

After a Pilot Stage, Parliament Continues Fellowship Programme for Strengthening Democracy in the Western Balkans

Sobotka: It is our responsibility to accompany our Western Balkan neighbours on their path towards the EU

Vienna – The parliamentary staff fellowship programme established in 2019 by the Parliament and the European Fund for the Balkans (EFB) in order to strengthen parliamentary democracy in the Western Balkans will continue following the successful course of the pilot stage. It enables parliamentary staff from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia to become familiar with the parliamentary work in Austria first hand as well as being involved and to cooperate in various spheres, during a six-week on-site visit. The second edition of the fellowship programme will be open for applicants until mid-September, and the first group of fellows is expected in Vienna in February 2021.

The objective of this initiative is to support South-eastern European states on their path towards the European Union. "Whichever part of the Western Balkans I find myself in, I can sense a strong desire within those countries to someday belong to the European Union. It is our responsibility not to disappoint these hopes and to accompany our Western Balkan neighbours on their path towards the EU. The Austrian Parliament wants to be a bridge builder and help strengthen parliamentary democracy in our neighbourhood. The fellowship programme for parliamentary administration staff serves to that purpose, as it enables direct exchange", President of the National Council Wolfgang Sobotka stated.

The first fellowship programme between September 2019 and March 2020 was completed by seven scholarship holders from Albania, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, within the parliamentary Budget Office and the National Council office, as well as in the fields of administrative innovation and digitalisation, protocol, organisation of visits and conferences, international relations and public outreach. Furthermore, the fellows were able to attend committee meetings and plenary sessions, as well as visiting parliamentary facilities, such as the Parliamentary Library, the Democracy Workshop or the Compliance Office.

Further information about the fellowship programme are available at

<https://www.balkanfund.org/general-news/western-balkans-fellowship-programme>