

## Interview

### Five questions for Gerhard Schumann-Hitzler,

Director of IPA Strategy,  
Directorate General for Enlargement  
European Commission



1. Mr Schumann-Hitzler, the adoption of the IPA Annual Report is an occasion to look back on successes achieved and lessons learnt. How would you assess the developments regarding the implementation of pre-accession assistance in 2012?

*2012 was a successful year as regards the implementation of pre-accession assistance. The available budget was spent in full for the intended purposes. We made considerable progress towards programming the assistance on the basis of a sector-wide approach rather than financing individual projects, which are not necessarily linked to a more comprehensive reform strategy in the beneficiary country. We furthermore successfully launched the Regional Housing Programme which aims to provide sustainable housing solutions for the most vulnerable groups of refugees from the wars in the 1990s.*

2. One of the major focuses for the Western Balkans remains the achievement of higher standards of democratic governance. Could you give us an example of a successful project in the region? How will the EU support further progress in this field?

*If the countries in the Western Balkans really want to join the EU, they need to comply with the basic standards and values of the Union. Functioning democratic institutions, good governance, including a professional public administration and the respect of the rule of law, are pre-conditions for any country that wants to develop its society and economy in a sustainable way. These are "fundamentals" which are very high on our list of priorities – both in the negotiations and for allocating financial assistance. In this context we supported for instance the professionalization of national parliaments as well as the Ombudsman and Supreme Audit Institutions which are essential factors in a system of checks and balances.*

3. The European Commission committed itself to better priority setting, transparency and accountability. What has been done in order to make these principles a reality under IPA?

*We are currently defining comprehensive strategies with the enlargement countries which will guide us in allocating financial assistance over the next seven years. These strategies will identify the areas in which the countries need this assistance to implement the necessary structural reforms and carry out the investments which will bring them closer to EU standards and will boost the economy. This will be combined with setting clear targets so that we can monitor progress and ensure that the EU funds have the intended impact on the ground.*

4. For the period from 2014 to 2020, the European Commission will move towards a sector approach for IPA. Could you explain the significance of this approach?

*"Sector approach" means that the Commission will devote the bulk of its financial assistance to co-financing the national reform programmes adopted by the enlargement countries in line with the country strategy rather than to financing individual projects. The national reform programmes are an important element of improving the economic governance. By supporting comprehensive reform programmes geared to the specific enlargement agenda of the beneficiary country, our financial assistance will have a bigger impact in that country since a bigger part of public expenditure (including the contribution from the national budget) will be used in line with our rules for good governance and sound financial management.*

5. January 2014 will see the launch of IPA II, the new phase of pre-accession assistance covering the 2014-2020 period. What are the main goals for this period?

*The main goal remains unchanged over the current 2007-2013 period: the financial assistance from the EU should bring the countries in the enlargement zone closer to accession. All of these countries need to implement far reaching reforms in order to qualify for membership: they need to strengthen their economic governance and competitiveness they need to ensure that the rule of law is respected in all areas of government, economy and society. They also need to develop functioning democratic institutions and guarantee fundamental rights and freedoms. This is a huge task but it will bring direct benefits for the citizens and businesses in the enlargement countries. And it will bring benefits for the EU and its Member States since it will contribute to peace, security and stability in our close neighbourhood.*