

Education with European standards

"It was just cool," says Zaur Mutallimov, a student from the Azerbaijan Tourism Institute on his return from an exchange programme in Portugal. "I really enjoyed studying and being in touch with young people from many European countries. It turned me into a more open-minded person, aware of European culture and values." About 100 people from Azerbaijan have benefited from the country's participation in the EU-funded **Erasmus Mundus programme** over the last three years – enough to launch an Alumni Network of EU education programmes in the country.

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Text and photos by **Shahin Abbasov**

Baku – More than 20 projects worth €6 million have been implemented in Azerbaijan since 1995 under the EU-funded programmes Tempus and Erasmus Mundus. Thanks to Tempus, says Parviz Bagirov, head of the National Tempus Office in Azerbaijan, universities have enriched their curriculums in engineering, oil and gas, civic aviation, management of emergency situations, environmental studies, economy, foreign languages, ICT subjects and European studies. And what's important, he adds, sectors and subjects for cooperation have been chosen by the Azerbaijani side.

The European Union Tempus programme offers many forms of cooperation, which include experience sharing in European education standards, elaboration of educational agendas, provision of modern teaching literature, professional training, studies abroad, improvement of university management and reform.

The Azerbaijani State Oil Academy and the State University of Sumgayit have implemented a joint project with the University of Cologne (Germany) to improve the teaching of energy resources management. "It was a long and successful project, approved and renewed by the EU several times," Bagirov said. Finally the work received support of the Azerbaijani government and 'Energy resources management' became a separate subject at graduate level.

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ENPI Info Centre – Feature no. 24

This is a series of features on projects funded by the EU's Regional Programme, prepared by journalists and photographers on the ground or the ENPI Info Centre.

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Tempus success story

Another Tempus success story is the establishment of an immunology laboratory at the Azerbaijan Medical University (AMU). "It is the only research lab on immunology, not just at AMU but in Azerbaijan as a whole," Parviz Bagirov said.

"Before, there was no immunology lab at the AMU," said Professor Gulnara Nasrullayeva, head of immunology at the Azerbaijan Medical University. AMU joined Tempus in 2003 along with universities from Georgia, Armenia, UK, France and Italy. As a result, the EU funded the establishment of the first immunology lab in Azerbaijan. "The facility is equipped with modern medical equipment and has trained personnel," Nasrullayeva said, adding the lab is part of the teaching process while also conducting modern research.

In 2005, a special immunology course was introduced at AMU thanks to Tempus. Four top students from AMU went to the University of Westminster and to University College London in the UK to study immunology. Then two of them were trained in France. Three of these students are now immunology teachers at AMU, Professor Nasrullayeva said.

Thanks to contacts her university maintained with its European partners, a new three-year grant agreement within Tempus was signed in 2010 that would help introduce a distance learning method of teaching immunology to graduate students. The most successful students will be granted Masters' diplomas of two universities – AMU and the University of Westminster.

Regional universities also benefit from the programme, for example in Ganja, Nakchivan, Sumgayit, Lankaran and Mingachevir, where they take an active part in the process, Bagirov said.

Another EU-financed education programme, Erasmus Mundus, has been operational in Azerbaijan since 2007. It is a cooperation and mobility programme in the field of higher education that supports student and teacher exchange and cooperation between the EU and local universities.

Numbers to increase

More young Azerbaijanis are pursuing a European education, with about 2,000 currently at European universities. Azerbaijan's Education Minister, Misir Mardanov, said recently that the numbers would increase with the implementation of the State programme on funding university studies abroad for 2008-2015.

Erasmus Mundus is one of the vehicles providing additional possibilities to study in Europe.

A consortium of three universities, the Azerbaijan State Tourism Institute (ATI), Ganja State University, and the private Khazar University, was established in Azerbaijan in the frame of Erasmus Mundus. Nigar Abbaszade, head of International affairs and projects department at ATI, says similar consortia were established in Georgia and Armenia, together with an international consortium of 18 universities from Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia, Greece, Latvia, Bulgaria, Romania, Portugal, the Netherlands and France.

About 100 people from Azerbaijan have benefited from the country's participation in Erasmus Mundus in three years. Abbaszade says they are all professionals who will not have problems finding good jobs. Parviz Bagirov from the National Tempus office adds the Alumni Network of EU education programmes will be created in Azerbaijan this year, and will "facilitate and promote exchanges within Erasmus Mundus."

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■ The EU-funded immunology lab at the Azerbaijan Medical University is the first such facility in Azerbaijan.

■ A new secondary school in Baku – the government invests part of its oil revenues into education infrastructure improvement.



Young people change a lot for the better as a result of Erasmus Mundus exchanges. They get new knowledge, skills, and learn to live in a multi-cultural environment.

“Erasmus Mundus is very positive as it gives young Azerbaijanis a chance to visit Europe, to study there and be more attached to European values,” Nigar Abbaszade from ATI said. She recalls a girl from an IDP family who had grown up in a refugee camp. Her father was killed during the Karabakh war. “Despite tough living conditions, she passed university exams, learned English and took part in Erasmus Mundus. The programme changed her a lot – from a shy girl she turned into a young, self-confident leader,” Abbaszade said.

It is not the only example. “Young people change a lot for the better as a result of Erasmus Mundus exchanges. They get new knowledge, skills, and learn to live in a multi-cultural environment,” Abbaszade said.

Participating countries

Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Russia, Ukraine (East) Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, occupied Palestinian territory, Syria, Tunisia (South)

TEMPUS IV for higher education

Supports the modernisation of higher education, creates opportunities for cooperation among actors in the field and enhances understanding

Timeframe

2008-2013

Budget

approximately
€ 35-39 million
per year (ENPI)

Objective

The Trans-European Mobility Scheme for University Studies (Tempus) supports the effort of the Partner Countries to modernize their higher education systems and creates opportunities for cooperation among higher education actors of the EU and the participating countries through joint projects. It also enhances understanding between cultures as it promotes a people-to-people approach and promotes convergence with EU developments in higher education leading to more jobs and growth.

Erasmus Mundus II – Action 2 Partnerships

Promotes cooperation between higher education institutions through encouraging partnerships, mobility and exchanges of students, researchers and academic staff.

Timeframe

2009-2010

Budget

€ 29 million

Objective

The Erasmus Mundus II - Action 2 Partnerships seeks to promote better understanding and mutual enrichment between the EU and third countries and in the medium term strengthens political, cultural, educational and economic links.

Find out more

Tempus IV http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/tempus/index_en.php

Tempus in Azerbaijan www.tempus-az.org/

ENPI Info Centre webpage – Tempus www.enpi-info.eu/maineast.php?id=248&id_type=10

ENPI Info Centre webpage – Erasmus Mundus II

www.enpi-info.eu/maineast.php?id=246&id_type=10

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