



## European Union and Central Asia



EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
External Relations

### EU cooperation in **education** in Central Asia

One of the priorities of the EU's strategy in Central Asia is to raise educational standards, since the majority of the population in this region is less than 25 years old, which represents a precious potential for the future development of the region.

International donors have invested a lot in the education field, in particular at the level of primary and secondary education. The EU has therefore decided to focus its efforts on higher education and vocational education & training, where it has extensive experience and expertise. In recent years, an academic mobility programme for Central Asian students and scholars has also been established. Most Central Asian countries are aiming at aligning their higher education systems with the developments taking place in Europe and in particular the Bologna Process.

The Bologna Process aims at developing a common higher education area in Europe, with a system of comparable qualifications (short cycle, bachelor, master, doctorate), flexible, modernised curricula at all levels which correspond to the needs of the labour market, and trustworthy quality assurance systems.

#### **The European Education Initiative for Central Asia**

In the framework of a comprehensive EU strategy to consolidate stability and prosperity in Central Asian countries, the modernisation of the education and training sector is supported under the *European Education Initiative for Central Asia*. A coordination mechanism among EU donors has been set up to achieve this. The Initiative is centred on existing initiatives, on EU support at national and regional level, and coordination with other international donors.

Under the *European Education Initiative for Central Asia*, joint events will be held and joint materials published to

disseminate information about the EU's contribution to the modernisation of education systems.

A guidebook on scholarships offered in the EU was recently published. It can usefully be complemented by the "Study in Europe" website which provides up-to-date information on thirty-two European countries, their universities and what it takes to live and study in them. (<http://www.study-in-europe.org/>)

#### **University cooperation through Tempus**

The Tempus programme covers 27 countries in the Western Balkans, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, North Africa and the Middle East. Tempus supports the modernisation of higher education and creates an area of cooperation in countries surrounding the EU, including Central Asia. Central Asia has participated in Tempus since 1995.

It has helped to train a new generation of academics and managers and helped to support the reforms necessary for the modernisation of higher education systems. 130 universities from all over Central Asia have participated in 230 projects over the past 15 years, involving several thousand scholars (an estimated 5,000 have been directly involved) and students from the EU and Central Asia.

Through these projects, Tempus has supported the development of new curricula at Bachelors and Masters level in a wide range of disciplines – including a few joint degrees with EU universities – bringing modern teaching and learning methodologies in line with the principles of the Bologna process. It has systematically introduced quality assurance measures to ensure that these curricula are relevant and in line with labour market needs. Tempus has also provided a legal basis for the establishment of quality assessment systems in universities. The quality assurance guidebooks developed by Tempus projects are now widely used by the Central Asian academic world.



Tempus has contributed to the modernisation of university governance and the creation of new partnerships with the labour market. Employers are more systematically involved in the definition of new curricula and the identification of labour market's needs and show high interest in recruiting graduates coming from the faculties involved in Tempus projects.

Tempus projects often demonstrate unexpected spin-off effects going beyond planned activities and outcomes, like the enhancement of local project management skills allowing Central Asian universities to become more visible on the international academic scene, and the reinforcement of regional academic cooperation. The partnerships established by Tempus are usually sustained over time through regular academic exchanges, joint publications, participation in projects, events and scientific collaboration.

Tempus projects are used by the national authorities as pilots to test reform ideas, especially those linked to the Bologna process. The programme has therefore been the cornerstone of higher education reforms, in particular through the introduction of a learner-centred system for credit accumulation and transfer, and the transition to the three-level degree system. Tempus has contributed to improving transparency and facilitating the academic and professional recognition of qualifications.

Finally the contribution which Tempus has made in the improvement of university facilities, the installation of modern computer and laboratory equipment, and the renovation and development of modern teaching materials and textbooks is widely recognised.

### **Academic mobility through Erasmus Mundus**

Erasmus Mundus is a worldwide cooperation and mobility programme launched in 2004 to enhance quality in higher education and promote intercultural understanding. In 2007, a new action was launched (now called "action 2" of Erasmus

Mundus) covering Central Asia, to fund the mobility of students and academics who wish to study in the EU at all levels of higher education (Bachelor, Masters, Doctorate) according to the "Erasmus" model.

### **Vocational education and training**

Since 1995, the EU has been active in the field of vocational education and training by modernising policy frameworks, offering staff development programmes for Ministry officials and practitioners and testing the proposed policies at grass roots level. In recent years the focus has shifted to skills development as a tool to reduce poverty, but also to other policy initiatives such as the development of national qualification frameworks, improving school management or improving equity, quality and access to vocational education.

### **Central Asia Research and Education network**

The EU is funding a high speed data-communications network in Central Asia which will enable researchers and students to better collaborate with their colleagues across the world. The CAREN (Central Asia Research and Education Network) project will provide high capacity Internet links for the first time for one million students and researchers in over 200 universities and research institutions along the ancient Silk Road in Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. They will be linked to each other and to the global research community through connection to the high-speed pan-European GÉANT network.

### **Increased budget for cooperation**

In addition to an increased number of EU Member States' scholarships for Central Asian students, the European Commission doubled the budget for exchange and scholarship programmes in 2009 and 2010. The budget for Tempus in Central Asia will be doubled from €5 million per year in the past to €10 million for 2010; the yearly budget for Erasmus Mundus action 2 activities has already been doubled from €5 to €10 million in 2009.

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**The European Commission has published an education compendium with useful information about EU Member States, their education systems, exchange programmes and scholarships.**