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The implementation of Fener and Balat Districts Rehabilitation Programme has now started.

7 Million Euro EU support is available for the rehabilitation of Fener and Balat districts of Istanbul.

The Rehabilitation of Fener and Balat Districts-Istanbul Programme was formally launched at a press conference in Istanbul with the participation of Hansjörg Kretschmer, Head of European Commission Representation to Turkey, and Eşref Albayrak, the Mayor of Fatih Municipality.

At the press conference, Ambassador Kretschmer underlined that *“this ambitious Programme will encourage the development of Balat and Fener not only as a model of urban regeneration which can serve as an example for replication elsewhere in the historic districts of the city, but also as a centre from which conservation and regeneration expertise can be developed and utilized in the long-term in other parts of Istanbul and Turkey as a whole.”*

The objectives of the Programme are to improve the living conditions of the inhabitants of Balat and Fener districts of the Municipality of Fatih-Istanbul, primarily through the restoration of dwellings in these two areas, which form part of the Historic Districts of Istanbul World Heritage Site. Despite this important international status – Turkey, through nominating the Site to the UNESCO World Heritage List, has undertaken by its signature of the World Heritage Convention, to protect it for the whole of humankind, and the attractive position of Fener and Balat, on the banks of the Golden Horn – the two areas have hitherto demonstrated severe problems of decay and dereliction, compounded by the poor economic status of the inhabitants. To remedy this situation, around 200 historic houses will be rehabilitated, selected on the basis of various social and architectural considerations. It is anticipated that the programme will be able to transform the condition of as many as one in seven of the dwellings in the two districts.

In addition, a multi purpose community centre to be operated by NGOs will be established to provide a range of social services to target groups in the local community. The primary aim of this centre is to provide much needed educational and health services to local residents and in particular to young people and women. In this respect, the Centre will include facilities for women living in the district, to provide a focal meeting place outside the home where they have access to literacy courses and/or vocational training. Mothers are to be provided with advice on nutrition and general childcare as well as on reproductive health. To improve the overall health of children, a vaccination programme and clinic for minor ailments is to be included in the centre. It is envisaged that the centre will also incorporate a small day nursery, especially useful for women attending courses. The Programme will not only provide the physical infrastructure of the Centre, but will in

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parallel carry out a community outreach campaign, to provide increased awareness of reproductive health and childcare. Local students will also use its classrooms for after-school study. The aim is to help schoolchildren study under better conditions than those found in normal schools and to complement traditional teaching with courses in such subjects as languages, mathematics and IT studies. The centre may also offer adult literacy courses.

Finally, within the Fener and Balat districts a solid waste management strategy will be developed, to enhance the cleanliness of the area and the environment of the inhabitants, which will be coupled with a programme to rehabilitate Balat Market, to encourage its development as a vibrant centre of local economic activity.

The Rehabilitation of Fener and Balat Districts Programme is designed to ensure the maximum involvement of the local inhabitants, who are the end beneficiaries. In this respect, the Programme activities are expected to create numerous job opportunities for the local artisans and inhabitants. Although the rehabilitation programme will be tendered out in four lots, the main contractors will require the services of numerous sub-contractors to implement the project activities within the time-frame of the Programme. Since approximately 50 houses will be rehabilitated within each overlapping phase of the works, numerous craftspersons will be required to work in the two districts, creating an estimated 300 new jobs over the three years of the implementation of rehabilitation activities. In addition, some 20 young professionals will be provided with experience on the design and planning of the conservation programme during a 15 month period from 2003 to 2004.

The inception of the Programme will result in the revitalization of the Fener and Balat districts so as to improve the economic and social life of the inhabitants of Fener and Balat, as final beneficiaries, by providing a range of economic opportunities based on the development of small businesses, based not only on the innate attractiveness of these two historic districts, but also by enabling the inhabitants to gain full benefit from their status as inhabitants of the World Heritage Site.

A technical assistance service contract has already been signed by the EC with a consortium of four members, which include Procivesa (a Spanish company-leader of the consortium), IMC Consulting (UK based consultant firm), GRET (French based research and technological exchange group) and FSWW (a Turkish NGO: Foundation for the Support of Women's Work) with a contract price of 1.885.800 Euro. The Technical Assistance Team will support the Municipality in overseeing the progress under the Programme and in monitoring and supervising all project components as well as reporting upon the project components, during the full 48 months implementation period of the Programme. The TA Team, together with the Municipality of Fatih have started to prepare the global implementation and annual work plans of the Programme activities, which will then continue with the preparation of tender dossiers for the restoration, social centre, solid waste management strategy and improvement of Balat Market components. The relevant tenders are expected to start during the course of 2004 and are scheduled for completion by the end of 2006.

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