

AUB to lead EU-funded regional project to develop professional diploma in green technologies

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The American University of Beirut (AUB) has been awarded a grant of 667,748.11 Euros from the European Union Tempus Programme to fund the development of a professional diploma program for green technologies in Lebanon and Egypt. Entitled PRO-GREEN-Joint/Dual Professional Graduate Diploma and Professional Degree in Green Technologies, the project was officially launched at AUB during a two-day meeting January 8-9, 2013, hosted by the AUB Faculty of Engineering and Architecture and the Munib and Angela Masri Institute of Energy and Natural Resources.

Through the PRO-GREEN project, partner universities from Egypt and Lebanon will develop a joint/dual diploma for green technologies with a focus on renewable energies, green buildings and water resources. The curriculum will first be piloted at universities in Lebanon and Egypt, with the ultimate goal to be offered in numerous countries and universities across the region. Courses offered by the program will also be recognized by partner universities from Europe, in addition to those from Lebanon and Egypt.

The meeting gathered a consortium of 10 partners from Lebanon, Egypt and Europe to launch the project activities and discuss the three-year scope of work. Partners from Lebanon include AUB and the Lebanese American

University. Egyptian partners hail from the American University in Cairo, Helwan University and Suez Cana University. European partners include: University of Alicante, Spain; Lund University, Sweden; Politecnico di Torino, Italy; Mediterranean Universities Union, Italy; and University College Dublin, Ireland.

The target beneficiaries of this project are university students and working professionals in fields related to engineering, architecture, science and information technology who want to develop further skills in the growing sector of green energy. The indirect target groups are small- to medium-sized enterprises, governmental officials and society-at-large, all of whom can benefit from the job creation and sustainable development fostered in the outcomes.

Project director Nesreen Ghaddar, associate provost and the Qatar Chair in Energy Studies at AUB, believes that the creation of a dual/joint degree in green energy application poses a unique opportunity for student, professors and professionals in the MENA region. “PRO-GREEN will be the first professional diploma offered in the region to specifically address issues of renewable energy, green buildings and water resources,” Ghaddar said. “Professionals are demanding such trainings to stay relevant in the work force and to make sustainable change in their communities. This degree will put leading MENA universities on par with our international counterparts and will adhere to standards set by the Bologna process.”

Ehab Abdel-Rahman, associate dean for graduate studies and research at the American University in Cairo, was the originator of the idea for such a diploma program. “The current economic and energy crises position us at a crossroads,” he said. “One path leads backward toward the kind of carbon-intensive, high waste, unsustainable economic development strategies that we have been pursuing for decades. The other leads into a new green future, where acting sustainably requires choosing lower-carbon, more environmentally friendly energy, fuel, and zero-energy buildings. This path allows societies to choose to pursue sustainable green economic growth strategies that create high quality, family-supporting jobs and long-term prosperity. We are proud to implement a project that can help move the MENA region toward a new, green future.”

Aref Al Soufi, national office coordinator of Tempus Lebanon, highlighted the importance of promoting green technology via university programs, in general, and engineering programs, in particular. “The PROGREEN project could help raise awareness on how university and engineering programs could contribute to the protection of the environment and be more relevant in responding to the needs of the society,” he said.

In the last decade, nearly 10 million Euros have been invested by the European Union in 38 projects and 100 mobility grants for Lebanese academics. Tempus is the EU’s main tool for cooperation in higher education.

Diego Escalona Paturel, head of cooperation in the EU delegation to Lebanon, noted that despite an economic downturn in Europe, the green economy has seen a rise in employment and remains strong. For this reason, he argued that the PROGREEN project will provide a valuable opportunity to students and the workforce.

“Investment in renewable energy infrastructure and energy efficiency creates jobs across sectors, including in the construction sector, which has been very negatively affected by the current economic crisis,” said Escalona, referring to the situation in Europe.