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

2006/0061(CNS) - 04/12/2006 - Final act

PURPOSE: approval of an Agreement to promote EU-US ties in the field of higher education and vocational training.

LEGISLATIVE ACT: Council Decision concerning the conclusion of the Agreement between the European Community and the United States of America renewing the cooperation programme in higher education and vocational education and training.

BACKGROUND: in 2000, the EU and US signed an Agreement on cooperation in the field of higher education, vocational education and training. (See: CNS/2000/0263). In 2005 the Council authorised the Commission to re-negotiate the Agreement.

CONTENT: the purpose of this Decision is to approve a new Agreement between the European Community and the United States of America renewing a programme of cooperation in higher education and vocational education. The Agreement will remain in force for eight years and may be extended or amended by mutual written agreement.

In brief, the terms and conditions of the Agreement are as follows:

- The Agreement renews the 2000 Cooperation Programme in Higher Education and Vocational Training originally established in 1995.
- **The general objectives** of the programme will be to promote mutual understanding between the peoples of the EU and the US (including languages, cultures and institutions) and to improve the quality of human resources development in both the Community and the United States (including the acquisition of skills required for the global knowledge-based economy).
- **The specific objectives** of the programme will be to: enhance higher education and vocational training collaboration; contribute to the development of higher education and vocational training institutions; contribute to individual participants' personal development and to contribute to transatlantic exchanges between the EU and US citizens.
- **The operational objective** of the programme will be to: support collaboration; improve the quality of transatlantic student mobility; support collaboration between public and private organisations active in the field of higher education and vocational training and to support the transatlantic mobility of professionals with a view to improving mutual understanding of issues relevant to EU /US relations.
- **The principles** underlying the Agreement are based on full respect for the responsibilities of the Member States and the US and the autonomy of higher education and vocational education; mutual benefit from activities, broad participation and the recognition of the full cultural, social and economic diversity of both the EU and the USA.

The programme will be pursued by means of actions including:

Joint EC/US consortia projects: The purpose of which will be to support joint projects in the area of higher education and vocational education and training. Each joint consortium must be formed by a multilateral partnership of EC and US higher education and vocational training institutions and should, generally, involve the transatlantic mobility of students.

Excellence mobility projects: The purpose of which is to offer financial support to higher education or vocational consortia that have a proven track record of excellence in the implementation of joint projects. Funding will go toward student mobility.

Policy oriented measures: The purpose of which is to offer financial support to multilateral projects involving organisation that are active in the field of higher education or vocational training. Policy oriented measures may include studies, conferences, seminars, working groups, benchmarking exercises and horizontal issues such as the recognition of qualifications.

"Schuman-Fulbright" grants: The purpose of which is to provide scholarships to highly qualified professionals who want to undertake studies or training in areas of specific relevance to the EU/US relationship.

Alumni associations: The purpose of which is to support alumni associations involving students who have participated in exchanges supported by the EU/US cooperation programme in higher education and vocational training.

As far as funding is concerned, the Agreement specifies that the activities will be subject to the availability of funds. Financing will be based on an overall matching of funds between the Parties and both parties will attempt to offer Programme activities of comparable benefit and scope

ENTRY INTO FORCE: On the first day of the month following the date on which the Parties have notified each other in writing that their legal requirements have been fulfilled. The Agreement replaces the 2000 Agreement.