EC/Canada agreement: framework for co-operation in the fields of higher education, training and youth

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The Commission presents a report pursuant to Article 7 of the Agreements between the European Community and the United States of America signed on 4 December 2006 and between the European Community and the Government of Canada signed on 18 December 2006 in the areas of higher education, training and youth. The report puts forward the Commission position on the main conclusions and recommendations of the interim evaluation of these two Agreements.

The commission notes that unfortunately, due to budget constraints, both the U.S. and Canadian authorities decided to cancel all current and future calls for bilateral projects between now and 2013 when both Agreements will come to an end.

Actions specifically undertaken in the framework of the EU-US Agreement are:

- the ATLANTIS programme with three sub-actions: (i) Transatlantic Degree Projects; (ii) Excellence in Mobility Projects (EIM); and (iii) Policyoriented Measures (POM);
- the Schuman-Fulbright grant scheme;
- the OCEANS alumni association;
- technical support measures, including annual Policy Forums and studies.

Actions specifically carried out under the EU-Canada Agreement are:

- the EU-Canada programme consisting of higher education and training actions, notably Transatlantic Exchange Partnerships (TEP) and Transatlantic Degree Partnerships (TDP);
- youth actions, in particular youth roundtables; and
- complementary actions, notably the EU-Canada Study Tour and Internship Programmes and the OCEANS alumni association.

Funding and outputs: as a general rule, the EU provides funding for the direct use of EU institutions, scholars and students while the USA and Canada provide funding for the direct use of institutions, scholars and students from their respective countries. The **EU's budget allocation for the ATLANTIS programme was EUR 23.2 million for the 2006-10 period** and for the **EU-Canada programme was EUR 5.1 million for the 2007-10 period.** Programme financing is done on the basis of a matching-funds principle between the parties to each Agreement, meaning that the EU budgets are in the end doubled by matching funds provided by the respective US and Canadian authorities. The ATLANTIS programme has permitted so far a total of 5 034 individuals and 317 institutions to participate in 67 mobility projects.

The EU-Canada programme has permitted so far a total of 2 804 individuals and 195 institutions to participate in 37 mobility projects.

The Schuman-Fulbright grant scheme is co-funded by the EU with an amount of EUR 320 000 per year and has had so far a total of 83 participants.

The evaluators found that while more data is needed to make a full assessment of the efficiency of the programmes, in comparison to e.g. the Erasmus Mundus programme and as a result of the matching funds

principle, **the average EU budget per exchanged student was significantly lower under the Agreements,** speaking for the cost-efficiency of the Agreements. However, the extremely small budget available in the EU-Canada case presents a significant handicap in fulfilling all of the Agreements' objectives.

Results of the evaluation: the **results are generally very positive**, the evaluation having analysed the degree of relevance of the Agreements to needs; the extent to which they overlap, complement or conflict with other policies and actions; the effectiveness of the Agreements in meeting their intended objectives and their added value; their efficiency and cost-effectiveness, and the effectiveness of management arrangements and other operational issues such as dissemination and exploitation of project results; and the extent to which the activities that have been supported are sustainable. While the activities supported by the Agreements are comparatively small in size in the context of the volume of international cooperation routinely undertaken in this sector between the EU, the US and Canada, they are notwithstanding offering a wide range of opportunities. **Only when it comes to the field of youth (Canada only), the evaluators concluded a lack of implementation which made it difficult to assess complementarity.**

With regard to **effectiveness**, the evaluators found that the Agreements have made contributions in respect of all their intended objectives, but have made less progress than anticipated in respect of providing opportunities for policy discussion, and in Canada, in the youth field. They recommended that both these areas should be made a strategic priority in the latter half of the life of the Agreements. In Canada, a swift decision should be taken as to what extent the youth field is a strategic priority which deserves to be implemented during the last years of the current Agreement. In the event of continuing inactivity, EU budget allocated to this area should be re-allocated to other parts of the programme in order to prevent waste of resources. In response, the Commission and its Canadian interlocutors have taken steps to implement a series of actions. In light of this recent development, a re-allocation of funds seems no longer necessary, and in addition, the Commission will continue its efforts targeting in particular the federal and provincial levels in Canada.

On **promotion and dissemination**, the evaluators noted the importance of achieving wider effects beyond the immediate projects themselves.

However, certain obstacles in achieving this result were identified, most notably as to what concerns a presumed lack of visibility and/or renown of the programmes (with the exception of the Schuman-Fulbright grant scheme), as well as a clear brand name (Canada only). The evaluators further concluded that the publicity for the Agreements and the dissemination of the results could be improved.

The **Commission shares the overall assessment of the evaluators that the Agreements are highly relevant** and fulfil their broader and more specific goals, especially so in the context of the EU developing its wider role in the world. The Agreements do not overlap nor conflict in significant ways with a wide range of relevant EU initiatives and offer substantial and tangible benefits for students, faculty and institutions.

The interest from stakeholders in the Agreements is increasing steadily, with the numbers of applications substantially going up in both 2009 and 2010. Most of the activities would not have occurred without funding from both the EU and the US or Canada . As the Agreements are comparatively cost-efficient due to their bilateral funding aspect which has a significant added value at a strategic level, they **stand as a model to follow for other industrialised and high-income countries,** not the least due to the fact that they champion high-quality student mobility, promote the use of innovative approaches to curriculum development, transparency and portability and that they provide a means to shape the nature of international cooperation.

In view of these considerations, the Commission deplores the sudden end of the main cooperation activities implemented under both Agreements. The evaluators have made a number of suggestions to improve certain aspects of the programmes but found no major shortcomings. The Commission has already taken action with regard to some of the suggestions and will take others of them into consideration.