them also offer classes for adult and part-time learners.

The Ministry of Labor, the second major player, was only established after transition in 1992. From 1993-2006 it established 10 public vocational training centers. Though these centers would have the

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authority to offer vocational programs up to the duration of 2 years, the majority of their occupational courses have a maximum duration of 3 months.

A few private providers like the Harry Fultz Institute, Don Bosco, an Austrian IT School and some smaller NGO also offer vocational programs. For vocational education they are to follow Government guidelines for secondary education, whereas the Ministry of Labor can approve vocational training up to 2 years duration more liberally, but with no opening to further vocational paths.

The vast majority of private training providers focus on foreign languages and computer courses. Only a few and rather small providers focus on occupational courses and programs. Private providers mushroom in higher education, but not in vocational education and training. Albania has more universities and other institutions for higher education than vocational schools. The Albanian pre-university education system, including vocational education and training, remains highly centralized.

The hiring and firing authority lies with the Ministries, educational and training programs depend on national curricula with lesson plans, and the VET providers have little authority to open and close courses as per the local conditions and needs. In vocational education even the number of students is defined centrally without reference to the regional absorption capacity and need in the respective occupational profiles.

There are substantial quality differences between VET providers and profiles. Those providers and occupational profiles which received international project support from various donors for course development, equipment, staff development and learning resources are in considerable better position than others.

By far the biggest and most reputed VET provider from the earlier system, the Harry Fultz Institute in Tirana, was privatized in the 90ies. For a couple of years it continued to be a phare in vocational learning, before it gradually shifted its focus to general education.

Status of VET providers

In quantitative terms, the vocational schools under the Ministry of Education are the most substantial element for VET delivery. They depend on the Ministry of Education, be it directly or be it through Regional Education Offices. As a result of a joint effort of German, Austrian and Swiss projects in the 90ies, the Ministry of Education granted those vocational schools which received international project support, a special status as pilot schools directly under the Ministry of Education. They were allowed to open their own bank account, received funds for school operations directly from the Ministry, and had slightly bigger autonomy to adapt their programs for practice learning to local requirements. In 2001, the pilot schools were renamed National Schools. At present 20 out of 41 vocational schools are National Schools. Despite joint and intensive efforts of an EU and a Swiss project from 2007-2010 to organize VET providers in Regional VET Centers, or to at least create a semi-autonomous status for vocational schools, the governance system erratically remained highly centralized.

Legislation

The legislative process in the post transition area features three major milestones:

- A first national law on vocational education and training (VET law) was approved in 2002. It had the character of a rather open framework law with options for a flexible implementation. However, crucial bye-laws, in particular those for financial management of VET providers as pre-condition for flexibilization and diversification of their portfolio, where never finalized.
- In 2010, the parliament adopted the law on the Albanian Qualifications Framework.

In 2011 the VET law of 2002 was revised. Main elements of this revision included the institutionalization of the National VET Agency, the opening of new program options like dual schemes or post-secondary training. The revised VET law reinforces the strict demarcations between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labor. The law further defines the structure for formal vocational education under the Ministry of Education as a 2+1+1 system with exit points to the labor market after year 2 and year 3, and with year 4 leading to the matura.

Types and levels of vocational programs and courses

By and large the present portfolio of vocational schools roots in the profiles they inherited from the earlier system. The profiles were adapted and modified, and a few new profiles (e.g. hospitality-tourism, automotive service and repair, ICT) were added. On the whole there was never a process to review the adequacy of the overall course portfolio both in qualitative and quantitative terms.

In 2011 80% of the students in secondary vocational education were enrolled in the 7 profiles ICT, economy and business, thermo-hydraulics, hospitality-tourism, transport vehicle service, mechanics, and electro-technics.

Secondary education in vocational schools is imparted under a 2+1+1 (2+2 for selected profiles) system. Officially the rationale and character of secondary vocation education, the balance between employability, labor market relevance and educational purpose, was never really clarified. Political declarations and projects speak of employability and labor market relevance, whereas in reality the Ministry of Education itself, the schools, but also the parents and students perceive it as a 4-years secondary education cycle leading to the matura and opening access to higher education. There is hardly any exit to the labor market after year 2 and year 3.

Vocational education provided by vocational schools for adults in evening classes is rare, and it doesn’t have an independent character. Such vocational programs follow the educational rationale and the curricula of secondary vocational education.

Post-secondary programs, be they for initial vocational education for graduates from general secondary education, or be it for advanced qualifications, exist in a few pilot classes under project conditions.

Public training centers offer courses of up to three months duration in 26 occupational profiles. However, almost 60% of the participants are enrolled in language and ICT classes. The majority of more technical profiles were inherited from a Swiss project focusing on employment oriented short courses.

Vocational training with a duration of up to 2 years is an option foreseen in the VET law under the responsibility of the Ministry of Labor, but such courses are available in a few NGOs only.

National VET Council

In 2004 Albania established a National VET Council as advisory body. The council is co-chaired by the Minister of Education and the Minister of Labor.

National VET Agency

In 2006 the Government also created a National VET Agency. In principle this agency should serve both the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labor, but administratively it depends on the Ministry of Education. It is staffed with 14 people and organized in three departments. In 2012 the scope of the

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VET Agency was enhanced, and the unit for the implementation of the Albanian Qualifications Framework was incorporated. However, at the time of writing this article, this unit was not yet staffed. The VET Agency was institutionalized through the revised VET law in 2011.

Albanian Qualifications Framework
The law on the qualifications framework was passed by the Parliament in 2010. At the time of writing this article, bye-laws are not yet elaborated, the AQF Council is not yet established, and the unit is not yet functional.

National VET Strategy
After the first National VET Conference in 1999, an abundance of white papers, strategy papers, policy papers, position papers, inventories, research papers, draft strategies and action plans, political declarations, consultancy reports, etc. were written by projects, international experts and working groups. None of the draft strategies and action plans was ever formally approved. It is only the National Strategy on Pre-university Education 2008-13, and the Sectoral Strategy on Employment and Vocational Training 2007-2013, which comprise short chapters on vocational education and training. These two chapters are widely aligned with each other. They address the need for fundamental reforms. The more tangible objectives address the development of an Albanian Qualifications Framework, the introduction of a technical matura, new training offers at post-secondary level, modernization of curricula, creation of a National VET Agency, empowerment of the National VET Council, and development of infrastructure.

The government program for the election period 2005-2009 defined a 40% participation in vocational education as strategic objective for vocational education. Subsequently this was introduced as single one key success indicator for vocational education in the Pre-university Education Strategy 2008-13. However, this was not supported through respective implementation strategies, action plans and budgets.

Under the pressure of the IPA-Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance of the EU, which makes strategies conditional for funding, the Government made another effort to develop a specific National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training and Lifelong Learning 2013-20. A final draft ready for consultation was released in December 2012. This draft strategy defines a participation of 33% in secondary vocational education, and doubling the participation in adult learning from 2% to 4% as overall policy goals.

The revision of the VET law in 2011 was a rather stand-alone process; it did not follow strategy development.

International support
Since the beginning of transition, international support to vocational education and training was substantial and multifaceted.

In the 90ies the major support of various donors was directed directly towards the rehabilitation of vocational schools, including renovation of learning programs, equipment support and staff development. The major stakeholders of that period included the German Government through GTZ, the Austrian Government through Kulturkontakt, and the Swiss Government through Swisscontact.

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Other donors from Denmark, the Netherlands, and Italy were also active at the level of vocational schools.

At the beginning of transition there was no Ministry of Labor. This was established with the support of the International Labor Organisation in 1992. Gradually it established 10 public training centers. In non-formal training the German Adult Education Association was one of the first stakeholders to stimulate adult learning. After the turn of the millennium, also the Swiss government implemented from 2001-2008 a project for labor-market oriented short courses with an outreach which outnumbered the provision under the Ministry of Labor.

In 1996, the European Union launched a first VET Reform Project. However, this was not implemented due to the upheavals in 1997.

In policy dialogue, the European Training Foundation continuously played an active role, and it also implemented a series of smaller projects.

Starting from 2000, the World Bank developed into the major international stakeholder in the educational reform process for primary and general education. However, it explicitly excluded support to vocational education and training based on the following position:

Reviving old models of vocational schools is fiscally unsustainable and will not do service to students...The government of Albania sets the target that VET would attract 40% of the total number of learners enrolled in secondary education...Vocational schools in Albania spend three times as much as general secondary schools to reach the same labor market outcomes. The target to increase vocational school students is fiscally not desirable...In the medium-to long-term, public vocational education is best provided at the post-secondary level. EU and EU accession countries are increasingly moving towards post-secondary VET while enhancing upper secondary general education to provide students with broad skills and competences...Encouraging the growth of private training institutions as well as the provision of practical training in firms will be important. Given that the majority of firms in Albania is small- to medium size, this may not be achieved in the short-term.

This position of The World Bank represents a crystal clear policy statement worth to be debated. Unfortunately this debate officially never took place, neither within the donor community nor within Government structures. VET projects financed by various donors, including the EU, continued to support secondary vocational education.

It was only in 2004, when the European Union started to invest substantially into VET with first major support projects under its CARDS Program. The terms of reference for this first project explicitly made reference to the fragmentation of the system:

Because of the lack of governance and co-ordination from Albanian Authorities the intervention made in this sector by the international community is highly fragmented. As a result there were many pilot initiatives, certainly advanced compared with the other schools, but there has been no transfer of best practice to the rest of the system.\(^8\)

As a consequence, the objective of the project was “to assist the Albanian Government, through the Ministries of Education and Labor, in the creation of a single high quality VET system\(^9\).

This first project of the European Union was followed by several others, including a twinning project to support the newly established National VET Agency, rehabilitation, reconstructions and equipment of several vocational schools and training centers, and a still continuing project with a component for supporting the development of a new National VET Strategy and Action Plan 2013-2020.

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\(^10\) Government of Albania, op.cit., p. 7
After the focus of the Swiss and the German Governments in the early years of the new millennium was rather on non-formal training and private sector development, they both returned in 2007 and 2009 respectively under more systemic approaches to support vocational education and training reform processes, and to stimulate decentralization, innovation, flexibilization and stakeholder participation.

Already in the late 90ies, the German, Austrian and Swiss projects initiated a loose and informal cooperation under the name DACH. Later on this developed into a DACH+ group with the participation of some other projects and donors, including the EU projects. Despite the structures remained loose and informal, DACH+ developed at times into a rather strong voice of the internationals, and a dialogue partner of the Government for key policy issues. Joint position papers, the organization of a National VET Conference, platform for debates with the private sector, were some highlights of this cooperation.

In 2009 the Government and the donor community established jointly an official Sub-sector Working Group for vocational education and training. The working group is directly hooked to the Department of Strategy and Donor Coordination in the Prime Minister’s Office. The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation performs as donor focal point and European lead donor.

Observations on implementation

As shown above, structurally and as regards the legal framework, many things have happened during the last couple of years. Albania has a specific legislation on vocational education and training, it has an approved law on the Albanian Qualifications Framework, with the 2+1+1 system it has a flexible approach, it has established a National Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Qualifications, many vocational schools and occupational areas have received substantial project support, the revised law opens the option for dual and post-secondary training, and accreditation and recognition of training programs in the private sector is in principle possible. However, implementation is a different pair of shoes.

Apart from some blooming and bright VET islands here and there, be it in the private, public or NGO sector, vocational education and vocational training hardly feeds the economy with the required skills and competences needed by the enterprises to produce products and services to the society. Some bullet points on prevailing challenges:

- The current VET system is characterized by shared governance between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labor with overlaps, high centralization, weak participation of the private sector, and absence of regional and local authorities. Neither the VET law, nor the Albanian Qualifications Framework, nor project efforts, nor the daily practice was able to overcome the dichotomy between vocational education and vocational training. In reality the shared responsibility of the two Ministries is rather a segregated responsibility.

- Apart from some outstanding examples (e.g. the banking sector in a dual faculty at the University of Durres based on the German model of ‘Berufsakademie’, some internship schemes in selected vocational schools); the participation of the private sector is somewhere between weak and absent. This concerns all levels and dimensions of private sector participation, i.e. participation in national, regional and local governance structures, financing, development of occupational standards, occupational assessment, provision of internships and industrial attachments, dual-form learnerships, etc. However, considering the history and the level of development of the private sector, this is not really surprising.

- Albania has too many, too poorly equipped and sometimes too small VET providers without a clear profile, identity and reputation as center of competence in their respective domains.

- Despite a recently modernized vocational education structure (2+1+1) which theoretically and in principle would allow for adequate vertical and horizontal flexibility with exit and re-entry
points, vocational schools are widely perceived as general education providers with technical or occupational profiles, but not as institutions which enable students to gain employability. In reality the 2+1+1 system is implemented as 4-years program leading to the state matura.

- Courses for adults with part-time learning exist in higher education, but they are only scattered offered in vocational education and training. If such programs are offered at all, they don’t have an independent character, they follow the same educational rationale like secondary education.

- Public vocational training centers focus on short courses for the unemployed under active labor market policy measures, whereas vocational training courses leading to real occupational qualifications remains unattended.

- Economic sectors in which a majority of the Albanian labor force earns their living (e.g. small-scale trading, agriculture and agriculture products processing, maintenance and repair, low-tech production, hotel and tourism) remain widely unattended.

- Post-secondary programs, dual training, occupational courses with a duration of up to two years are options under the VET law. However, if at all, they are only offered under direct project support or through NGO providers.

- As a consequence of poor alignment with the labor market and of poor quality, vocational education and training institutions have a low reputation, they don’t attract students, and the enrolment rates remain low. With 14% enrolment in vocational education in 2009/10 the strategic goal of 40% remains far out of reach.

And last but not least, the challenge to develop a single VET system is misinterpreted as uniform VET delivery, instead of creating a system which is able to manage and integrate diversity. Qualifications frameworks with their focus on competence instead of learning paths and duration, could exactly serve the purpose to integrate different learning paths, models and approaches under different authorities, including on-the-job learning in the private sector, under one common roof. The following paragraph sheds light on the respective developments in Albania.

The Albanian Qualifications Framework

At first a qualifications framework as such is an instrument and not a policy. As an instrument it can serve different purposes.

The South African approach and the European Qualifications Framework might represent the two poles of what a qualifications framework might be used for.

In the South African understanding of the qualifications framework, the framework is not just an instrument among others, but the backbone of a complete and coherent national system with an abundance of qualifications and respective unit standards. This understanding of a qualifications framework is rooted in the competency-based learning philosophy and approach, and it is the backbone of a complete learning system.

The purpose of the European Qualifications Framework is quite different. Though the framework as an instrument and the respective terminology also roots in the anglo-american approach to occupational learning, its purpose is different: The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) acts as a translation device to make national qualifications more readable across Europe. It is common wisdom, that vocational education and training throughout Europe has many facets, and is based on different traditions, beliefs and learning philosophies. Again, the dual system in German speaking countries and the Scottish Qualifications System may represent the poles. It will never be possible, and it is possibly also not desirable, to ever have a similarly unified European vocational education and training system.

like the Bologna system at the level of higher education. Thus, in the European context, the European Qualifications Framework serves as instrument to manage diversity, and to make qualifications acquired under different learning systems and approaches comparable.

In Albania the National Strategy on Pre-university Education 2009-2013 speaks of a radical reform, which "goes beyond the merely institutional improvements up to radical changes in the vision, attitudes and conduct of all committed stakeholders"\(^\text{12}\). Thereafter it introduces the Albanian Qualifications Framework as the core instrument to achieve the objective, in particular to "increase flexibility, admission possibilities, advancement and vertical and horizontal mobility (between levels and directions) in vocational education and training.

Such formulations taken literally, suggest the Albanian Qualifications Framework to become the backbone of a completely re-engineered training and learning system somehow similar to the South African or Scottish Model. However, in reality, neither the political will, nor the resources, nor the participation and interest of the private sector were ever available to take that route.

Such a fundamental reform would have to be made a national task, where the concerned line ministries would play a role as one stakeholder among others.

As a matter of fact, the Albanian Qualifications Framework was never considered a national task, but as a joint task of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labor, and basically limited to vocational education and training. The concerned Ministries entrusted the development of the Albanian Qualifications Framework to a project, the EU CARDS VET project. The objectives for an Albanian Qualifications Framework as described in the inception report of that project sound much more vague and modest than the declarations in the strategy. It doesn't speak of the Albanian Qualifications Framework as a lever for a fundamental reform, but of an instrument to improve understanding, to improve access, to improve learner mobility\(^\text{13}\), and the like.

Without the political will and determination for a fundamental reform, and within the limitations of the given reality that vocational education and training in Albania is considered to be exclusive domains of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labor respectively, an Albanian Qualifications Framework could theoretically and meaningfully serve the following minimal, yet still ambitious, purposes:

- Integration of the offers under the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Labor under one common roof,
- Opening of horizontal and vertical vocational paths,
- Permeability between sub-systems,
- Facilitation of re-entry to vocational education from the labor market,
- Recognition of prior and non-formal learning, including validation of skills acquired in migration.

In reality the law on the Albanian Qualifications framework is rather segregative than integrative in nature. It rather reinforces than it overcomes the strict demarcations between general education, vocational education and vocational training. The Albanian Qualifications Framework is not based on the principle to define qualifications which can be reached through different paths and under different sub-systems, but it rather installs parallel systems for general education, vocational education and vocational training. No bridges between the sub-systems are foreseen.

Up to present the Albanian Qualifications Framework is cross-referenced in other legal texts, it is present in discussions, policy papers and draft strategies, but it is not really implemented. The AQF council has not been established so far, and the AQF unit to serve as secretariat of the AQF council has formally been attached to the National VET Agency, but it has not yet been staffed at the time of writing this article.

\(^{12}\) Republic of Albania, Ministry of Education, National Strategy on Pre-University Education 2009-2013, Tirana 2008, p. 31
Even if the Albanian Qualifications Framework would be implemented as per the law, it would not serve as lever and backbone for a fundamental and radical reform as stipulated by the National Strategy on Pre-university Education. At best it could develop into a useful instrument to at least open vertical vocational paths, to recognize prior learning, and to serve as instrument to stimulate the private sector to further develop, institutionalize and accredit their non-formal on-the-job learning schemes. In the given context horizontal mobility between sub-systems, and the flexibilisation of the access to vocational education to allow re-entry from the labor market, still seems to be a long way to go.

**Lessons learnt on policy development**

**Lesson 1 – Policy development has different dimensions**

Policy development encompasses the three dimensions content, processes and structures, sometimes also referred to as policy, politics and polity. In international cooperation in particular the process component is most critical, because politics and policy development processes rarely follow project cycles and rationales. Policy development processes have different speeds, sometimes they are much slower, and sometimes must faster than project cycles. This challenges donors to re-visit their philosophies and approaches, if they really want to play a role in policy development.

**Lesson 2 – Awareness on deficits is a pre-condition for policy development**

Pre-condition for policy development is the awareness of a deficit and the feeling for the need for remedial action. Albania has a serious and alarming skills gap in almost all domains of the economy and at almost all qualification levels. Many private sector actors are aware of it, whereas this awareness widely lacks in the public sector. While the primary focus of vocational education is on educational attainments, the private sector makes its own ad-hoc arrangements for skills development. Prior to the development of VET policies and strategies, Albania would have to gain clarity on how it intends to fill its skills gap, and which role VET is envisaged to play in it.

**Lesson 3 – Policy development requires a culture of exchange and debate**

In principle many public sector actors are aware on the need for private sector cooperation and participation in policy development and implementation. However, the reality is different, and the private sector is widely absent. The highly standardized reaction of public sector actors on this shortcoming is the call of for the Government to force the private sector by law into cooperation. Cooperation requires dialogue, exchange, debate, partnership, negotiations at equal eye level between the concerned stakeholders. In Albania such a culture of exchange and debate is in the infancy stage, and the wide-spread perception of the public sector still being superior to the private sector, persists.

**Lesson 4 – Exchange and debate require platforms**

Exchange and debates on policy development require platforms for the interaction between stakeholders. In an environment where both such platforms and a culture of exchange and cooperation are missing, investments into the establishment and operation of such platforms are indispensable prior to policy development in a specific sense.

**Lesson 5 – Policy development requires stakeholder participation and functioning interfaces**

Possibly everybody would agree that VET policy development requires public and private sector participation. But it also requires functioning interfaces between the political and technical level both in
the public administration and in the private sector; it requires professional and independent expertise, and it requires the civil society and the media. Policy development is a political process, and neither a technical nor an administrative one. Thus, it also requires inputs from and consultations with the various political forces already during the process, and not only at the end for formal approval.

**Lesson 6 – Internationals need to review their role and approaches**

The role of internationals in policy development remains essential in transition economies. Despite good preconditions, despite a long standing cooperation among internationals in Albania, they played a controversial role in VET policy development. Thus far it is only the World Bank which made a clear policy statement. No other donor or international organization has an equally clear position, and the community of internationals as a whole has neither a shared vision on the position of the World Bank, nor on the role and value of secondary vocational education. In reality policy interventions may happen through experts of multilateral and European entities, through consultants, as project or program components, at the level of donor offices or embassies, or through official Government-to-Government consultations. Among internationals, policy debates in recent years at best took place at the level of projects and experts, but not as integrated element of donor coordination. If internationals want to play a decisive and catalytic role in policy development, they need to enter a policy dialogue among themselves. And equally like national stakeholders, they have to establish adequate interfaces between the political and the expert level. Internationals have to understand their role as stakeholders in the political process among others. Policy development understood as technical project or program component, or policy dialogue at the level delegations and embassies detached from expertise, may contribute at best to instruments and islands, to project outcomes, but not to coherent policies.

**Lesson 7 – Policy development requires a vision**

Albania has thrown most key elements of the earlier VET system over board; the backbone of the inherited structures went lost. Thus it cannot only reform, it has to redesign and rebuild a system. At the same time it never answered the question, how it intends to close the serious skills gap, and who, which stakeholders, which programs, which sub-systems should play which role in this process. As a result, the role and purpose of secondary vocational education remains highly ambiguous, whereas skills development is in reality by and large left to ad-hoc measures of the private sector. Policy development requires a vision on the future system and its architecture.

**Quintessence**

Policy dialogue detached from politics, and subordinate to either donor strategies or project rationales and cycles; policy development perceived as expert task, may result in bricks, instruments, and project outcomes, but not in coherent policies and system development. Instruments and approaches are transferable, policy and systems not.

Policy and systems development have a long time horizon. Re-building a vocational education and training system from scratch in an economically fast changing and politically sensitive context is a generation task. This is no surprise. Also in an advanced economy like Switzerland with its well-developed vocational education and training system, the adaptation of the Bologna system in higher education, the related development of higher professional schools into Universities of Applied Sciences, the necessary revision of access paths with the introduction of a vocational matura, and the subsequent restructuring of the non-academic higher professional education, is a continuous construction site since two decades. And also in an advanced economy, such processes are not a linear implementation of a once defined policy and strategy, but a meandering through policies, politics and putting individual bricks and puzzle stones together to an ultimately coherent system.
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