EC/United States agreement: renewing the cooperation programme in the field of higher education and vocational education and training

2006/0061(CNS) - 27/04/2006 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE: to promote EU-US ties in the field of higher education and vocational auctioning/training, through the signing and conclusion of an Agreement.

PROPOSED ACT: Council Decision.

CONTENT: the proposed Agreement seeks to extend an existing EU-US Agreement on higher and vocational education, which ran out at the end of 2005 (refer to **CNS/2000/0263**). In 2005, the Council authorised the Commission to re-negotiate an Agreement, based partly on positive responses from independent evaluators. EU-US experts and government representatives agree that the Agreement is of strategic importance for improved people-to-people relations.

The Agreement sets out general, specific and operational objectives.

The general objective of the agreement is firstly to promote mutual understanding between the EU and US in the field of language, culture and institutions and secondly to improve the acquisition of skills needed in a global, knowledge-based economy.

The specific objectives are four-fold:

1) Enhance collaboration between the EU and US in the field of higher education and vocational training.

2) Contribute to the development of higher education and vocational training organisations.

3) Contribute to the development of individuals for their own sake and as a means to achieve the programme's objective.

4) Contribute towards transatlantic exchanges.

The operational objectives are more specific and include higher education and vocational institute collaboration through the promotion of joint study and mobility programmes; encouraging mutual recognition of qualifications, study and training and where appropriate the system of credits; to support public/private collaboration and to support the mobility of professionals between the EU and US.

Put concretely, the actions pursued by the Agreement would include consortia projects with an emphasis on staff, student and the mobility of trainees. Further mobility projects would focus on promoting student mobility to institutions with a proven record of excellence, including those funded under the previous EU-US Agreement. Under this heading particular attention is given to excellence. Other actions consist of the "Schuman-Fulbright" Individual Mobility grants and support for an Alumni Association. The programme, in particular, will complement the Erasmus Mundus programme in that it will focus on undergraduate mobility and include transatlantic exchanges in the field of vocational training.

For further information concerning the financial implications of this measure, please refer to the financial statement.