

**Joint meeting of the EMI Political Committees
“Freedom, Security and Justice” & “Foreign Affairs and Security
Policy”**

Cyprus, Friday 30.11.2012

**EU Foreign Policy in the Eastern Mediterranean – the Case of
Lebanon**

It is a great privilege and honour to be among you this evening. The European Movement has for years played an essential role in the process of European integration. And what better place than Cyprus to take stock of EU foreign policy in Lebanon and the region? The fact that my plane over here this morning did not even reach cruising altitude before coming into land is a tangible reminder of the geographical proximity of this region to the EU, but more significantly it is a tangible reminder of why we as the EU continue to invest so much time, money and energy in our immediate neighbourhood.

The social, political and economic upheavals of the last two years have once again elevated the amount of global attention given to this region. But the EU's engagement today cannot be characterised simply as a temporary response to a bad case of "noisy neighbours". We were heavily engaged before, we are heavily engaged now and we will be heavily engaged in the future.

No doubt the current conditions in the region necessitated a change in our approach to match new realities on the ground. And this we have done. Already by March 2011 we had outlined our vision to reformulate our European Neighbourhood Policy to respond to the aspirations and expectations of people who continue to look to Europe for examples of good governance, transparency, equality and dignity. As never before, we now directly link the level of our engagement with governments to their commitment to the principles of 'deep democracy', in a "more-for-more" formula. We have backed this up with additional funds (EUR 1.24bn in all), and we are mobilising new players that have been successful in other arenas (such as the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development). We are not focusing only on money, but also markets and mobility – both of which are pivotal factors in the neighbourhood's long term prosperity and fruitful interaction with the EU.

This new approach has put the EU in the front line – setting the parameters for the engagement of a host of other actors. We have brought the EU together on the same page, and now we can read this page out; aloud and with confidence. This has been made possible by the fact that the EU now has a clear institutional framework for foreign policy engagement in the guise of the European External Action Service.

What does this amount to on the ground in Lebanon? More than anything it is about coordination. Coordination on foreign policy issues is time-consuming and strenuous, and requires all of us to give up a little in order to get back even more – but this is the backbone of our work. There may be still detractors to role of the EU institutions in foreign policy, there always will be, but I challenge anyone to trump the impact of all EU Member States Ambassadors delivering a clear and unified message to political figures up and down the country. Coordination might not be a very enticing concept, but it certainly reaps results.

We meet to share information on security developments, pooling our collective resources to keep each other abreast of the political and security situation that changes by the minute. We work together on crisis preparedness, even planning for any eventual evacuation of EU citizens. And here I would like to extend particular thanks to Cyprus for all the resources and efforts laid on to help us in this task. We also coordinate our resources in the delivery of development and humanitarian assistance – unifying our political vision with concrete development initiatives.

It is perhaps a cliché to describe the EU as "unity in diversity", but this characterisation has a tangible impact. Through its *diversity* the EU is uniquely seen as a neutral partner that does

not have an identifiable bilateral interest. Through its *unity* the EU is able to meaningfully engage with all parties with a recognisable and clear voice. It is no coincidence that the EU was singled out as a partner of the Lebanese government in its policy statement issued upon its formation, or that EU election observers have again been asked to observe the upcoming parliamentary elections in Lebanon. This appreciation of the EU as a neutral partner also enables us to provide valuable input for the most complex and politicised elements of Lebanon's challenges.

The uprising in Syria is of grave concern to all Lebanese of all persuasions, but it is a highly sensitive political issue in a country that has been intimately tied to Syria throughout its history. All of which makes the possibility of spill-over of the Syrian conflict into Lebanon a real risk. Lebanon has deep fragilities and the regional situation has provoked increased volatility. As the sectarian character of the Syrian conflict rears its ugly head so these risks for Lebanon grow. Targeted assassinations such as we saw in October only add to this heady and dangerous mix. Though it pains me to say it, clearly we have yet to identify long-term peaceful solutions for Syria itself. But I am convinced that we do have the tools and the know-how to help Lebanon avoid being dragged into this

conflict – and to support those voices in the country who are committed to ensuring that Lebanon's resilience prevails.

The value of dependable, solid and predictable state institutions in times of uncertainty cannot be overlooked. A civil service that delivers services to all, a police force that upholds the rule of law, and an army that protects and guarantees national security are all crucial factors in building Lebanese resilience. If nothing else I think you will agree that the EU certainly has a wealth of experience in building institutions, this is our bread and butter.

The provision of assistance to refugees that have fled from Syria into Lebanon is also a key factor. The refugee situation in Lebanon is growing at a rapid pace, there are now over 130,000 refugees registered or in the process of registering with the UN. It is suspected that many more are in Lebanon under the radar. It doesn't take much of a leap to imagine the potential destabilisation that such an influx can cause. It is no mistake then that we have dedicated substantial funds towards these refugees, both to meet the immediate humanitarian needs but also to look towards their medium-term to long-term needs such as livelihoods and education.

Indeed these two messages of support to Lebanese institutions and the ongoing commitment of support to Syrian refugees in

Lebanon were two of the main messages passed by HRVP Ashton during her visit to Lebanon at the end of last month.

To me this situation in Lebanon clearly vindicates our reasoning for linking all the countries of the region under the umbrella of the European Neighbourhood Policy, and why our response to the Arab Uprisings, did not just focus on the countries directly affected. All of these countries have deep and entrenched links, and many of them share similar structural challenges that were the drivers of the uprisings in the first instance. Our new policy approach has opened the door to greater engagement with Lebanon to tackle the root causes of its fragility that predate 2011 and help to build Lebanon's resilience to face future challenges.

Today we have a unique opportunity to build deep and lasting democracy and prosperity in our Neighbourhood. This requires vision, perseverance and a team effort from all involved – a combination of factors that the new EU institutions provide a fertile breeding ground for. While we can lay down the roots today, real change takes time and will be measured in generations not in seasons. It is my hope that in fifty years time that the EU is once again a laureate for a peace prize, but this time for its success in extending peace and stability in its neighbourhood.

