

Scholarships to students from the Western Balkans and participation in Community programmes and agencies¹

The Commission proposes to increase the number of scholarships for students from the Western Balkans. Several hundred students from the region will be funded for studying in the EU. More Community programmes and agencies are also being opened to the Western Balkan countries, enabling contacts and cooperation between scientific and educational institutions.

Scholarships and youth exchanges

Within the "*Erasmus Mundus – Western Balkans Window*", starting in academic year 2007/08, up to 100 students from the region can undertake each year postgraduate studies in EU-based high profile master courses. Support is provided from the CARDS and IPA programmes.

For the academic year 2008/09 a decision was taken under the "*Erasmus Mundus - External Cooperation Window*", to enable the exchange of up to 500 undergraduate and graduate students, doctoral and post-doctoral candidates and academic staff between the Western Balkan region and the EU Member States. Support for the scheme is provided from IPA.

Around €10 million of Community support is earmarked annually for these activities. As of the academic year 2009/2010, the Commission intends to double this annual allocation. This would enable several hundreds additional students to receive a scholarship.

In addition, a new "*Western Balkans Window*" was opened in 2007 in the *Youth in Action programme*. It allows support for more projects submitted by young people, youth associations and civil society organisations from the Western Balkans. These activities will include youth exchanges, European Voluntary Service projects, as well as training and networking projects. They will be based on partnerships between organisations from the region and their counterparts from the EU. Support is provided by the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA).

¹ Fact sheet for the Commission Communication: "Western Balkans: enhancing the European perspective" See IP 378

Participation of the Western Balkan countries in Community programmes and agencies

Since 2007, most of the Western Balkan countries are associated to the 7th Framework Programme on research; some of them also participate in the "Culture", "Progress", "Competition and Innovation", "Customs" and "Fiscalis" programmes. Further programmes, such as "Lifelong learning", "Europe for Citizens", "Media", will be opened to more Western Balkan countries in 2008-2009.

The Community programmes' aim is to support implementation of the Community policies and achieving their objectives. Some of them require establishment of administrative bodies and development of certain capacity to ensure effective participation.

The candidate and potential candidate countries of the Western Balkans are entitled to participate in Community programmes on the basis of Framework Agreements these countries have signed with the Community and that are now all in force. Community support under IPA is available to co-finance the participation. The Commission has been working closely with the countries in the region to identify the Community programmes for which there is interest and capacity and, where necessary, to prepare the parties for participation.

Western Balkan countries can also participate in Community agencies on a case-by-case basis and in various forms (e.g. participation in seminars, special meetings following Management-Board meetings, joint working parties, secondment of national experts etc.). Preparations for participation in some agencies are going ahead, in particular for Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. A number of Community agencies receive support from IPA to prepare for the participation of the Western Balkan countries.²

² The following agencies receive support from IPA: CEDEFOP, Community Plant Variety Office, European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, European Medicines Agency, European Food Safety Authority, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, European Maritime Safety Agency, European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, European Agency for Fundamental Rights, European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control.