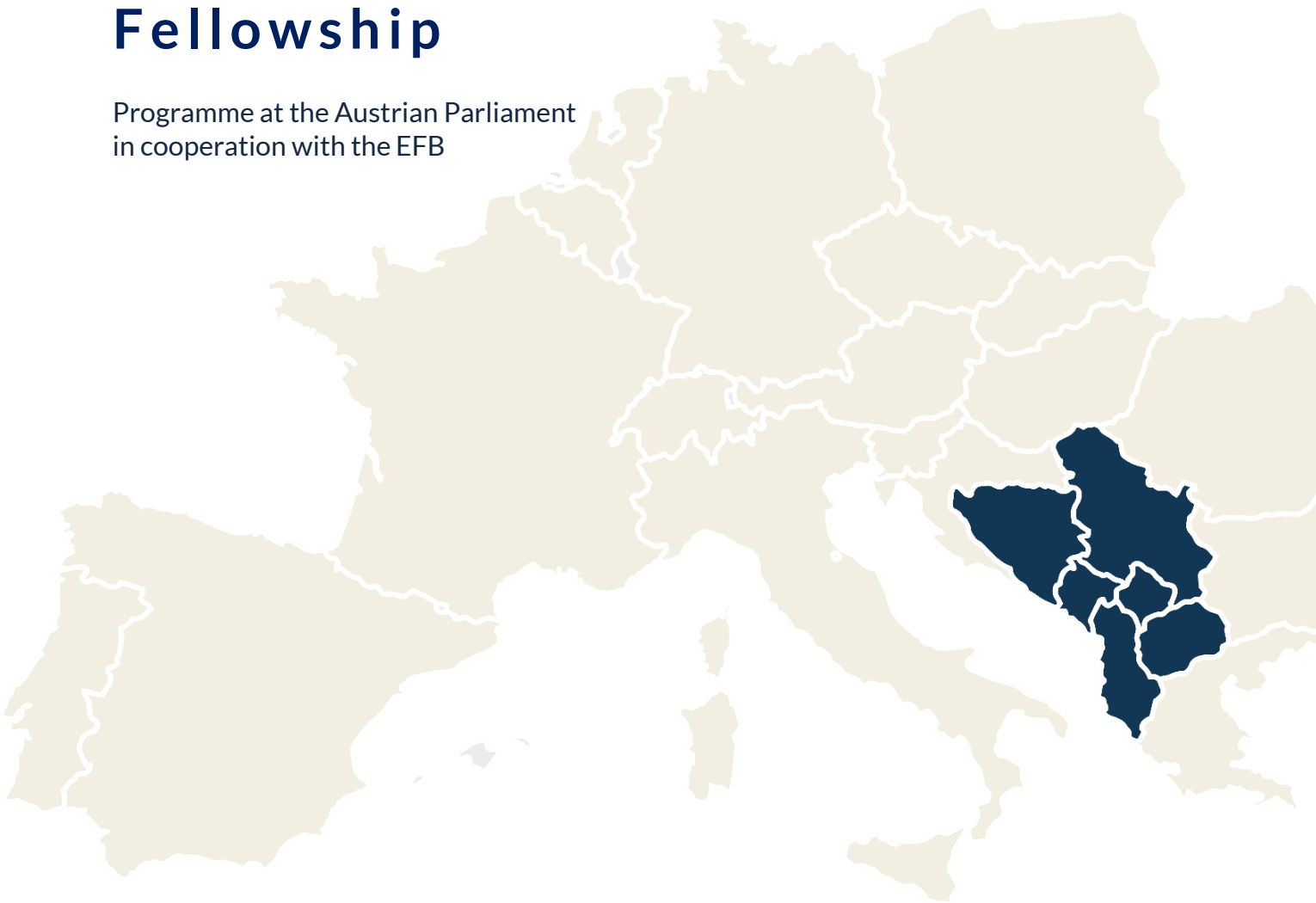




Parliament
Austria

Western Balkans Fellowship

Programme at the Austrian Parliament
in cooperation with the EFB



Applications can be submitted from
December 21th, 2023 – February 29th, 2024

PROGRAMME DESCRIPTION

Western Balkans Fellowship Programme at the Austrian Parliament in cooperation with the EFB

The Western Balkans Fellowship Programme at the Austrian Parliament in cooperation with the EFB is a practice-oriented educational programme for civil servants working in the National Parliaments of Western Balkan countries. The purpose of the programme which is funded by the Austrian Parliament and implemented by the EFB is to give impetus to the EU integration-driven reforms of the Western Balkans Parliament's administrations, through building the capacities of individuals, who are acting as the agents of change. The programme targets public administration professionals with a strong commitment to contributing to the development of their societies who are lifelong learners, acquiring skills and broadening their horizons throughout their careers.

The Fellowship Programme is designed for civil servants working in the administrations of the **National Parliaments in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia**. It is a unique opportunity to familiarize themselves with the operations and practices of the Austrian Parliament as well as to observe and to learn from administrative staff and professionals about various aspects of their work.

Background

The Western Balkans countries' needs as well as experiences before and after the accession of new Member States in 2004, and two subsequent expansions in 2007 and 2013 are showing that administrative capacity plays a key role in the capability to assume both the obligation of the EU accession process and the obligations of membership later on. The geostrategic commitment of the EU to the region and the

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unequivocal commitment to the EU membership perspective of the Western Balkans has been reflected in a number of key actions and documents within the last years.

The functioning of democratic institutions is one of the fundamental elements addressed by the European Commission within the enlargement process of the Western Balkan countries. National parliaments must play a key role in this process.

Whereas political leadership is undoubtedly necessary to steer the EU accession process, it needs to be supported by skilled and talented public officials, capable of performing all of the complex tasks involved in the EU integration process, including the transposition of EU acquis into national legislation, the coordination of sectorial policies, the management of EU pre-accession assistance, etc.

Cross-border working relations are not developed through institutions, but by the people who work in them. Personal networks and an understanding of different working cultures are essential for overcoming barriers of national administration and past conflict. Both the EU integration process and the performance of the Balkan countries within the EU will depend on qualified and experienced human resources to guide and shape the process. In this regard, the power and the role of National Parliaments remain crucial.

Objectives and expected results

Within the framework of the Austrian Parliament's initiatives to foster capacity building, civic education and the rule of law in the countries of the Western Balkans the Fellowship Programme is enhancing EU integration-driven reforms of the Western Balkans' public administrations by educating and motivating public servants to practice and advocate European principles of public administration and by sharing knowledge about parliamentary democracy.

The European Fund for the Balkans (EFB) is an initiative launched in 2007 by European private Foundations. The EFB aims at strengthening democracy, fostering European

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integration and affirming the role of the Western Balkans in addressing Europe's emerging challenges.

The EFB's strategic objectives are:

- To develop the Western Balkans' social capacity focused on the region's democratisation and EU accession process;
- To develop a policy platform that improves policy making while strengthening democratic institutions and civil societies in the Western Balkans and supporting EU integration;
- To develop a culture of regional cooperation with a set of norms taken at the societal level.

Specific objectives of the programme are:

- To develop the capacities of a selected category of public servants who want to shape regional and European collaboration by targeting national actors important for European integration;
- To enable a good environment for supporting motivated parliamentary public servants in acquiring knowledge and skills regarding European principles of administration, and transferring know-how within their departments of work;
- To get to know the role of National Parliaments in the EU-legislation process and to get familiarized with parliamentary processes in the Austrian political system.

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Expected results are on the individual and institutional level:

- By empowering the individuals not only with knowledge, but also with tools and techniques, the programme is providing them with assets to develop their careers.
- Participation in this programme helps to create a professional network on EU and regional levels and an understanding of different working cultures, which is essential for every public servant.
- After the programme, the officials return to their respective Parliament, acting as the agents of change in their everyday work.
- The programme's regional approach ensures the mixture of the officials from Western Balkan countries and yields the additional benefit of regional confidence building, stemming from social bonding and professional networking of the fellows.

Programme description

The fellows will get the opportunity to work in particular in one of the following fields of the Austrian parliamentary administration: central administrative services, plenary meetings, committee support, legal, legislative and research affairs, IT, EU participation, international affairs and communication.

The programme is specifically designed for civil servants from the National Parliaments in the Western Balkans who have several years of professional experience in public administration and have already assumed initial managerial responsibilities. The eligible applicants should be/have:

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- national of one of the Western Balkan countries,
- at least 2 years professional experience as a civil servant for the Parliament,
- excellent academic qualifications,
- very good knowledge of English (at least B2),
- at least A2 (B1 will be appreciated) proficiency level of German language (the level will be checked during the interview),
- sound knowledge of national and international politics and economics,
- strong interest in the European Union political developments,
- ability and readiness to acquaint oneself with various different topics in a short period of time,
- ability and readiness to complete inter-disciplinary work in inter-departmental working groups,
- ability and readiness to organise one's own life arrangements in a new environment.

Planned objectives and expected results are achieved by implementing the following activities:

Application

On behalf of the Austrian Parliament the European Fund for the Balkans is launching a targeted call for applications. Only civil servants working in the administration of National Parliaments can apply. Applications from candidates in political positions are not accepted.

Expected activity duration: 6 weeks

Selection

The selection of applicants is conducted in two phases – technical and qualitative selection. Technical selection is an administrative review, performed by the EFB's General Secretariat staff. Only applicants fulfilling the technical eligibility conditions will be accepted for the qualitative selection process. Rejected applicants will be notified. Applicants pre-selected for qualitative selection may be requested to send a copy of their university diploma via e-mail. The copy of the diploma should be sent together with a translation into English. The qualitative selection is performed by the Selection Committee. During the qualitative selection process, short-listed applicants will be called for an online interview in English, during which the German language proficiency will be also assessed.

Expected activity duration: 3 weeks

Placement Procedure

After selecting the fellows, EFB will inform the candidates about the dates of their fellowships. There are two possible shifts (groups) for the fellowship – starting spring 2024 and autumn 2024. Each shift will have three fellows at the same time.

The Austrian Parliament delegates a host mentor responsible for supporting the development of the fellowship work plan, the fellow's orientation in the host institution, facilitating the fellow's work, as well as monitoring and evaluating the fellow's performance.

Expected activity duration: two months.

German language training

Fellows take an intensive language course in their home country, prior to departure for the fellowship. In case the allocated expenditures for the language training have not been fully used before the departure, the fellow may continue a language training in Austria.

Expected activity duration: three to six months.

Practice phase

Each fellow will be placed in one of the departments at the Austrian Parliament, depending on the preferences expressed during the selection process. During their stay fellows will take part in a peer-to-peer exchange of experiences, and will familiarize themselves with administrative structures and forms of policy making in the host institution. Host mentors will support the fellows by induction and orientation for each fellow's position, actively monitor and facilitate the fellows' working and learning processes, facilitate the fellows' interaction with other institutions and evaluate the fellows' performance. The quality and intensity of the cooperation with the host mentor and authorities of the Austrian Parliament is crucial for the success of the fellowship.

Expected activity duration: six weeks.

Joint Seminar

Before the practice phase, the Austrian Parliament will invite all six fellows to a gathering in Vienna (expected to take place in spring 2024 together with the fellows of the 3rd generation) exchanging experiences and plans for follow-up. The Joint Seminar will inter alia also include meetings with the following institutions in Austria: Court of Audit, Ombudsman Board, EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, European Commission Representation in Vienna and the European Parliament Liaison Office in Vienna as well as with MPs and representatives of think tanks.

Expected activity duration: four days

Presentation of the fellowship experience in professional experience the home institution

The fellow is obliged to share the knowledge and skills with his/her colleagues in their Parliament. Knowledge sharing must be structured, with at least one presentation for the colleagues. At the end of the cycle, the fellow reports to the EFB, which will be shared with the Austrian Parliament.

Expected activity duration: one month

Funding

Six (6) scholarships will be available for civil servants in the 2023/2024 programme cycle. The programme financed by the Austrian Parliament and implemented by the EFB includes the following support to the fellow: intensive language course, travel expenses, international travel (medical) insurance, stipend for practice phase and the travel expenses and lodging for the Joint Seminar in spring 2024.

Practice phase funding - Round-trip travel expenses between the fellow's residence and Vienna will be covered. The fellow is expected to obtain sufficient travel insurance against illness, liability and accident in the host country (international medical insurance), which will be reimbursed by the EFB. In case the fellow needs a visa cost for six weeks multi-entry Schengen tourist visa for the host country will be covered. The fellow receives a stipend of €2,700.00 for the six weeks period. This sum shall serve to finance all living expenses throughout the duration of the Practice Phase - lodging, meals, local travel and transport, etc. (the host institution pays no compensation).

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German language training funding – The costs of the language training in the home country will be paid directly to the provider of the service before the start of the fellowship. The fellow is responsible for selecting a language training, providing, and organising his/her language lessons 2-6 months before. In total, up to €1,000.00 of language training costs can be paid by the EFB on behalf of the Austrian Parliament .

By participating in the programme, the fellows from the National Parliaments will have the opportunity to:

- gain professional experience in an EU country's parliamentary administration,
- receive training on their respective fields of expertise including EU issues,
- engage with their colleagues from the region and the EU, and thus
- create links between administrations through individual networks,
- serve as ambassadors of their respective countries,
- learn or improve a foreign language and
- participate in the EFB Community network after completing the fellowship.

Application process

Applications can be submitted exclusively from December 21th 2023– February 29th 2024 to fellowship@balkanfund.org (subject: Application for FP2022/2023 Austrian Parliament). The following documents should be included:

- **CV in English** (maximum 3 pages, pdf). Please upload a CV using the Europass template in English: <https://europa.eu/europass/en>

The CV should include a description of your relevant professional experience to date and a summary of your educational and academic background, such as name of your home organisation, job title, number of months/years spent in each position, description of your duties and responsibilities, details of the work you have carried out, etc.

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- **Letter of Consent from your employer** (pdf). You are asked to upload a signed and stamped Letter of Consent from your superior officer or an authorised representative¹ stating that you will be approved for the necessary leave of absence for six weeks (between May and November 2024, plus 4 days for the Joint Seminar in spring 2024), in case you are accepted for the Fellowship Programme. Please send the Letter of Consent using the given template in the Call, published on our webpage.
- **Motivation Letter:** We expect you to write a Motivation Letter (minimum of 200 words, maximum of 400), with a detailed presentation of your motive for applying for the programme, the connection of your professional interest with the programme as well as your intermediate and long-term professional goals and expectations for your fellowship to the Austrian Parliament.
When answering these questions be as specific as possible and describe your major area of professional interest and what would you expect to learn in the Austrian Parliament. Please clearly outline your preferences regarding the host department (for example research, human resources, IT, international affairs, etc.)

¹ In cases where the superior officer has not been granted powers of procuration on behalf of the institution