



EUROPEAN UNION

Delegation of the European Union to
the Republic of Lebanon

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PRESS RELEASE

The Ambassadors of the European Union meet the President of the Republic

The Ambassadors of the European Union met this morning H.E. the President of the Republic Michel Sleiman. Discussions focused on the general situation in Lebanon and the region, the impact of the conflict in Syria on Lebanon, as well as the partnership between the European Union and Lebanon.

Following the meeting, Ambassador Angelina Eichhorst made the following statement:

"The Ambassadors of the European Union to Lebanon thanked the President of the Republic for meeting them today. We reiterated to His Excellency our support to Lebanon and discussed with him how we can further assist the country in coping with the crisis.

Lebanon bears the brunt of the impact of the Syrian crisis on all fronts. The Disassociation Policy as expressed in Baabda Declaration remains essential to keep Lebanon away from the Syrian conflict. The European Union once again calls on all parties to uphold this commitment and supports the call for dialogue of President Sleiman. There must be a functioning government to assume the essential responsibilities and take the necessary decisions, both in terms of managing the refugee crisis, and in terms of national governance and international obligations.

The European Union welcomes the efforts of the security services, including the Army, which are carrying out their mandate under difficult circumstances. The judiciary must uphold the rule of law and combat impunity. In addition to the contributions already provided by the EU Member States to strengthen the stability of the country, both in direct and substantial assistance to security services and through their contributions to UNIFIL, we are deepening our cooperation with all security services, including the Army.

Overall, the European Union is the largest trading partner of Lebanon and the largest donor with \$1.3 billion in ongoing grants and loans. We continue to intensify our relations under the Association Agreement and our on-going Action Plan and through our common political positions and cooperation programmes.

Regarding the immediate financial impact of the Syrian crisis, we are making every effort to help meet the urgent needs of Lebanese and refugees, through emergency humanitarian aid and the development of infrastructure and basic services. These days, an additional amount of €70 million will be allocated by the EU humanitarian agency ECHO to help the poorest refugees through the winter. This contribution of the European Union will cover all the needs identified and planned for the poorest Syrian refugees

during the winter under the 'winterisation' programme developed by the inter-agency coordination here in Lebanon. This is assistance for 5 months - from November to March - to 90,000 families 1) living at an altitude above 500m above sea level and/or 2) in the 'informal tented settlements' 3) 10% of vulnerable Syrian families living below 500m.

All in all, European institutions and Member States have already allocated more than €500 million to Lebanon to meet the consequences of the Syrian crisis on the country. Most of the funds were allocated to the United Nations, such as UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP, but much of the on-going allocations also go directly to the Lebanese Government to cover the needs of the Lebanese host families in the poorest municipalities.

The European Union continues to prepare for the future and encourage productive sectors of the Lebanese economy and to seize the potential opportunities of new sectors like oil and gas for example. Accession to the World Trade Organisation accompanied by structural programmes to get the most benefits from this membership should remain a priority. A series of bills should be discussed in Parliament, including the election law, with democratic deadlines fast approaching. The adoption of a national budget is an essential element of good governance and management of national priorities and international obligations, including the annual contribution to the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, which is due for 2013.

The European Union and all Member States continue to support the stability, security, unity and independence of Lebanon. It also joins in the strong international support for Lebanon as expressed recently in New York in the Security Council and in the margins of the General Assembly of the United Nations.

In these times of economic crisis and budget restrictions, we are mobilising all energies and will seek all synergies in partnership with national institutions, international organisations, civil society and the private sector, to maximise our assistance in areas which best serve Lebanon and the people living in this country."