

Central Asian Education Platform

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Needs Assessment Report

Nikolai Petrov,

Senior Expert

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INTRODUCTION

The “*Central Asian Education Platform – CAEP*” was launched in February 2012. Through its Directorate-General for Development and Cooperation-EuropeAid in Brussels, the European Commission serves as the body responsible, and the international Consortium – led by the German consulting company, GOPA Consultants – was selected as Consultant Agency.

As a key pillar of the European Education Initiative for Central Asia, CAEP should enhance both cooperation between the European Union and Central Asia (CA), and also regional cooperation between the countries of Central Asia, in order to strengthen education reforms in the region. It also enables better co-ordination of donors’ actions in the education sector while enhancing ownership by Central Asian countries.

In accordance with the scope of the European Education Initiative, the Project concentrates its activities in two education sectors – higher education (HE) and vocational education and training (VET).

To achieve the stated goals, the Project has to implement the following three components:

1) **Dialogue forums:**

- 2 conferences at ministerial level.
- 2 regional meetings based on thematic issues.
- 10 meetings at national level (2 for each CA country).

2) **Mapping and Communication:**

- A state-of-play will be completed on the education sector of each country.
- Mapping will be done on the activities in the area of education carried out in CA by the project countries, the EU, EU Member States and other international donors.
- A CAEP website will be set up for promotion purposes and for and sharing the results of dialogue forums and EU – CA education cooperation.

3) **Studies:**

- To carry out studies to complement dialogue forums.

The target groups in CA countries include:

- policy developers and decision-makers in education;
- managers of educational institutions;
- organisations, educators and social partners involved in competence-based standards supervision and development;
- actors of education quality assurance systems;
- methodological and teachers’ education and upgrading institutions;
- managers and experts of technical assistance programmes.

The envisaged outcome of the needs assessment was formulated as “the optimum design and appropriated means of operation enabling the Central Asian Education Platform to serve effectively for ongoing iterative policy dialogue and agreement among educational stakeholders”.

To reach the outcome, numerous means have been used: interviews during missions to Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan; questionnaires, desk research.

The Report provides:

- an analysis of the needs assessment in each of the countries visited;
- state of regional cooperation in the education sector;
- common major needs in the education sector reform across CA region for a mid-term to long-term period;
- recommendations on the CAEP design and means of operation;
- recommendations on the Central Asia DCI Indicative Programme, 2014-2016.

The Report reflects the views of the author, and not necessarily those of the EU.

Four of the five CA countries were visited in March-April 2012: Kyrgyzstan (22-29 March), Kazakhstan (30 March- 5 April), Tajikistan (12-18 April), and Uzbekistan (19-25 April). It was not possible to get visas to Turkmenistan, as the CAEP project is not endorsed by the Government of this country.

The mission was undertaken by Team Leader, Juergen Weiss, and Senior Expert, Nikolai Petrov.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Taking into account the overall objective of the CAEP project to contribute to the CA countries' programmes towards improving the competitiveness and productivity of national economies as well as capacity for sustainable development in the region, the following common needs have been identified in the educational sectors of CA states.

1. Major Common Needs Identified for a Mid-Term to Long-Term Period

In higher education

- a) Ensuring the relevance of graduates' skills, knowledge and attitudes to the needs of economic and socio-cultural development of CA countries by means of a competence-based and outcome-oriented learning process.
- b) Ensuring the quality of transformation to, and implementation of, a three-level educational system based on the principles and instruments of the Bologna Process.
- c) Ensuring recognition of graduates' qualifications and diplomas within the CA area and beyond.

In vocational education and training

- Ensuring a transformation to a competence-based and outcome-oriented learning system founded on occupational and qualification standards; modular learning programmes and assessment based on those standards; the accreditation of institutions which follows requirements of internal and external standards for quality management and assessment.
- Ensuring the development and dissemination of manuals for teachers and textbooks for students, as well as the supply of necessary equipment to meet the requirements of competence-based learning.
- Ensuring the introduction of modern methods of teaching and learning which correspond to a competence-based learning system.
- Ensuring close collaboration between the learning institutions and the social partners.

In the education sector as a whole

- Ensuring the continuity and succession of all educational levels by creating National Qualification Frameworks. These national frameworks might eventually be transformed to the CA regional qualification framework (such as EQF) to create optimum conditions for the mutual recognition of qualifications and easy mobility of labour within the region.
- Introduction of quality-assurance infrastructure in the education sector.

2. Technical Assistance: Achievements and Problems

The EU/EU Member states have contributed considerable efforts to, and achieved important results in, transforming the Soviet-time education system to a new system oriented towards modern, international principles based on the European experience during the last decades: the Bologna process; EQF; competence-based, result-oriented learning and assessment.

The important consequence of technical assistance in the last two decades is the growing number of local experts who are in the position to ably contribute to the modernisation of the education system in CA countries.

Despite great efforts, international technical assistance in its present form may have only a limited impact on the current systemic changes required. The following shortcomings have been identified:

- concentration on issues which are real matters, but not decisive to the modernisation of the education system as a whole (with the exception of the TEMPUS programme which decisively influenced the transition of CA Higher Education to the Bologna process principles and instruments);
- reiteration of the same activities carried out by other projects before;
- non-sustainability of results achieved during the project's timeframe;
- too many conferences and workshops with the common theme of "the education reform's policy and strategy".

3. State of Regional Cooperation

Despite the real need for closer cooperation between CA countries in the education sphere due to their common background in the USSR and similar problems in the implementation of education reforms, there have been **no intergovernmental meetings within CA** since UNESCO's sponsored annual get-together of the Ministers/Deputy Ministers stopped taking place a few years ago.

The **only non-government regional organisation** with annual membership fees is the Education Network Association "EdNet". The association is a regular and able partner of TEMPUS, Erasmus Mundus, WB, Soros Foundation, USAID and other educational projects in HE.

Through their projects, the **European Union and other international donors** continue efforts to establish closer ties among the education authorities and institutions of CA states, but these networks usually almost cease to exist as soon as financing is stopped.

TEMPUS continues to be the major player in promoting cooperation between EU Member States universities and CA universities, and the education ministries. The Bologna Process pathway adopted by Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan could never have happened without the TEMPUS programme's efforts in these countries.

DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service) is another regional player in HE exchange programmes. Its services are highly esteemed, as the organisation covers all costs of the students' (professors') assignments in Germany with only one condition attached – knowledge of the German or English language.

ETF concentrated its efforts at regional level on introducing European experience in VET reforms by means of regional pilot projects, peer learning activities and a policy advice approach coordinated across CA. Despite the limited resources at the disposal of ETF, its services were indispensable in bringing contemporary European experience at the right moment of VET system reformation in CA countries and providing the opportunity to share their own experiences. ETF implemented three *important projects* in collaboration with national partners in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan: the National Qualification Framework (NQF), Skills Development for Poverty Reduction (SDPR), and School Development for Life-Long learning. Every two years, ETF invites its partner countries to review the state of their VET policies and systems. The Torino Process helps to design home-grown VET policies and align donor assistance with national strategic aims.

Improving school management and supporting an active role by school managers in vocational education development is the focus of the new initiative launched by the ETF in 2012. The initiative will build on the recently completed school development project. It will involve up to 200 schools in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and will have observers from Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.

GIZ is the major external player in VET systems of CA countries. In addition to country projects, GIZ is currently providing considerable funds for the implementation of two regional projects in the education sphere. The “Programme of professional education in Central Asia” (Euro 19.5 million) will be executed over a span of nine years (2010-2019). Its aim is to modernise professional education and training for the food processing industry. Another regional project financed by GIZ (Euro 6.5 million) the “Regional Programme on Reform of Educational Systems in Central Asia” (2011-2013) concentrates on the reform of general education systems in CA.

The EC-sponsored **Central Asian Research and Education Network (CAREN)** established a high-capacity regional network based on broadband Internet for public use (fee-charging) by education and research institutions. However, CAREN's present and near-future potential for research and education in this region should not be overestimated due to the current poor state of research in the region and lack of resources by most CA universities to pay expensive fees for the high-speed, fiber-optic connection.

New systemic goals in the education sector of CA countries challenge traditional methods of granting technical assistance to CA. Present regional efforts are limited to particular sub-sectors of educational system (general education, VET and HE) without much coherence among them.

The majority of the national stakeholders and representatives of international donor organisations and projects express their support for *the idea that CAEP as a “key pillar”* of the European Education Initiative shall **focus its activities on a new systemic goal in the CA countries - transition to competence-based learning.**

4. Recommendations for the CAEP design and means of operations

The Project has to focus its work on the major requirements of the education sector modernisation programmes in CA countries and on streamlining EU/EU Member States' technical cooperation activities towards the implementation of these programmes.

Taking into account the common needs identified for the CA countries in HE and VET, and also the means of CAEP's operation (dialogue forums, mapping, communication, and complementary studies), "**Transition to Competence-based Learning**" shall be defined as the coherent **content area for CAEP** and its national, regional and international dialogue. This focus area determines the following:

- definition of contents of 14 dialogue events;
- selection and invitation of EU experts;
- development and maintenance of the communication platform (website, mapping database, publication formats);
- preparation of dialogue-connected studies; and
- planning synergy activities with stakeholders and donors.

To make the dialogue as efficient as possible, **the order and content of the dialogue events** may be defined as follows.

- First national conferences: Transition to competence-based learning in the educational sector.
- First regional conference at technical level: Regional cooperation in competence-based learning for water management (in cooperation with EU-CA Environment and Water Platform).
- First Regional conference at policy level: Policy issues in the transition to competence-based learning.
- Second regional conference at technical level: Regional and international cooperation in implementing competence-based learning in CA.
- Second regional conference at policy level: Policy issues in the transition to competence-based, regionally and internationally recognised qualifications.
- Second national conferences: Achievements and problems in implementing competence-based learning.

To support the relevance of CAEP's awareness-raising activities, communication platform and regional dialogue, the following **studies** are proposed to be prepared:

- **Framework study:** Transition to competence-based learning in CA – state-of-the-art and perspectives.
- *Targeted studies related to regional and national conferences*
 - Vertical integration of competence-based learning and qualifications (case study of water management education and training in CA).
 - Quality assurance through a competence-based education and training system.

- Qualifications and credit frameworks for career development and professional mobility of people.
- Policy issues for regional and international recognition and accreditation of competence-based qualifications.
- Recommendations on CA country action plans and requirements of technical assistance for further development of competence-based learning.

4. Recommendations on the Central Asia DCI Indicative Programme, 2014-2016

An assessment of the needs for further modernisation of the education sectors in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, and consultations with EU/EU Member States and other international donors and project managers, led to the following recommendations:

- To maximise results and impact of technical assistance, **a major priority area shall be defined** for Regional cooperation and for bilateral assistance in the education sector.
- Needs assessments done in four CA countries identified **Transition to Competence-based Learning** as the priority area determined by education stakeholders and reflected in the recently approved mid-term to long-term Government programmes for education development.
- In this way, **synergies and complementarities** between focal intervention areas at both regional and national levels can be **systematically planned**, and the **support via European Education Initiative and CAEP can be optimised**.
- The **CAEP's** activities may serve as the **first stage** for setting a new priority area. During this stage, CAEP will **raise awareness** amongst partner countries, donors and experts of the advantages and current experiences of competence-based education systems. In the **next stage**, a well established CAEP infrastructure may contribute effectively to the **practical implementation** of the new priority area supported by CA DCI Indicative Programme.
- **The scope for action** in this priority area **has to be defined at country and regional levels** in line with the analysis developed for each country, and following consultations with the beneficiaries.

KYRGYZSTAN

1. Education Sector Policy and Strategy

Education sector policy is defined by two institutions – the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) and the Agency for Vocational and Technical Education (AVTE) under the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Migration (MoLEM). Since 2008 the MoES has been designing the draft Education Development Strategy 2020 (EDS 2020) which covers all educational levels. Civil society organisations and the donor community participated in the design of this document. The strategy EDS 2020 was approved in March 2012 to serve as the long-term strategic document for the education sector development.

The EDS 2020 foresees fundamental reforms that aim at systemic changes within the education sector. For the first time, an education strategy document in the Kyrgyz Republic includes achievement indicators (initial, interim and final ones) and elaborates a process of implementation monitoring. In addition to that, the EDS 2020 includes donor-sponsored projects in the education sector and their contribution for achieving the aimed results. This indicates an incipient process of coordinating donor investments by the state.

As the major **outcomes of the first stage** (2012-2014), the Education Development Strategy 2020 identified:

- Creating a *foundation for the competence-based learning system* – transformation from knowledge paradigm to competence paradigm.
- Providing each pupil and student with *basic and specific competences* for their professional development, including communication skills
- Preparing conditions for *life-long-learning* opportunities.

2. Analysis of the Situation in Higher Education Sector

HE challenges

In Kyrgyzstan, problems of the higher education sector are characterised by:

Unsystematic and inconsistent educational policy

In the sphere of higher education there is no complex policy which systematically allows to modernise structures and content of higher education, and to remove shortcomings in the system. The degrees of bachelor or master are hardly within the labour market, and there is skepticism in terms of whether or not these degrees are equal to the diploma of a specialist. This creates barriers for the systematic introduction of master and bachelor degree programmes and gradual curtailing of specialist programmes. The gap between the labour market demand and the structure of higher education programmes causes a surplus of graduates or specialists in some sectors and a shortage of

specialists in other fields. The qualification requirements for graduates are very wide, and assessment is of formal character.

Poor quality of human and material resources

Existent norms are obsolete and do not meet the requirements of modern higher education institutions. Low standards are applied upon employment of academic staff. Officially, teachers have to obtain at least a master's degree, but in reality administrators allow persons with bachelor degree or with the diploma of a specialist to teach university students.

Inefficiency of budgetary spending on HE

For the academic year 2008/09, almost half of the state scholarships were directed to pedagogical specialties, but most scholarship holders did not fulfill their obligations and changed from their specialty to a more prestigious one during the last year of study. Only 76% of the scholarship holders are finishing their studies, even less of them work within their specialty. Resources allocated for scholarship holders are much less than actual costs. Therefore, institutions have to pay additional cost from the sums received by "contractual" students.

Inadequate development of science in higher education institutions

There is no adequate connection between science and higher education institutions. Certain efforts were made to merge research institutions with higher education institutions, however, many issues - for example, the development of mechanisms to involve students in research activities - remained unsolved.

The Education Development Strategy 2020 elaborates the following measures to deal with the above problems which are of interest to the purposes of CAEP project:

- 1) To align qualifications with labour market requirements.** The objective is to create favorable conditions for the institutions to revise their structures and curricula in accordance with labour market requirements; to identify qualification levels of HE institution's programmes within the frame of the national qualification structure.
- 2) To align higher education with international standards to enhance competitiveness and mobility of graduates.** The objective is to guarantee benefits to Kyrgyz higher education graduates of three levels (bachelor, master and doctor's degrees) equal to that of other countries' graduates at the regional labour market.
- 3) To develop a quality assurance system for HE institutions.** The objective is to create a system of external evaluation of education services involving independent experts and international accreditation agencies; to create an internal system of quality support; to develop a system of indicators to measure the quality of educational services and to introduce accountability; to enable transparency in the sphere of financial management and in the decision-making process.
- 4) To provide a legislative framework to the reform of higher education.**

International Cooperation

The higher education system in Kyrgyzstan has been extending its international contacts. There are about twenty institutional agreements with the CIS countries and about fifty agreements with other countries. Over three thousand young citizens of Kyrgyzstan are currently studying abroad in universities of Russia, USA, Germany, France, Turkey, and Malaysia through accredited exchange programmes.

It is expected that the implementation of the Bologna process will bring local and European universities closer, and help develop partnerships and facilitate education reforms.

The current policy concentrates mainly on promoting academic exchange, international recognition of Kyrgyz higher education diploma, and improving links with the international donor community.

Kyrgyzstan benefits from international programmes supporting student and teaching staff conducted by ERASMUS MUNDUS, TEMPUS, UNESCO, UNDP, DAAD, Soros Foundation, IREX (International Research Exchange Board), ACCELS (American Councils for International Education). In addition, mobility is also encouraged within national initiative called "Staff of the 21st Century". Thanks to these measures academic mobility has increased substantially. Kyrgyz universities host students from CIS countries (Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan) and non-CIS countries such as Turkey, India, Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, China, Mongolia, and Nepal.

Impact of the TEMPUS Programme

TEMPUS projects have been the main instrument to introduce Bologna process and European Credit Transfer and Accumulation system (ECTS) in the national HE level. Over the last years, ECTS has been widely used in the framework of bilateral agreements with EU universities through at least eight TEMPUS projects. Following an order from the Ministry of Education and Science, a working group on the transition to the Credit Transfer and Accumulation System was established in 2004. The working group designed a method to estimate the workload of major higher education programmes. These methods were then tested in seven pilot universities.

The ECTS/Diploma Supplement National Bureau under the Ministry of Education and Science was established in 2007 in the framework of a TEMPUS pilot project. The ECTS National Bureau published an ECTS Introduction Handbook which was disseminated to all universities in the country. It organised a high number of ECTS trainings for university administration and teachers, and monitored the transition process to ECTS.

TEMPUS has also contributed to the establishment of a management and assessment system. A Quality Assurance manual, based on the guidelines produced by the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM), was developed by experts trained in the framework of TEMPUS projects and is now widely used. TEMPUS has also been active in supporting the transition to the three-level degree system through projects focusing on the development of Bachelor and Master Curricula.

3. Analysis of the Situation in Vocational Education and Training Sector

VET challenges

In Kyrgyzstan the Vocational Education and Training Sector (VET) is characterised by *two levels*: primary vocational-technical education (PVTE) and secondary vocational education (SVE). PVTE is managed by the Agency of vocational-technical education and subordinated to the Ministry of Youth, Employment and Social Security. It administers 109 educational institutions. SVE is administered by the Ministry of Education and Science and includes 122 educational institutions that train specialists for middle-tier of production and services. *The performance of these two levels of VET is not coordinated.*

Although the improvement in VET enrolment during the last six years could indicate a positive trend, VET continues to struggle with **key dilemmas**, namely:

- mismatch between graduates specialties and demand of the labour market;
- low quality of final products (level of graduates' skills, knowledge and attitudes) and competence requirements at the labour market;
- shortage of outcome-oriented learning programmes;
- knowledge-oriented teaching and assessment;
- weak ties with the social partners;
- outdated competences of teachers and engineering-pedagogical staff.

The Education Development Strategy 2020 identified the following **policy directions** aimed at solving major VET problems:

- Improvement of quality and relevance of learning.
- Strengthening and modernising VET infrastructure.
- Improvement of management, financing, monitoring, accounting and appraisal.
- Improvement of VET accessibility.
- Strengthening the involvement of social partners.

International cooperation

Donors have been active in the VET sector in Kyrgyzstan since the 1990s. The donor assistance in primary vocational education has mainly aimed at capacity building of educational institutions and their upgrading.

Secondary vocational education has not been considered by the donors as a potential development sector. As a result, SVE institutions do not apply new teaching approaches and the quality of education does not comply with employers' requirements.

The **German Technical Cooperation Agency (GIZ)** has assisted the VET sector through a number of projects that included the modernisation of training infrastructure, teachers training, independent certification of professional competences, and the establishment of a labour

market monitoring system. The **Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation** has been an active partner for years, providing bilateral support through training in new agriculture, forestry and small community tourism business methods.

The European Training Foundation (ETF), in collaboration with national partners, implemented three multi-country projects in Kyrgyzstan in the period 2005-09: National Qualification Frameworks (NQF) in Central Asia, Skills Development for Poverty Reduction (SDPR), and Policy Learning in Partner Countries (PLPC). The NQF project resulted in a set of occupational profiles in tourism and in a draft NQF policy paper. However, mainstreaming of the new tools and a coherent new approach to qualifications are objectives of the future.

To enhance mutual information and to reach a good level of coordination, all donors have agreed to an informal **Donors' Round Table** that has developed policy proposals and studies and also meets regularly. The government's commitment to implementing the Education Development Strategy 2020 provides a solid foundation to build donors' actions in a harmonised and aligned way for the period 2013-2020. *The strategy could benefit from external support to achieve systemic and lasting outcomes. The new EU project "Support to the Kyrgyz Education Sector" took a lead in the preparation of the final draft of the Strategy and together with the World Bank, ADB, USAID, UNICEF, UNESCO, GIZ, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (through its project Helvetas) have already prepared a draft of a Joint Country Support Strategy for the period 2013-2015 which covers all eight programmes constituting the new Education Strategy.*

4. Major Results of Needs Assessment Interviews and Questionnaire

The CAEP mission to Kyrgyzstan took place from March 21 to 29 2012. More than 50 people were interviewed and questionnaires filled. Representatives of all major stakeholders (ministries and agencies, education and training institutions, employers' organisations, NGO and international donors) participated in 24 meetings. It became possible due to the persistent efforts of Jipar Shabdankulova from CAIConsulting, member of the project's consortium.

Productive consultations took place in the **Ministry of Education and Science** with the Deputy Minister in charge of Higher Education; the Head of International Department; the Head of Professional Education Department, and the Head of Strategic Planning and Monitoring Department.

As a major *problem which deserves the exchange of Central Asian countries*, the Deputy Minister mentioned the *transition to two-level higher education* along the Bologna Process principles. In his opinion, EU experts might be involved in the creation of the quality assurance system for all levels of education. The Deputy Minister expressed his readiness to represent Kyrgyzstan in the CAEP project's Steering Committee. The Head of the Professional Education Department *suggested to conduct a national conference* which would discuss all major aspects of competence-based education and training including the outcome-oriented learning process, assessment and accreditation of educational providers. The Head of Strategic Planning and Monitoring Department suggested that the *creation of national qualification frameworks*, the

introduction of occupational and qualification standards, and the establishment of competence-based learning and assessment may become priorities in the national and regional forums to be organised by the CAEP team.

The Director of the Agency on Vocational Education and Training (initial VET), proposed the following *issues to be discussed at the CAEP's meetings*, with follow-ups at national and regional level:

- Integration of all educational levels by means of national qualification frameworks and consecutive occupational and qualification standards;
- IT in education and distance learning;
- Internal and external quality management and assessment of training institutions.

The same topics, in his opinion, can be presented at *CAEP's information platform /internet forum*.

Interviews took place in three **Universities**: Kyrgyz State University of Construction, Transportation and Architecture (Rector and Vice-Rector); Kyrgyz State Technical University (Head of International Relations Department) and American University of Central Asia (Head of the European Studies Department). All three universities are active participants of TEMPUS and other donors' programmes. They established close relations with universities in Europe, Russia and USA. Double bachelor degrees (Kyrgyz and of a foreign university) are being issued to graduates for selected professions. There is a growing number of students being enrolled from neighboring countries – Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan.

Two-level higher education is becoming obligatory for all universities in Kyrgyzstan. During the interviews it was confirmed that a *major problem for the universities is how to ensure the quality of the transition process and employability of graduates*. It was mentioned that other CA countries (with exclusion of Turkmenistan) are facing similar problems. Therefore there may be common interests for closer collaboration among them, and the CAEP project shall contribute to this cooperation process by means of research, discussion forums and information platform.

There was a special request by the Head of the European Studies Department of the American University of Central Asia to assist in the introduction of a master's programme in **European studies**. Taking into account that the Department is the only education institution in CA providing teaching in European history (past and present), this request **deserves consideration** within the framework of the CA Education Initiative.

The Executive Director of the International Business Council, which unites 138 large state and private companies, spoke about mismatch between qualifications of Education sector's graduates and needs of industry and services. It is a general opinion of employers that most graduates obtain very low quality of professional competence in their educational institutions. He assured that *employers of particular economic sectors are ready to be involved in the development of occupational and qualification standards* as well as in the assessment of learning outcomes. His organisation maintains close contacts with employers of other CA countries and may contribute to *CAEP efforts for closer cooperation among social partners of the education sector in the region*.

There were productive discussions with members of the leading **NGOs** in the education sector of Kyrgyzstan: Foundation for Support of Educational Initiatives, Education Network Association and Kyrgyz Research and Education Network. These organisations acquired rich experience in working with international donors as local experts and became qualified agents for adapting international expertise to local realities. Ms. Nataliya Nikitenko, Director of the Education Network Association, was recently elected to the Kyrgyz Parliament and took a leading position in its Education Committee.

Their common opinion is that the education system in Kyrgyzstan has reached a stage where the introduction of a national qualification framework, the transition to a competence-based learning at all levels of education, the creation of internal and external quality assurance systems, and raising professional skills of teachers has become a real necessity. NGOs would be *willing to support any efforts by CAEP project to promote creation of the quality assurance system in the education*. They also suggested that *CAEP information platform might focus on the major themes of the project's activities and serve as a forum where it is possible to put a question and receive an answer*.

During the visit, discussions were held with major **European and other donors organisations** as well as with experts of international projects. Among them were TEMPUS and Erasmus Mundus programmes, the EU project "Support to the Kyrgyz Education Sector", ETF Kyrgyz country manager, GIZ project "Regional Cooperation Programme: Reform of Education Systems in Central Asia", DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service), UNICEF, ADB, Soros, USAID Quality Learning project.

The establishment of the Education Round Table is a noticeable achievement of the international donors and their projects. Members of the Group meet regularly and inform each other about recent developments. The Group works with a six months rotation in the chairmanship and carries out its own internet site.

The remarkable feature of the Group is the *practice to coordinate the donors' activities in the education sphere on the principle of a Sector Wide Approach (SWAP)*. We observed how this principle worked during discussions of what could be each agency's contribution to the implementation of a new Education Development Strategy just approved by the Government.

The SWAP approach helps to minimise the common shortcomings of foreign technical assistance – fragmentation and parallelism. But it is still impossible to guarantee survivability of the achieved results after the project is accomplished. That's why a *majority of respondents to the questionnaire evaluated the consequences of external technical assistance to the process of education reform as "average"*.

The donors expressed their support to the goals of CAEP and their readiness to contribute to events which would be conducted by the project. There were several concrete *proposals for the CAEP's participation in national and regional conferences conducted by international donors*.

In the donors' opinion, *–national and regional conferences shall focus on a certain actual problem and secure the follow-up actions to be effective*. They identified the following current

problems: transition to two-level higher education, all aspects of quality assurance, low level of teaching and learning and education management.

KAZAKHSTAN

1. Education Sector Policy and Strategy

Since independence in 1991, Kazakhstan has actively experimented with educational reforms in order to train its own specialists for the country's rapidly expanding economy.

Kazakh policy makers have employed various approaches and strategies in modernising the national education system, improving the quality of education and attempting to raise standards to international levels. Kazakhstan was among the first in the Central Asian region to allow the establishment of private universities and colleges across the country. It was also among the first countries in the region to abandon the Soviet-style system of higher education and to join to the Bologna process, introducing a western-style three-level education structure (bachelor's-master's-doctorate).

In order to quickly train a large number of international-quality professionals for its public sector, between 1994 and 2010 Kazakhstan sent about 15'000 students abroad under the Bolashak (Future) programme. The programme provides full funding for education in foreign countries, including tuition fees, living and travel expenses. The condition for funding has been clear: graduates have to return to their home country and work for the government or various government agencies for five years. Hundreds of Bolashak graduates returned to Kazakhstan transferring important know-how and expertise to crucial fields – from banking and energy to public management and engineering.

The government issued a number of laws and other normative documents concerning educational reforms in the country: Law on Education (2007), Conception of Education Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan till 2015 (2004), State Programme of Educational Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2005-2010 (2004). The Programme envisioned ambitious goals, including an increase in student enrollment from 73'800 in 2001 to about 180'000 in 2008, gradual decentralisation of the higher education system, introduction of a western-style credit system, improvement of education standards, and an increase in international cooperation in the field of education.

Recently, the government announced the even more far-reaching **State Programme of Educational Development 2020** (further referred to as Programme 2020), committing itself to equip Kazakhstan's education system to meet internationally competitive standards. Some of the priorities identified are: changes in the content of secondary and higher education, modernisation of higher education and post-graduate studies, extension of non-governmental education, introduction of new standards and technologies.

2. Analysis of the Situation in the Higher Education Sector

HE challenges

Despite serious achievements in the HE during the last decade in Kazakhstan, there is certainly potential for further improvement. The following challenges can be mentioned:

- *Centralised control over the content of education* (courses and curricula) and process (organisation of teaching and degree standards) are still limiting universities' freedom and ability to respond to the needs of the economy, students and employers.
- *Research, development and innovation need substantial strengthening.*

Almost no new scientific equipment was bought between 1983 and 2004, and research has been hamstrung by a requirement for academics to have 800 to 900 hours of contact time a year with students, prompting the World Bank to judge R&D and innovation as the "least reformed" areas of the system. Research conditions are still not attractive to young scholars, according to the British Council, and the average age of researchers in the country is 55.

- *The Higher Education Quality Assurance System is rather complicated.* There is too much emphasis on compliance checks and too little on university self-evaluation and improvement. A stakeholder based quality assurance culture is still mostly lacking.
- *Relations between HE institutions and employers need to be changed,* in particular, the formal involvement of employers in quality assurance system and in assessment, as well as in internship for students.

There is much *misunderstanding between the former degrees inherited from the Soviet system: Kandidat Nauk* (Candidate of Science) and *Doctor Nauk* (Doctor of Science), and the newly born, i.e. a Master's and a PhD degree. Students and teachers who are actively participating in academic mobility and are looking for the qualification recognition sometimes face many problems.

Corruption is a serious factor which penetrated the whole system of HE and kept back the implementation of state education policy. Results of a social survey indicated that 64 percent of respondents considered state universities as the most corrupt entity in the country, 54 percent viewed the level of corruption in universities as "high" and 28 percent noted the fact of "buying" graduate diploma.

The New Programme 2020 proclaims as a major aim in Higher Education "achievement of the high quality level meeting labour market needs, targets of industrial-innovative development of economy, goals of individual and corresponding to the best international practices in education sphere". The Programme identifies indicators which will serve as a proof for achieving this major aim." Securing integration into European area of Higher Education" is one of such indicators.

Internationalisation of HE

A major step towards the internationalisation of higher education in Kazakhstan is the decision to implement higher education reform along the general lines of the Bologna process. In line with the national plan, the former types and levels of academic programmes were transformed into the three levels established under the Bologna framework.

Along with this, major changes are taking place in the teaching and learning process, in the way curricula and programmes are organised and delivered. As a result of the reform it is expected that degrees offered in the country will be comparable with European degrees.

Opening the country to international universities also contributes to some extent to internationalising the higher education system – currently there are 5 branches of foreign universities in the country. Foreign scholars are being brought in as another part of the attempt to internationalise the Kazakh education sector. For example, in 2010, the government invited 1'100 overseas university teachers and scientists to give lectures at 27 of the nation's universities. According to the Eurasian National University, based in Astana, 306 academics from Europe, the US and Kazakhstan's neighboring countries came to teach Master's and Ph.D. programmes in English during the school year of 2010/2011. Some foreign scholars stayed for short periods, but others have remained for as long as three years.

Universities are being pushed to teach in English in order to bring Kazakhstan within the orbit of the international scholar community. For example, the L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, based in the capital Astana, is in the process of converting most of its programmes into English, from a former mixture of Russian and Kazakh.

The government has established a new and legally autonomous institution in the capital, Nazarbaev University, where all academic work is conducted in English and most faculties are drawn from outside the country.¹ The University College London runs a year-long course at Nazarbaev that leads to a "university preparatory certificate". Students then go on to undergraduate studies. The University of Pennsylvania was consulted regarding the structure and governance of Nazarbaev before it was set up, and several other Western institutions have been involved.

Besides positive impacts of HE internalisation, there are also some negative aspects. There are significant distortions and mismatches in the labour market. Many observers and even the Bolashak students themselves complain that too many graduates have been returning back with advanced degrees in law, general management and international affairs and there are simply not enough jobs for them. A significant number of graduates have recently been assigned to do work far below their qualifications,, or work at positions other than the ones they have been trained for.

¹ The establishment of the western-style Nazarbaev University in 2010, a US\$ 2 billion project, reflects the rise of so-called "Global Universities" in some developing countries, notably Abu Dhabi and Kuwait where such ambitious "Global Universities" were established as host campuses of some of the most prestigious western universities.

On many occasions managers also complain that the Bolashak graduates have very strong theoretical knowledge and were trained to work in a western corporate environment, but they easily get lost in the local working environment and have difficulties adjusting to it.

In addition, as the number of Bolashak students sent abroad raised from 300 to 3'000 per year, there was a significant negative impact on the prestige, quality and student demographics of the local universities. Though the Kazakh government pays full tuition fees for Kazakh students at the most prestigious and most expensive universities around the world, local Kazakh professors are still significantly underpaid and the brightest students go to foreign universities and do not bother applying locally. This erodes the prestige of the teaching profession and very few young people are currently heading to work at institutions of high learning, especially at tertiary technical colleges and lyceums.

Impact of the TEMPUS programme

The TEMPUS programme started in Kazakhstan in 1994. By the end of 2011 76 projects with the participation of Kazakh higher education institutions have been financed. According to the selection results of the Tempus Fourth Call for Proposals covering the period 2012-2014, nine projects with the participation of 24 Kazakh HE institutions and with a total of 8,5 million Euro have been recommended for funding from the Tempus budget.

The impact of Tempus has been strong in terms of *curriculum modernisation* (60% of the overall number of Tempus projects). Tempus was a pioneer in introducing *quality management and assessment system* in the Kazakh Higher Education system.

Tempus has supported the *implementation of the European Credit Transfer and Assessment System*, an important step in aligning universities with the principles of the Bologna process. New curricula and degrees developed through Tempus projects are being systematically implemented in accordance with the ECTS. All the universities which have recently received international accreditation have been involved in Tempus.

3. Analysis of the Vocational Education and Training Sector

VET challenges

There is widespread consensus between international experts and Kazakh decision-makers that the *low skill level of the labour force is one of the most important problems* for the socio-economic development of Kazakhstan. Particularly the VET sector is not able to supply the fast growing economy with the required skills and to react flexibly and cost-oriented to changes in skill demand.

One main reason for this is an increasing institutional gap between education and business. *In education, structural change did not happen in line with economical change*. The VET sector lost its links with state-owned employers after obtaining independence and was widely neglected until recent years. When demand for skilled labour started to increase, shortcomings became obvious. Officials, teachers and students lack orientation what and how to learn.

The current VET system, based on command and control from a different era, hamper adaptation to new circumstances. Without an appropriate institutional and supporting infrastructure, new investment cannot be absorbed efficiently. More finance just makes education expensive and reinforces misbalances. Consequently, much-needed new knowledge, technologies and other inputs for modernising VET do not arise.

A vicious circle emerged. Low absorption capacity decreases finance and investment. The gap between educational results and requirements of the market spreads. Investments do not reduce the gap, but just raise costs, dissuading further investments.

An outdated VET system influences ambitious efforts of the government, such as the plans on strengthening competitiveness, diversifying the economy, increasing local content, and decreasing the presence of foreign labour.

The Foreign Investors Council² initiated a **State VET development programme (NPVET) 2008-2012** which addressed increasing labour shortages. It was planned that the first stage would cover an investment of 53 billion Tenge (approximately 260 million Euro) and will increase in the second stage 2010-2012. However, main shortcomings and critical issues of VET were not addressed or addressed only on a rhetoric level in the programme. NPVET committed more than 80% of available resources to construction and purchase of equipment, reinforcing outdated structures. Employers were not involved in decision-making processes. Concepts or business plans did not guide investments about skill analyses and forecasts. *NPVET assumed the continuation of the current donor-led model of VET modernisation, avoiding national investment in problem-solving capacities.*

In December 2010 the Government approved the State Programme on the Development of Education up to the year 2020. The *Programme 2020 absorbs all subsectors of the education system including VET.* As it is common in CIS member-countries, no official statement has been made about the implementation of the previous Programme. But it looks that not much has changed in the VET. The new Programme confirmed the following:

- *Lack of occupational standards and modern qualification requirements* for specialists hinders achievement of adequacy between the content of teaching and requirements of industry and employers.
- *Existing infrastructure and technical equipment do not assure quality* of training and make it unattractive for the youth.
- *Low motivation for engineering-teaching staff* leads to their departure to other economic sectors.
- *Non-effective management* of training institutions makes them non-competitive in the market conditions.
- *Low financing* and rate of expenditure per student on state education order do not contribute to obtaining modern qualifications for students.

² Foreign Investors Council is an influential organisation representing interests of big international and national private and state companies. President Nazarbaev is the Chairman of this body.

Following the creation of “growth points” in the HE (Nazarbaev University) and the general education (Nazarbaev Intellectual Schools), “Kasipkor” (Craftsman) holding, a state owned company under the supervision of the MoES, was established in May 2011. In accordance with the *Development Strategy of “Kasipkor” holding for 2012-2021*, the colleges of the international standard will be opened in four cities of Kazakhstan. Almaty, Astana, Shymkent and Aktobe will have schools of engineering, architecture, construction, information and communications technologies, design, metallurgy and machine-building industry, agro-industrial complex and interdisciplinary school. The expected number of students in the colleges of Astana and Almaty will be around 1’500 people and around 1’200 people in Shymkent and Aktobe.

Centers of Innovation and Development will be opened under each of the four colleges. In addition, a Teacher’s Professional Development Centre is planned to be opened in Astana. “Kasipkor” will also manage four interregional vocational education centers, which are presently under construction in Atyrau, Ekibastuz, Ust-Kamenogorsk and Shymkent.

Each college and interregional centre will have 3 partners:

- Strategic partners from the world’s leading colleges (partners from Singapore, Germany, The Netherlands, Canada and Australia are considered).
- An international corporation.
- Large domestic company.

International corporate training centers will be organised on the premises of colleges (IBM training centre and Apple training centre).

The Programme 2020 proclaims the following **major aims for the VET sector**:

- Modernisation of the VET system in accordance with the needs of society and industrial-innovative economic development
- Integration into the world education area.

To achieve this aim, the Programme calls for the implementation of the following **tasks**:

- On the basis of national and sectoral qualification frameworks, *the structure of VET will be streamlined.*
- In accordance with the requirements of *occupational standards*, the following actions will be undertaken:
 - ✓ compulsory state VET standards and education programmes will be renewed;
 - ✓ model education programmes and textbooks for special subjects will be developed;
 - ✓ modular education programmes for enquiring several qualifications would be developed, and data bank on modular programmes developed.
- *Modern education technologies* will be incorporated into the learning process.
- *Independent certification of qualifications* will be introduced in the economic sectors.
- VET institutions will be *attached to the base enterprises* as the contractual principle for the practical learning of students.

- To increase competitiveness and acquiring additional financing, training institutions in accordance with their profile, may be *transferred* (including co-founding) to *national holdings and companies*, transnational corporations and foreign investors.
- Cooperation among Republican, regional and sectoral councils of VET development assure active involvement of business and professional organisations in the learning process and job placement by means of *signing agreements between a VET institution, an employer and a student*

International cooperation

EU assistance

Interventions from the final stage of the Tacis Programme continued under the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI) project “Social Partnership in VET in the Republic of Kazakhstan”. The specific objective of the project was to contribute to the National Programme for VET (2008-2012) by building capacity at national, regional and local levels through involving stakeholders and social partners, in particular, and improving the link between VET and the labour market in general. It was the first international project addressing a systemic approach to VET.

In August 2010, the EU Delegation to the Republic of Kazakhstan agreed a new Euro 4 million VET reform project, focused on capacity-building on the basis of organisational development. The horizontal tasks of the project aim at the development of institutional partnerships to increase synergies, fill gaps and reduce overlap and to exchange best practices. The specific objective of the project is to contribute to the implementation of tasks identified for the development of VET sector in new Programme 2020.

By means of the last two projects the EU contributed effectively to the initiation of institutional reforms in VET in order to bridge the gap between business and education and undertake a paradigm shift from a state-led VET system to an employer-led VET system, which is able to serve a competitive economy. By initiative of these projects, National Council for VET Development, Regional and Sector Councils for VET Development were created in which state and business representatives have to closely cooperate.

European Training Foundation (ETF)

The ETF work in Kazakhstan is focused on supporting the delivery of EU assistance through the Development Cooperation Instrument, with particular attention on developing thematic reviews (*Torino Process*) and supporting stakeholder dialogue.

The following thematic areas are covered: VET system development and provision in a lifelong learning perspective; labour market needs and employability; enterprises and human capital development; education and business partnership.

The National Qualification Framework (NQF) regional project supported the identification of occupational profiles in the tourism sector and developed an NQF policy paper.

In 2011 **World Bank** provided a loan for a three year project “Modernisation of vocational and technical education in Kazakhstan” to support the upgrading of VET system. The project carries out three major objectives:

- contribute to the *creation of national qualification system and development of learning outcome-based qualification standards*;
- contribute to modernisation of VET financing system;
- enhance performance of VET institutions.

The German organisations GTZ (now GIZ) and InWEnt made significant contributions to the creation of model VET institutions during the last decade. **British Council** assisted in the establishment of partnership relations among Kazakh and British VET institutions. The **Norwegian** project “Development of the system of vocational education and training for the oil and gas sector” (2006-2008) contributed to modernising VET for the key sectors of the Kazakh economy. As a follow-up of the project, a fully equipped training center was established in Atkai. **Korean International Cooperation Agency** provided assistance under the project “Implementing the system of independent quality assessment, awarding and verifying qualification in technical and service professions in Kazakhstan (2006-2008)”. **Eurasia Foundation of Central Asia** (consulting company) has been implementing project (financed by Chevron Munaigaz Inc) in Atyrau VET school by developing new curriculums for operators of drilling machines and electricians.

In 2011 there was an **attempt to organise donors’ meetings** on a regular basis. Two meetings took place with participation of major VET donors, EU Delegation and VET Department. The proclaimed purposes were to strengthen communication among donors and to see government steering the process, guiding and taking initiative, and absorb the inputs and advices provided by donors.

Only two meetings took place. It seems that neither the VET Department, nor the EC Delegation or donors themselves were ready and willing to take the responsibility for organisation of such regular meetings.

4. Major Results of Needs Assessment Interviews.³

The CAEP mission to Kazakhstan took place from 30 March to 5 April (30.03 – 02.04 Almaty, 03.04 – 05.04 Astana). 25 interviews were conducted with representatives of state authorities, universities, VET institutions, employers, NGOs and donors.

At official level, there were two meetings at the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) and at the Ministry of Labour and Social Security (MoLSS). The **Director of the Department of technical and professional education** of MoES, described the positive changes in the VET system in the last few years. The accumulated knowledge and *pilot testing of competence-based approaches*

³ Due to the absence of the Project’s endorsement by Government, it was impossible to utilise questionnaires. The interviews were arranged unofficially because European Delegation failed to send an official note to the Ministry of Education and Science despite several requests made on behalf of the Project.

have created conditions for systemic modernisation of VET system on the basis of occupational and qualification standards, outcome oriented learning methodology and curriculum. This may create the foundation for quality assurance of the training institution's performance and match between competences of graduates and requirements of national economy. The Ministry agreed to take the WB loan for 34 million dollars and also agree to an EU project which are supposed to introduce the "soft" power for the transition to competence-based training and learning.

Government, in its turn, provides adequate financing to strengthen the "hard" basis of VET by capital construction and reconstruction, building of four regional centers for upgrading teachers' pedagogical and engineering skills to meet the requirements of competence-based learning system.

By his opinion, CAEP may play an important role by creating opportunities to discuss problems and share experiences of CA countries in transition to competence-based VET system. For this purpose, MoES will be ready to stage national conference with the participation of representatives from other CA countries.

The meeting at the **Republican VET scientific-methodological centre** confirmed that practical action has been taken for the transition to competence-based system. The New Labour Code was approved in February 2012 which included the creation of a national qualification system. Ministry of Labour and social security (MoLSS) together with employers' associations should take the lead.

During the interview in the **MoLSS**, the Head of the working group in charge of the implementation of government decision on the creation of National Qualification Framework explained that the *European Qualification Framework will be used as a foundation for the Kazakh NQF*. Sector ministries and sector employers' organisations would be involved in the development of occupational standards and sector NQF.

An informative meeting took place in Almaty with Aziskhanov J.N., veteran of Kazakh VET system, former deputy-minister, present **Director of a large construction college** and Chairman of the Union of directors of Alma-Ata colleges. In his opinion, the time is right for the *unification of initial and secondary VET programmes* to be implemented in the same educational institutions. Such programmes shall be consecutive and successive. Graduates of these colleges shall be accustomed to the credit system of learning and study to the bachelor degree level. Engineers, in this case, will obtain a Master's degree in HE institutions.

As an example of a changing attitude of employers, he mentioned that *competence-based occupational and qualification standards of professional levels 2 to 6 for seven leading professions in the construction industry have already been developed* through the cooperation of VET institutions (initial and secondary) and employers under the auspices of the Kazakh Construction Association, which unites 475 companies. Now, the Ministry of Education and Science shall approve the said qualifications.

Issues of university education have been discussed during the visit to the **Kazakh-German University** which has the status of a non-profit self-sustainable organisation and provides graduates with a twin Bachelor diploma (Kazakh and German).

National Economic Chamber of Kazakhstan (Atameken) is the organisation that represents the interests of employers in the Tripartite Commission. The managing director of the social and educational programmes of Atameken stated that the industry and services were not satisfied with the quality of graduates at VET and HE levels. She reiterated the willingness of sector business organisations to participate in the development of occupational and qualification standards. *The creation of a NQF, in her opinion, has becoming even more acute taking into account incoming Kazakh membership to WTO.*

Alongside Nazarbaev University, “Nazarbaev Intellectual Schools” would be established in 14 Kazakh regions by 2013. Aigul Kazzahanova, **Managing Director of Nazarbaev School in Astana**, explained that such schools have been created for gifted children whose parents are unable to provide them with high quality education. Schools are not under jurisdiction of MoES and educate for grades 7 to 12 of the general education. Pupils study three languages: Kazakh, English and Russian. School will be used as feeding institutions for Nazarbaev and other best universities and serve as testing grounds for the introduction of credit-based learning process in the secondary schools, and also as centers for upgrading school teachers’ qualifications.

In-depth discussions were held with representatives of **EU/EU Member States and other donors’ organisation and staff of their projects** (EU Delegation; UNESCO Cluster Office for Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan; World Bank; TEMPUS; Soros Foundation; GIZ).⁴

The CAEP mission initiated a meeting in Almaty with Mr. Anatoly Krutov, who is in charge of EU-CA Environment and Water Platform. Conducting a *regional conference on competence-based learning for water management* was preliminary agreed as a joint event of the two CA European Platforms.

⁴ For information and analysis see sections “International Cooperation” above.

TAJKISTAN

1. Education sector policy and strategy

Despite many adverse circumstances in the transition period, Tajikistan was able to retain a high level of literacy and education. However, negative tendencies arose during the development of the education sector after 1991, as many *young people had an increasingly low education standard than their parents*. The quality of education has decreased significantly and there is greater inequality in the access to education for various social groups.

For the last few years Tajikistan has been following the common trend established in other CA countries by developing a new education strategy until 2020. Like in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, previous strategies have been abandoned before their expiration dates.⁵ The latest document “National Strategy for Education Development of the Republic of Tajikistan until 2020” (further referred to as “Strategy 2020”) differs positively from the previous strategies through its modern concept and clear identification of problems, outcomes, activities, monitoring instruments and indication of financial resources.

The emphasis on the creation of “innovative” education aimed at the “new quality of education” in concurrence with “modern world tendencies”. The major goal of the Strategy 2020 has been formulated as follows: The **renewed system of education, based**, in accordance with modern world tendencies, **on competence approach**, shall provide pupils and students with key competences and social skills such as: occupational skills needed in the labour market; knowledge and skills needed for self-employment; orientation for life-long learning; career planning; decision making and values of civic society.

At all levels of professional education (primary and secondary VET and HE) *State Educational Standards* of a new generation will be introduced. They will be developed on the basis of occupational standards with the direct involvement of employers. *The concept of new education standards includes the transition to the competence-based educational results and modular organisation of educational process* on the basis of qualification requirements of national qualification structure.

The **new State Education Standards will regulate:**

- educational outcomes as an enumeration of occupational and general competences which compose the content of activities within the framework of a corresponding trade or profession;
- curriculum of a modular structure with invariant and variant parts;
- conditions of learning-process organisation;
- order for updating programmes;
- major educational technologies.

⁵ National Strategy for Education Development of the Republic of Tajikistan (2006-2015) and National Strategy for Education Development of the Republic of Tajikistan (2009-2018).

Students will have more time for independent work, and the teacher's role will change from the knowledge transmitter to the organiser of the learning process.

Without much exaggeration, the new Strategy 2020 corresponds to modern trends in European Union Member States education systems.

2. Analysis of the Situation in the Higher Education Sector

In 2011, there were 30 HE institutions with about 158,000 students, 60% of whom paid fully for their studies. HE is characterised by great disproportions. More than 50% of all students have been specialising in humanitarian and social sciences, and more than 15% in natural sciences. Less than 15% of students graduate in engineering and construction. Despite the great deficit of teachers, only 5% of students are specialising in this field. Even fewer specialise in agriculture and services (3% and 1% respectively).

Currently, **two challenging activities** are under way as part of the country's higher education reform. The first is the **introduction of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS)** at national level. The introduction of ECTS in HE is seen as one way of becoming part of the international HE process. In particular, a number of new policy documents stress the importance of becoming a part of the Bologna Process. As a further example: in accordance with the norms of the Bologna Process, Tajikistan is planning to transfer to a 12-grade system for general education.

The second challenge is the **introduction of the National Testing System for entrance to HE**. The decision to start the process was signed by the President on the basis of the draft developed with the support of UNDP. The system of entrance examinations to HEIs in the Republic of Tajikistan has not changed since Soviet times. It is out of date and does not meet the new requirements of HE.

To change this situation, the Government decided to develop a new national testing system that will help to impartially evaluate the standard of knowledge of comprehensive school graduates at the stage of university enrolment. The main tasks are: to promote equal access to higher education for all citizens; to improve the quality of education in general; to ensure transparency; and to reduce corruption in education.

There is an **over-production of HE graduates, and a mismatch between supply and demand**. Many graduates leave the country to work abroad. There is an obvious shortage of qualified instructors and professors. Many universities' premises are in a bad condition.

Despite all these problems, in Strategy 2020, the Government makes a conscious choice to prioritise the modernisation of the content and structure of HE education. Without these changes, investments in the education infrastructure and staff development will not be effective.

The implementation of Strategy 2020 shall bring the following changes to the HE system:

- *Transition to the Bologna model* is accomplished.

- Education is conducted in accordance with the *State Order, based on the labour market's requirements*.
- *A new generation of competence-based educational standards* has been developed and introduced, accompanied by relevant learning processes and research.

3. Analysis of the Situation in the VET Sector

In Tajikistan, the VET system as a whole does not produce relevant qualifications for a skilled and competent workforce. For that matter, it is not seen by young people and their parents as an attractive educational path, because it no longer prepares for a promising occupational future. During the last 20 years, the structure of professional education has changed radically. In 1991, about half of schools' graduates who continued education, entered into initial VET institutions. Nowadays, this share has dropped to 25%. At the same time, the share of HE institutions increased from 25% to more than 50%. The following picture reflects the existing problems:

- VET is currently still **heavily supply driven**. Policymakers do not base their decisions concerning the contents and coverage of VET programmes on an analysis of labour market developments. Such information is not currently available, nor are capacities in place to collect and analyse labour market data and to prepare these as a basis for informed policy making. However, what happens in reality is that everyone in the system simply continues doing what they have been doing since the 1980s. The aim is to keep the system running.
- The qualifying role of the various schools and programmes is not very clear. Different VET programmes (one, two and three-year programmes), provided by different institutions, appear to differ according to the general education level that they provide rather than the occupational skill level for which they qualify students. There is **no relationship between levels of qualifications on the labour market and levels of VET programmes**.
- All VET programmes continue to be aimed at traditional wage employment, without taking account of the drastic decrease in job opportunities in industry, and the increasing diversity in scale and products in the agricultural sector. Work in the informal sector is increasing. The **system educates individuals for non-existent or disappearing jobs**.
- In curriculum terms, school-based VET programmes are dominated by a large number of general subjects that are related neither to the vocational orientation of the programme, nor to the vocational theory and practical parts. The approach to the teaching of knowledge, both general and vocation-specific, is **based on the knowledge transfer by the teacher**, with an emphasis on rote learning by the student.
- The quality and relevance of practical training has deteriorated rapidly. The former close links between vocational schools and large industrial complexes and state farms have not yet been replaced by new ways of cooperating between the education and employment sectors. This means that **work-based practical training opportunities have all but disappeared**. The development of skills now relies on the capacity of the

practical trainers and the availability of adequately equipped workshops within vocational schools. However, most practical **trainers have little experience from the world of work** of the occupation for which they train.

Strategy 2020 envisages serious measures which may lead to a breakthrough in VET. Among such measures are the following:

- *establishing multi-level and multi-profile VET institutions* on the basis of the initial and secondary vocational schools and learning centres;
- developing and incorporating new generation of *educational standards oriented towards competence-based outcomes* and modular organisation of learning processes;
- introducing *external evaluation of learning outcomes* – certification of professional qualification;
- utilising different forms of *social partnership* and involving the real production sector of the economy into the learning process.

Implementation of these measures for *VET modernisation will be impossible without the support of European and other donors.*

International Cooperation

The **TEMPUS** programme started in Tajikistan in 2004. A number of changes in the Tajik higher education sector, from top management to grass-roots' level, have been supported by Tempus projects. Participation in the programme has helped to effect the following:

- strengthen the solidarity of the Rector Community and the Council of Rectors of the Republic of Tajikistan;
- improve the relationship between the universities and the Ministry of Education;
- increase the knowledge and information base of stakeholders regarding the EU education process, including the Bologna Process;
- encourage the professional development of academic staff; and
- motivate a younger generation of teachers.

TEMPUS projects have been the main instruments through which the implementation of the ECTS in the national higher education system was made possible.

The positive outcomes of the pilot projects led to spreading the credit system to Tajik universities. The projects' activities included training lecturers and university staff responsible for the organisation of the educational process, and developing coherent curricula and programmes based on the credit system. The reports and training modules developed as a result of the projects became basic documents for disseminating experience gained in the introduction of the credit system.

DAAD is another important international partner contributing to modernisation and exchange programmes in Tajik HE. The organisation also provides German language teachers and subject lecturers for a number of universities.

GIZ is the **major contributor to the transformation of VET system**. Despite a high turnover of partners in the Ministry of Education⁶, the programme, “Support to the Reform Process of the Vocational Education and Training System in Tajikistan” has been attaining good results in helping to raise the effectiveness of occupational training for youth and adults.

GOPA (German consulting company), which implements the initial VET component of the above programme, was successful in introducing competence-based learning with all the accompanying elements in 6 pilot VET institutions. The indicator of success: employers paying for the training and retraining of their employees in some of these institutions and hiring graduates. Currently, the process of transforming these schools into resource centres has started.

ETF initiated its activities in Tajikistan in 2004 and became the first international organisation to deal with initial VET at the systemic level. ETF launched a debate in the country on a new concept of vocational education and has been supporting the Tajik authorities in the provision of information, analysis, and policy advice on VET reform.

United Nations Development programme (UNDP) established modular training centres in Dushanbe and Gharm to deliver short-term skills training for young people not entering university, and for disadvantaged adults. The UNDP also rendered support to the Modular training centre under the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection (MLSP) in organising training for adults.

The German Adult Training Association carried out a two-year project to assist in enhancing the curriculum development capacity for adult education in the Methodological Centre in the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection. Further assistance to the Centre was provided in teacher training by the **GTZ** and **InWent**.

The **Aga Khan Foundation** was built the University of Central Asia to offer internationally recognised standards of higher education. This university also provides training courses at primary and secondary vocational education levels through its School of Professional and Continuing Education. The principle decision to locate the university in rural area was taken to promote access to education and training facilities for the poorer part of the population.

The **Turkish Cooperation and Development Agency** provided equipment and training support for adult education to the Association for Adult Education under the MLSP.

4. Major Results of Needs Assessment Interviews and Questionnaires

CAEP’s mission to Tajikistan took place on 12 – 18 April 2012. Twenty-five interviews took place with the representatives of state authorities, ministries, employers’ organisations and donors. In

⁶ In 2011 nearly all Staff of VET Department, and most directors of the partner-training institutions, were dismissed and changed by others who – in most cases – were less qualified.

addition, 15 questionnaires were completed which gave a representative opinion of some other groups of stakeholders which were not interviewed (e.g. directors of VET institutions).

The head of EU Delegation in Tajikistan officially informed the Ministry of Education about CAEP's mission. This fact enabled Mr. Sulton Imomov (Director of the CAEP consortium member, CAICo, in Tajikistan) to organise meetings with directors of major departments in the Ministry of Education, and with the Deputy Ministers of Economic Development and Trade, and the Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Protection.

Discussions in the Ministry of Education (MoE), with Department Directors of International Relations, Higher Education, Vocational Education and Education Analysis and Development, **came to the following conclusions:**

- Implementation of the new Strategy 2020 would be difficult because it requires *cardinal changes in the content of education process, from being traditionally knowledge-based, to being competence-based*; and also requires the creation of a new quality assurance system.
- *In HE*, this transformation would be accompanied by the *final transition to a three-level education structure* based on the principles of Bologna Process including ECTS, *by 2015*.
- In VET, besides transition to competence-based learning, there will be an attempt to *unify the existing two types of institutions (initial and secondary) into single multi-level and multi-qualification institutions* with consequential programmes securing life-long learning.
- To meet these ambitious goals *MoE needs financial and methodological assistance from the European Union* on a multi-lateral and bi-lateral basis.
- *Focus on the implementation of Strategy 2020 could become the major direction of the EU-CA Education Initiative in Tajikistan.*
- MoE is interested in sharing experiences among CA countries undertaking a similar transformation of their education systems to being competence-based. Therefore, the *MoE supports the aims of CAEP* and will be ready to participate actively in its activities.

The Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Protection of Population stated that his Ministry was responsible for adults' training and retraining. For this purpose, the Ministry established a Training Centre in Dushanbe (which was visited later) and 27 more in the regions, for short-term training programmes. President Rakhmonov assigned the Ministry the task of increasing annual enrolments from 40,000 at present to 100,000. The Deputy Minister drew attention to the fact that *absence of qualification standards and modular programmes based on units of occupational standards prevents adults from obtaining the official certification of their skills*. On his opinion, the transition to competence-based education and training could solve this problem. He expressed *the willingness of the Ministry to be involved in CAEP's national and regional activities*.

The Deputy Minister of Economic Development and Trade, who is in charge of the human resources development sphere in the Republic, drew attention to the following:

- the absence of pre-school education (only 5% to 7% of 3-5 year-old children have an opportunity to attend);

- the disproportion between general-school graduates attending VET and HE institutions;
- the great number of general-school graduates (about 100,000 annually) do not continue education and go into the labour market as unskilled workers;
- *the donor's assistance shall be focused on the transition to competence-based training at all levels of the education system and in the technical aspects of the introduction of Bologna process in HE;*
- *through its discussions platforms, CAEP shall provide the opportunity for national and international Tajik education stakeholders to unify their efforts in the implementation of Strategy 2020.*

Discussions with **Directors of the Republican Methodological Centre and Republican Institute for Education Personnel Upgrading** touched on the problems of the shortage, and the low professional level of teachers and educational managers. Besides inadequate remuneration, the acute problem is the absence of competence-based qualification standards for teachers at various levels of the education system. By order of the Minister of Education, the *Methodological Centre was appointed as a focal point for the development of new competence-based education standards*. Therefore, the Centre is much interested in the organisation of, and participation in, the CAEP's national and international meetings.

The **Coordinating Council of Business Associations and Civil Unions** counts for 48 business associations unifying 85,000 employers. The Council represents Tajik employers in the Tripartite Commission and participates in the Investment Consulting Council which is headed by the President of the Republic. The Chairman of the Coordinating Council raised the *problem of the mismatch between skills of VET and HE graduates and the growing demand for qualified labour by industry and services*. In his opinion, if the government takes a serious attitude to the transition to competence-based education and training, the *Council can ensure the involvement of sector business associations in the development of occupational and qualification standards*. He supported CAEP's purposes, although *the usefulness of national and regional discussions would depend on the right focus and follow up actions*.

There were fruitful discussions with senior staff in three universities: **Russian-Tajik (Slavonic) University, Tajik State University** and **Tajik State University of Commerce**. The following are the *major points of the discussions*:

- Each of the universities established a network involving CA universities, universities in Russia, China and other Asian countries.
- Due to the TEMPUS and DAAD programmes, contacts have been established with European universities. Some relationships "survived" the end of the joint projects.
- Each university teaches students from neighbouring CA countries, as well as Afghanistan.
- The Bologna-Process principles and instruments are gradually being introduced, on the understanding that – by 2015 – all teaching processes will be transferred to three levels of qualifications.
- The most urgent mid-term problem is how to ensure the quality of teaching during the transition period.

- There is a great need for the EU's assistance in solving this urgent problem.
- There were suggestions to *establish a regional centre, within the Framework EU-CA Education Initiative, which will render technical and methodological assistance to universities in adopting the Bologna Process principles.*

Constructive meetings were held with **donor organisations** and their projects (TEMPUS, DAAD, GIZ, Open Society Foundation)⁷. An agreement was reached to cooperate closely in conducting CAEP national conferences in Tajikistan. *It was agreed with GIZ to consider the possibility of jointly organising a national conference in October 2012.*

⁷ For more detailed information on their activities, see Section 4.

UZBEKISTAN

1. Education Sector Policy and Strategy

The education sector in Uzbekistan differs considerably from the corresponding systems in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan regarding its structure and management. A general secondary education consists of 12 years, and it is compulsory and free. The last three years of secondary education can be completed in two types of secondary educational establishments – professional colleges and academic lyceums. Both types of schools provide the general secondary education required for further education in universities.

One important principle is continuity of education. Education starts from pre-school age and continues for nine years of schooling followed by additional three years. The concept is aimed at raising the profile of vocational education in the republic. It is predicted, that approximately 80% of all pupils will go to Professional Colleges upon completion of the mandatory nine years studies in general secondary education. Colleges offer a three year secondary specialised syllabus leading to a range of specialised skills in a selected trade. Pupils, who go to Academic lyceums, are given the opportunity to raise their level of knowledge in selected humanitarian, technical or agrarian subjects. Upon completion of the College or Lyceum the student can either opt to pursue higher education or go directly into labour market.

In Uzbekistan *the system of education is governed by the Department operating under the Cabinet of Ministers (CM) which is responsible for the development of the social sector as a whole, including the implementation of educational reforms. At the same time, some specific issues are the responsibility of central bodies operating in other areas: financing system and tuition fees (Ministry of Finance); facilities development, demographic forecasts, forecasting and programmes for admission to HE (Ministry of Economy). The Ministry of Labour and Social Security is responsible for programmes aimed at professional training and raising the level of employees' professional skills.*

The CM is responsible for the direction and implementation of strategy, for the development of a unified state education policy, management of the public HE institutions and their educational programmes, establishment and reorganising of educational institutions, quality assurance and accreditation of institutions and/or programmes, recognition and determining of foreign qualifications, approval of State Educational Standards (SES), the award of state grants to institutions, defining the quotas for admission and appointing the rectors.

Two ministries, the Ministry of Public Education and the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialised Education, are responsible for the governance of educational establishments.

The Ministry of Public Education is responsible for the activities of pre-schools, extracurricular educational establishments and general education schools. The Ministry has a central office as well as regional, district and city branches of public education, which provide methodological supervision of the activities of these educational establishments.

The Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialised Education is a government body which supervises Higher and Secondary Specialised Education in the country. It reports to the Cabinet of Ministers and consists of the Centre of Secondary Specialised and Vocational Education and the Centre for Development of Higher and Secondary Specialised Vocational Education. The Ministry has the power to approve secondary legislation which improves the quality of education.

The basic document determining policy and strategy in the education sector “**National Programme for Personnel Training**” (NPPT) was approved by President Islam Karimov in **August 1997**. Since then the NPPT has been the basis for the reformation of the national education system. The reformation process can be divided into three major stages:

- 1997-2001 – initial stage during which the new National Policy of Personnel Training was formed;
- 2001-2005 – stage of large scale transformations of secondary specialised vocational education;
- after 2005 – adjustment of state educational standards and further development of the secondary school education system.

In 2010, the following priority areas were selected for the further development of the education sector:

- Improving the quality of education in schools, professional colleges, lyceums and universities.
- Ensuring a rational and efficient use of the existing material and technical base.
- Reconsidering the direction of education and specialisations, taking into account the demand for specialists in different sectors of economy.
- Developing and introducing modern information and communication technologies, including internet connection.

The authorities undertake efforts to extend the “Uzbek model” of reforming the education system beyond the national borders. In February 2012 a huge international conference took place in Tashkent on the initiative of President Islam Karimov⁸. The official purpose of this conference was to introduce the international community to the Uzbek educational reform. The final communiqué promoted the “full support” of principles and approaches of Uzbek educational reform. The conference called other countries to “recognise and study thoroughly the unique system of general and free 12 years’ secondary education by the scheme 9+3”.

2. Analysis of the Situation in Higher Education

There are 65 higher educational institutions in Uzbekistan, including State Universities in each of the regional centers. The following international universities have been established in

⁸ There were about 1,000 participants and guests from 48 countries and 8 international organisations. The UN Deputy General Secretary, the President of ADB, education ministers and other distinguished foreign guests took part.

Uzbekistan: Westminster International University in Tashkent, branches of the Moscow State University named after M.V.Lomonosov, the Russian Academy named after Plekhanov, the Russian University of Oil and Gas named after Gubkin and the Singapore Institute of Management in Tashkent.

There are no private universities in Uzbekistan, although the Law "On Education" adopted in 1997 provided a legal basis for such institutions.

According to the National Programme for Personnel Training, higher education is based on secondary specialised education (academic lyceum) as well as vocational specialised education (professional college) and includes 2 levels: a Bachelor's degree and Master's degree.

The Bachelor's degree level is a basic higher education providing fundamental and applied knowledge according to specialty, with a period of study of at least four years. Upon completion of the Bachelor's programme a graduate is conferred with the degree of bachelor and granted a diploma of the state pattern, which entitles him to start professional activities.

The Master's degree level is a higher education with fundamental and applied knowledge in a concrete field and can be obtained after a minimum of two years on the basis of the Bachelor's degree. Master's degree holders are given a diploma of the state pattern, which entitles the holder to work in his profession. It should be emphasised that only students who have studied for a Bachelor's degree in a certain field may apply for the corresponding Master's course.

There were (2009) a total number of 286'300 students in higher education, including 273,700 at the Bachelor's level and 12,600 at Master's level. About 69% of students study on a fee basis at the Bachelor's level, 75% of students study on a fee basis at the Master's level.

Challenges of higher education in Uzbekistan:

- *Quality* of higher education.
- There are *set quotas for entrance* to educational institutions.
- *Test results* show that the required entrance level is individually defined by each higher educational institution. Students who do not get a sufficient score for one institution might have scored enough to get into another, but students can only apply once each year.
- *High tuition fees* for those who study on a fee basis.
- There are *less educational opportunities for girls* compared to young men. The share of female students in higher education is 40%.
- *Lack of inclusive education* for students with disabilities.
- The *educational process is excessively overloaded* with too many subjects. In the leading higher educational institutions in Western countries students study 3-4 subjects during a term, whereas in Uzbekistan that number is 10-14.
- The *equipment* and educational facilities in higher educational institutions do not meet contemporary requirements.
- Low level of *teacher's salaries*.

Internationalisation

International cooperation is one of the fastest and most dynamic development spheres of higher education in Uzbekistan.

On the basis of inter-governmental agreements, students can get educated at foreign universities. Leading higher education institutions support close working relationships with universities in Russia, Germany, UK, USA and other countries.

International cooperation takes place in terms of:

- Establishment of joint higher education institutions.
- Involvement of foreign teachers and scientists in the teaching process.
- Support for incoming and out-going student mobility.
- Support for cooperation in research
- Organisation of international conferences on current issues of higher education.

Impact of the TEMPUS programme

In Uzbekistan TEMPUS has had a considerable impact on the overall internationalisation process of higher education, being the only programme providing long-term intensive inter-university cooperation and improving the universities' technical infrastructure and computer facilities. Most foreign support in Uzbekistan goes to secondary specialised vocational education instead of HE.

Projects for *curriculum development* have been especially important because of their direct links with the NPPT, and in particular with the introduction of the two-level higher education system. TEMPUS projects supported development of new curricula and courses for Master and Bachelor programmes, mainly *in the fields of engineering and applied technologies*, ensuring their relevance to local labour market needs through direct involvement of enterprises, branch ministries, Chamber of Commerce and Industry and other non-academic organisations.

A considerable number of TEMPUS projects have been implemented in the field of *university management*. A number of new and sustainable structures have been established in several universities through TEMPUS: Quality Assurance Centers at the Tashkent State Agrarian University and at the National University of Uzbekistan; the Practical Clinical Skills Training Centre at the Tashkent Medical Academy; an Information Technologies Centre at the Tashkent Automotive and Road Institute.

The TEMPUS programme has considerably contributed to the improvement of *higher education quality*. Since 2004 quality assurance has been a continuing national priority for TEMPUS in Uzbekistan, and this has led to the implementation of six projects in this field, providing support to Uzbek universities to improve university quality management systems through the development of e-resource management methodologies, the development of qualification requirements for technical specialties, a concept for quality assurance in agrarian higher education, and capacity building for student independent learning.

Regional cooperation in higher education by Uzbekistan has been boosted by TEMPUS. Projects in Energy, Water Resource Management, Food Safety, and Agrarian Management have been successfully implemented in Uzbekistan in cooperation with universities and non-academic organisations from Ukraine, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. In the framework of the first call for proposals under TEMPUS IV, three multi-country projects will promote regional cooperation. Among them is a project with the aim of raising awareness and promoting alignment with the Bologna process in Central Asian countries and Russia.

3. Analysis of the Situation in Secondary Specialised Vocational Education

Compulsory 3-year secondary specialised vocational education is an independent element in the overall system of continuous education. It is provided in compliance with the Laws of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On Education” and “National Programme of Personnel Training”. Currently graduates of secondary general schools have the right to choose the fields of their further studies – whether at academic lyceum or vocational college.

The objective of secondary specialised vocational education is not only intellectual development and the in-depth study of general subjects, but also preparing graduates to join the labour market and providing them with professional skills. Secondary specialised vocational education is provided on a full-time basis, in two types of education establishments: academic lyceums and vocational colleges.

Academic lyceums are secondary specialised vocational education establishments, providing a 3-year education in compliance with the national education standards. Lyceums are focused on intensive intellectual development, a deep specialised and professionally-oriented education, taking into consideration the pupils’ interests and abilities. While studying at academic lyceums pupils can choose the fields of studies (humanities, sciences, agriculture and others).

Vocational colleges are the second type of secondary specialised vocational education establishments providing a 3-year education. In compliance with the national education standards, these colleges offer secondary specialised vocation education with in-depth development of professional skills – training students in one or several trades of a chosen profession.

Along the obvious improvements of *vocational colleges* during the last decade, a number of *continual problems* exist :

- The output of the national VET system has *no international analogue* and that creates difficulties in finding relevant jobs and recognition abroad.
- VET is seen as a major tool against youth unemployment vis-à-vis the sustained population growth and as one of the drivers of economic development. This conviction has led to huge investments in vocational colleges’ infrastructure but less at the policy development level, which would make VET programmes and qualifications more responsive to its environment. The current VET curriculum was developed mainly by

education specialists with no real orientation to the labour market and needs of economy.

- Vocational colleges are not always located close to the student's residence area. Despite the fact that education provided by vocational colleges is free, students do not receive scholarships and as such there is an additional expense for those who have to move to the city and live in the dormitory. Therefore, *most rural school graduates have to study at the colleges located close to their residence area.*
- Each professional college has a Board of Trustees with *participation of employers* but the level of industry involvement *is limited* mostly to providing practical training places to some students. Colleges do not offer any services for business as a rule.
- *Experience of elder teachers* in many cases *is outdated* and based on outdated technologies. The younger staff has no sufficient working experience.
- *Authorities still retain centralised control over the VET system*, as illustrated by the continuing attempts to modernise the so-called classifier, the list of officially recognised occupations for which VET programmes exist. The classifier lacks systematic input from social partners and remains determined by education policies.
- There is an urgent need to review *narrow and out-of-demand specialisation* of many colleges.
- Better cooperation at the central level on one hand and vertically in the system on the other, real involvement of social partners and loosening up traditional centralistic ties can help *to focus* not only on quantitative developments, but *on improving the quality and relevance of VET.*

International cooperation.

EU conducted a number of technical cooperation projects under the TACIS programme. The Project "Social partnership in education and training" aimed at developing capacity at national, regional and local levels in designing and implementing a VET strategy for involving stakeholders. The project made a contribution to raising awareness for social partnership benefits.

ETF has been working in Uzbekistan to support the preparation and implementation of TACIS projects. Uzbek representatives attended the workshops conducted by ETF within the framework of its CA regional projects National Qualification Framework and School Development for Life-Long Learning as observers .

GIZ has so far been involved in the development of the Uzbek VET system **only** through its regional project "Programme of Professional Education in Central Asia".

Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation gained a good reputation by implementing a skills development project in the field of repair and maintenance of automated systems (2004-2010). In 2011 the new project "Water management skills development" implemented by **GOPA**, a German consulting company started . The project involves 11 vocational colleges in rural and urban areas of Andijan, Namangan, Fergana and Tashkent to introduce the new model of training and retraining of medium level personnel for regional water management objects and enterprises.

Japanese Bank for International Cooperation is the leading agency by its commitment of loans to the Uzbek VET sector (more than 60% of the total sum). The second biggest is the **Asian Development Bank** (25%). More than 90% of external assistance was provided as loans and credits, and only 9% as grants. The considerable part of an annual state financial allocation for the education sector is used currently to pay interest on the acquired loans and credits.

The Uzbek Government closely follows the initiation and implementation of international projects through the *National Coordination Unit (NCU)*, but is not stimulating coordination efforts among the donors.

4. Major Results of Needs Assessment Interviews

Due to the absence of the Project's endorsement by Uzbek Government no meetings with the representatives of state authorities in charge of the Education sector could be organised. All interviews were conducted on unofficial basis. In addition, no questionnaires were distributed. At the last moment, the Head of Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Uzbekistan sent an official letter to the National Coordination Unit, but no reply has been received by the moment of writing this report.

One of the most important interviews was conducted with Mr. Nodiz Sultan-Mukhamedov, **Executive Officer of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Uzbekistan**, and Mr. Latif I. Sattiev, Director of the Chamber's Education Centre. They raised the following issues:

- The Chamber is the only employers' organisation recognised by the Government (better to say "created by the Government").
- Despite the growing budget allocations for the education sector, the *quality of graduates' skills is much below employers' requirements*.
- The *shortage of national qualified labour power* compels employers to hire foreign workers and specialists.
- The *cooperation* between industrial enterprises and educational institutions is *very weak* although there is a tendency for improvement.
- The Chamber is ready to stimulate *involvement of employers* into the development of *occupational and qualification standards*.
- TEMPUS and ETF programmes contributed a lot to the establishment of closer ties between employers and educational institutions, both in HE and VET.
- *The absence of cooperation and coordination among the donors* shows when their representatives visit the Chamber and suggest projects or activities which have been already implemented by other donors.

HE issues were discussed in the following **universities**: University of World Economy and Diplomacy, Tashkent State Technical University, Uzbek State World Languages University and the Tashkent Institute for Irrigation and Melioration. All universities visited are in good physical condition, well equipped and in the process of extending their premises. The following *major issues were raised* during the meetings:

- There is a *Government policy to limit the number of students* by establishing quotas for enrollment even to the students who pay for their study. If these limits would be taken away, the number of bachelor students might be increased two to three times and the number of students for master degree four times.
- *Universities have limited freedom* in organising learning processes or changing content and parameters of the educational standard approved by the Ministry.
- A University has *no right to open* an independent bank account.
- *The Quality of graduates' knowledge and skills has been decreased* because of: disinterest of low paid teachers; a reduced level of knowledge of secondary schools' graduates; the absence of proper internal and external quality assurance systems.

In their opinion, *CAEP may add value to the current EU programmes* in the education sector of Uzbekistan, *if it focuses* the agenda of national and regional forums as well as its information and communication platform *on the acute issues which influence the solution of many problems*. Such an issue for the coming years could be to assure the quality of the education sector's final product – knowledge, skills and attitudes of graduates.

Helpful meetings took place with two **NGOs** (Neoconsulting and Centre for Economic Research) and with the chairperson of the **Association** of English teachers of Uzbekistan). *Neoconsulting* is the leading Uzbek NGO in the education sector and actively collaborates with TEMPUS, DAAD and other donors' programmes. The *Centre for economic research* is the leading think tank working directly for the President's administration and the Government. Within the social development sphere, the Centre is conducting research and provides advice on the education sector reform. *Both organisations* supported the goals of CAEP, and *expressed their interest to be involved in CAEP activities* in Uzbekistan and the CA region.

The Opinion of representatives of visited **international donors and projects** (Delegation of European Union, TEMPUS, DAAD, World Bank, GIZ, GOPA) *on the success of CAEP in Uzbekistan was ambivalent*. The Head of the EU Delegation was sure that *if the project is not endorsed officially by the Uzbek Government*, no activity in the country would be permitted. Others stressed the point that Uzbek authorities are not in favour of regional activities in CA. At the same time it was specified that, if the status of the project is settled and CAEP suggests an idea which will quicken the interest of the authorities, the organisation of the national or regional conferences would not create any serious problems.

Possibility of regional conference in Uzbekistan.

The CAEP mission followed up the idea of organising a *joint regional conference with EU-CA Environment and Water Cooperation Platform* in Uzbekistan. The possibility of such a conference was discussed with several **potential partners**: Tashkent Institute for Irrigation and Melioration, Scientific-Information Centre of Interstate Coordination Water Commission and the Uzbek-Swiss "Water Management Skills Development Project in Uzbekistan (2011-2014)". The idea was fully supported by the interlocutors and they expressed their readiness to be involved in the conference implementation. The topic *"regional cooperation in competence-based learning for water management"* was suggested as a theme of the conference.

The following *reasons* were indicated *in favour of such a conference in Uzbekistan*:

- Uzbekistan is the only country in the region with a potential shortage of water resources therefore is highly interested in regional cooperation in this area.
- With the growing retirement of aged workers and specialists, the lack in competence of young employers became a very sharp problem.
- A common qualification framework is needed to provide similar requirements to the professions engaged in water management in CA countries.
- There is a problem of vertical and horizontal gaps and junctions between the learning programmes.
- CA countries depend on each other for the quality of the personnel managing water resources.
- Historically Uzbekistan has been the regional centre of education and training for water specialists.
- There is an additional positive factor: *this year Uzbekistan is assuming chairmanship of the Aral Fund* and could be interested to initiate an event concerning education and training for water management.

To conduct such a regional conference would be a real contribution to the implementation of “EU-CA Education Initiative” and to the promotion of cooperation between EU Platforms created in accordance with “EU-CA Strategy for New Partnership”. *The only serious stumbling block for the implementation of this idea by CAEP is the absence of the endorsement of the project in Uzbekistan and other CA countries.*

State of Regional Cooperation in HE and VET

Despite the real need for closer cooperation between CA countries in the education sphere due to their common background in the USSR and identical problems in the implementation of education reforms, there have been **no inter-governmental meetings within CA** since UNESCO's sponsored annual get-together of the Ministers and Deputy Ministers of Education stopped taking place a few years ago.

The **only non-government regional organisation** with annual membership fees is the *Education Network Association "EdNet"*, established in 2003 with headquarters in Bishkek. EdNet carries out continuous regular activities in HE in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, and claims membership in 32 HE institutions. The Association is a regular and able partner of TEMPUS, Erasmus Mundus, WB, Soros Foundation, USAID and other educational projects in HE.

Through their projects, the **European Union and other international donors** continue efforts to establish closer ties among the education authorities and institutions of CA states, but these networks usually almost cease to exist as soon as financing is stopped (e.g. Central Asian Education Cooperation Network supported by ADB and UNESCO; Central Asian Education Resource Centre supported by Soros Foundations in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan).

TEMPUS is the *major player in promoting cooperation between EU Member States universities and CA universities, also involving CA government education authorities* in these activities. The Bologna Process pathway adopted by Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan could never have happened without the TEMPUS programme's efforts in these countries.

TEMPUS' regional project "Central Asian Network on Quality Assurance and Accreditation (2009-2012)" has been a success in the introduction of internal and external assessment of HE institutions in three participating countries. However, there is a *risk that this network may cease to function* in efficient way due to lack of funds, as happened with several other networks established by international projects. **DAAD** (German Academic Exchange Service) is another regional player in HE exchange programmes. Its services are highly esteemed, as the organisation covers all costs of the students' (professors') assignments in Germany with only one condition attached – knowledge of the German or English language.

ETF concentrated its efforts at regional level on introducing European experience in VET reforms by means of regional pilot projects, peer learning activities and a policy advice approach coordinated across CA. Despite the limited resources at the disposal of ETF, its services were indispensable in bringing contemporary European experience at the right moment of VET system reformation in CA countries and providing the opportunity to share their own experiences. Every two years, ETF invites its partner countries to review the state of their VET policies and systems. The *Torino Process* helps to design home-grown VET policies and align donor assistance with national strategic aims.

ETF implemented three *important projects* in collaboration with national partners in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan: The National Qualification Framework (NQF), Skills Development for Poverty Reduction (SDPR), and School Development for Life-Long learning.

The NQF project supported the identification of occupational profiles in the tourism sector and developed an NQF policy paper. The NQF project helped to focus more attention on the link between schools and the world of work, including strengthening social partnerships in VET. The SDPR project promoted policy thinking on how to enable VET schools to provide skills development opportunities for poor people and become partners in poverty-reduction activities.

Improving school management and supporting an active role by school managers in vocational education development is the focus of the new initiative launched by the ETF in 2012. The initiative will build on the recently completed school development project. It will involve up to 200 schools in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and will have observers from Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.

GIZ is the major external player in VET systems of CA countries. In addition to country projects, GIZ is currently providing considerable funds for the implementation of *two regional projects* in the education sphere. The “Programme of professional education in Central Asia” (Euro 19.5 million) will be executed over a span of nine years (2010-2019). Its aim is to make *professional education in the sphere of processing agricultural and food products* corresponding to the continuous developments in the labour market. Another regional project financed by GIZ (Euro 6.5 million) the “Regional Programme on Reform of Educational Systems in Central Asia” (2011-2013) with headquarters in Kyrgyzstan and offices in each CA country concentrates on the *reform of general education systems in CA*.

The EC-sponsored **Central Asian Research and Education Network (CAREN)** started its activities in 2010. The project inherited network members and some activities from the NATO-founded communication project “Virtual Silk Highway” which connects the South Caucasian Silk partners and Black Sea Interconnection project, and which focuses on replacing satellite connectivity by terrestrial fibre-optic connections. CAREN also transfers to the German Research Centre for Geosciences the data on real-time earthquake monitoring in CA countries.

As one of the EU platforms serving CA countries, CAREN established a *high-capacity regional Research and Education network* based on broadband Internet for public use (fee-charging) by education and research institutions. CAREN can allow researchers, educators and students in five CA countries not only collaborate with each other, but also to engage in joint projects with their peers in Europe and other parts of the world. However, *CAREN’s present and near future potential for research and education in this region should not be overestimated* because of the current poor state of research in CA and lack of resources by most universities to pay expensive fees for the high-speed, fibre-optic connection.

New systemic goals challenge traditional methods of granting technical assistance to CA in the education sector. Present regional efforts are limited to particular sub-sectors of the educational system (general, VET and HE) without much coherence among them. The majority of the national stakeholders and representatives of international donor organisations and projects express their support for ***the idea that CAEP as a “key pillar”*** of the European Education Initiative shall **focus its activities on a new systemic goal in the CA countries – *transition to competence-based learning.***

Major Common Needs Identified for a Mid-Term to Long-Term Period

Taking into account the overall objective of the CAEP project to contribute to the CA countries' programmes towards improving the competitiveness and productivity of national economies, as well as capacity for sustainable development in the region, the following common needs have been identified for mid-term to long-term period in the education sectors of the CA states.

In Higher Education

- Ensuring the relevance of graduates' skills, knowledge and attitudes to the needs of economic and socio-cultural development of CA countries by means of a competence-based, outcome oriented learning process.
- Ensuring the quality of transformation to and implementation of a three-level educational system based on the principles and instruments of the Bologna Process.
- Ensuring the recognition of graduates' qualification and diplomas within the CA area and beyond.

In Vocational Education and Training

- Ensuring the transformation to a competence-based and outcome-oriented learning system founded on occupational and qualification standards; modular learning programmes and assessment based on those standards; the accreditation of institutions which follows requirements of internal and external standards for quality management and assessment.
- Ensuring the development and dissemination of manuals for teachers and textbooks for students, as well as the supply of necessary equipment to meet the requirements of competence-based learning.
- Ensuring the introduction of modern methods of teaching and learning which correspond to a competence-based learning system.
- Ensuring close collaboration between the learning institutions and social partners.

In the Education Sector as a whole

- Ensuring continuity and succession at all educational levels by creating National Qualification Frameworks. These national frameworks might eventually be transformed to the CA regional qualification framework (such as EQF) to create optimum conditions for the mutual recognition of qualifications and easy mobility of labour within the region.
- The introduction of education sector quality-assurance infrastructure.

Recommendations for CAEP's Design and Means of Operations

The Project's work focuses on the major requirements of the education sector modernisation programmes in CA countries, and on streamlining EU/EU Member States' technical cooperation activities towards the implementation of these programmes.

Taking into account the common needs identified for the CA countries in HE and VET, and also the means of CAEP's operation (dialogue forums, mapping, communication, and complementary studies), "**Transition to Competence-based Learning**" shall be defined as the coherent **content area for CAEP** and its national, regional and international dialogue. This focus area determines the following:

- Definition of contents of 14 dialogue events.
- Selection and invitation of EU experts.
- Development and maintenance of the communication platform (website, mapping database, publication formats).
- Preparation of dialogue-connected studies.
- Planning synergy activities with stakeholders and donors.

To make the dialogue as efficient as possible, **the order and content of the dialogue events** may be defined as follows.

- First national conferences: Transition to competence-based learning in the educational sector.
- First regional conference at technical level: Regional cooperation in competence-based learning for water management (in cooperation with EU-CA Environment and Water Platform).
- First Regional conference at policy level: Policy issues in transition to competence-based learning.
- Second regional conference at technical level: Regional and international cooperation in implementing competence-based learning in Central Asia.
- Second regional conference at policy level: Policy issues in transition to competence-based internationally recognised qualifications.
- Second national conferences: Achievements and problems in implementing competence-based learning.

To support the relevance of CAEP's awareness raising activities, communication platform and regional dialogue, the following **studies** would be conducted:

- **Framework Study:** Transition to competence-based learning in CA – state-of-the-art and perspectives.
- **Targeted studies related to regional and national conferences.**
 - Vertical integration of competence-based learning and qualifications (case study of water management education and training in CA).
 - Quality assurance through a competence-based education and training system.

- Qualifications and credit frameworks for career development and professional mobility of people.
- Policy issues for regional and international recognition and accreditation of competence-based qualifications.
- Recommendations on CA countries' action plans and technical assistance requirements for further development of competence-based learning.

Recommendations to the Central Asia DCI Indicative Programme, 2014-2016

Assessment of the needs for further modernisation of the education sectors in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, and also consultations with EU/EU Member States and other international donors and project managers, led to the following recommendations:

- To maximise the results and impacts of technical assistance, a **major priority area** for regional cooperation and for bilateral assistance in the education sector **shall be defined**.
- Needs assessment carried in four CA countries identified **Transition to Competence-based Learning** as the priority area determined by education stakeholders and reflected in the recently approved mid-term to long-term government programmes for education development.
- In this way, **synergy and complementarities** between focal intervention areas at both regional and national levels **can be systematically planned**, and **support** via European Education Initiative and CAEP **can be optimised**.
- **CAEP's** project activities may serve as the **first stage** for the implementation of the new priority area. During this stage, CAEP will **raise awareness** of partner countries, donors and experts for the advantages and current experiences of competence-based education systems. In the **next stage**, well established CAEP infrastructure may contribute effectively to the **practical implementation** of the new priority area through the CA DCI Indicative Programme.
- **The scope for action** under this priority area **has to be defined at country and regional levels** in line with the analysis developed for each country, and following consultations with the beneficiaries.