



**Speech of Ambassador Christina Lassen,
Head of the Delegation of the European Union to Lebanon**

**Graduation Ceremony at Antonine Sisters School
Ghazir, 5 July 2016**

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Dear Sister Chamoun,

Dear teachers,

Dear parents,

But most of all: Dear students, Mabrouk!

I am very happy to be here in Ghazir on such a joyful occasion and I would like to thank the Antonine Sisters School for inviting me to be the guest speaker on this very special day. It is always a pleasure for me to attend events that focus on young people, young people who have dreams and ambitions for what they want to do with their lives. This is very inspiring as it gives me the hope that the world's future is in good hands - in your hands.

This is also why the main message from me to you today is: Yalla! Get out there and realise those dreams. You can do whatever you want as long as you believe in it and you are willing to work for it. And without discriminating I would like to address a special call to the girls graduating today: It may not always have been like that, but in today's world, all possibilities are open to all of us. And we need

more talented women out there realising their dreams and being leaders in society. If not, we will waste half this world's talents.

For the rest of us – your teachers, your parents and all others who care for you - we need to support you in realising your dreams, to assist you in exploiting your full potential and to provide you with a space to develop your skills and to discover yourself.

Your teachers have been doing a great job in giving you all this. Education, science and sport competitions, choir, theater, book fairs, and trips; I am truly impressed by all the activities you have been undertaking! And by your successes; I heard that your students have done very well at the 2016 World Scholar's Cup.

I do not know where you are taking this energy and motivation from, but I wish you never lose it because Lebanon needs this motivation. Lebanon needs young leaders who are willing to engage in society and make this an even better country to live in. A country with good public services, with an ever dynamic private sector, with creative artists and idealistic civil society representatives; with youth like you in the lead, I am confident about the future of this country.

There is no more effective way to invest in the future of next generations than in youth and education. And we learnt this lesson in Europe. Free movement of persons gave us more educational opportunities, and this is one of the biggest achievements of the European Union. The existence of exchange programmes like Erasmus inspired us to cross European borders in our studies creating among the younger generations a truly European spirit. And we extended the scope of this success. Europeans can now study in Lebanon, and Lebanese, in Europe. I hope

that in your future university career, you will benefit from programmes like these and I strongly encourage you to do so.

Graduation is the moment to be happy. But it also the moment to be thankful: to your teachers for guiding you, to your parents for standing by your side, to your friends for making these years an unforgettable experience. Certainly, their assistance has contributed to your success. They will be the inspiration and motivation that will help you to discover new horizons.

I remember my own graduation day. I did not have a clear plan. But I had my ambitions and I had a crazy dream that I wanted to become an ambassador. I had no idea what that meant exactly or how to get there, but twenty years later and after lots of hard work and enriching experiences I made it. And I love my job and the path that took me there.

This is to say: do not worry if you are not sure about your path. What you want to be right now is not that important as long as you follow your passions and you are being honest with yourself. If you only try to do what you think looks right on the CV rather than what you feel like it probably is not the right thing to do. Do not be afraid to dream and to be ambitious, but also do not be afraid to fail big.

You are about to enter a completely new chapter of your life. It will be a difficult period: new environment, new friends, new challenges but also new opportunities. Do not be afraid to face them. Do not spend time trying to choose the perfect opportunity or to make the perfect decision. Recognise that you will sometimes fail; acknowledge that you will face obstacles; but also remember that you will learn from them. There is no one right path to be followed. Define your own.

I wish you all the best of luck in your next steps!

You all deserve a big applause - Mabrouk!