

**Speech of Angelina Eichhorst
Head of the European Union Delegation to Lebanon**

Panel Debate "Political Participation, Peace and Reconciliation"

Panel debates in Lebanese universities in April 2013

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Dear friends,

I am very happy to be with you today and look forward to a vibrant discussion on a very important topic: Human Rights.

Only a few months ago the European Union was awarded the Nobel Prize for advancing peace, reconciliation, democracy and human rights in Europe. After centuries of strife the European countries have managed to unite on democratic values and the European Union has transformed Europe from a continent of war to a continent of peace.

The European Union's work goes beyond the borders of Europe. Today, the European Union plays an important role in international affairs through diplomacy, trade, development and humanitarian aid in cooperation with EU Member States and global organisations. In this work, human rights are a top priority and a silver thread that runs through everything we do in external relations.

As the President of the European Council Herman van Rompuy put it receiving the Nobel Prize: *"Over the past sixty years, the European project has shown that it is possible for peoples and nations to come together across borders. That it is possible to overcome the differences*

between "them" and "us". My message... is: you can count on our efforts to fight for lasting peace, freedom and justice in Europe and in the world.

When the Presidents of the European Council, the European Commission and the European Parliament received the Nobel Prize in Oslo, they were accompanied by four young Europeans of two reasons: firstly, because the prize belongs to the citizens of the European Union and, secondly, because it is the youth who is responsible for Europe's future.

The same goes for Lebanon: today's youth is tomorrow's decision makers and it is imperative to include young people in the debate about Lebanon's future. That is why we are today continuing the series of university debates that the Delegation of the European Union is organising with EU Member States and Lebanese universities. The purpose of these debates is to inform about our work, but even more so to listen and learn about, what you - the future of Lebanon - have to say.

Lebanon is an important partner to the European Union and our cooperation advanced with unprecedented intensity during 2012. Recently a new Action Plan with ambitious goals for our cooperation in the coming years was jointly agreed in the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy. This Action Plan includes significant priorities in the field of human rights, not least finalising the National Human Rights Strategy and create a human rights institution.

Via continuous political dialogue with authorities and civil society and through the financing of cooperation programmes, the European Union

promotes "deep democracy" in the sense of respect for the rule of law, freedom of speech, independent judiciaries and impartial administrations.

In terms of democratic governance, Lebanon has for long time been a step ahead in the region. Elections are held periodically and Lebanon is a State party to nearly all core human rights conventions and treaties. Freedom of association and religion prevail. The media environment is relatively liberal and freedom of expression is generally respected.

But there are also challenges and the panels today will give you the opportunity to discuss peace and reconciliation and political participation with EU Member States Ambassadors, Members of Parliament, NGOs and academics.

When it comes to peace and reconciliation one of the important questions we may want to discuss is: How to deal with the past and pave the way for divided communities to be reconciled, so that a peaceful, inclusive and tolerant society based on dialogue can prevail?

When it comes to political participation, 2013 is the year of parliamentary elections in Lebanon. As highlighted by President Michel Suleiman on many occasions, it is important to hold elections in line with the Constitution. Furthermore there is a need to reach a broad consensus on an electoral framework that is in line with international standards and recommendations of past election observation missions.

Some of the important questions concerning political participation that are relevant for Lebanon today are: How to have more people –

especially more women and young people - taking an active part in politics? How to create more transparency and accountability in politics?

I am very happy to see so many young people participate today - what is better than to discuss peace and reconciliation and political participation with those, who are responsible for the future. I look forward to a lively debate and I would like to encourage the panelists to adhere to the rule of only giving short presentations, so that we can have as many questions and comments from the audience as possible.

Thank you