

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

Launching the new EU support to the Business Incubation Association of Tripoli (BIAT)
under the programme 'Reinforcement of the Lebanese Private Sector Competitiveness' funded by
the EU

Tripoli, 13th April 2011

Your Excellency Minister Mohammad Safadi,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to be with you today in Tripoli to launch the second phase of the European Union project to support the Business Incubator in Tripoli.

The EU Delegation and BIAT have an established history of successful cooperation. We began in 2006 with a grant and European expertise provided to help setting up a Business Incubator. Before the money, there were ideas, the vision, and I am pleased to be here today with so many of you.

Since its creation from scratch by a consortium of motivated partners, you came a long way, successfully overcoming numerous challenges and achieving significant objectives; f more than 300 quality jobs have been created through the different support activities to local enterprises. BIAT is a success story for the people of Tripoli and Northern Lebanon in general.

BIAT is also a pioneering initiative. It is the result of the public and private sectors in Lebanon working hand in hand. Its mixed nature, as well as its close cooperation with several universities, makes it a uniquely positioned actor to promote economic development, enhance its positive social impact, and provide entrepreneurship education.

Let me recall that in March 2007 the first Lebanese Network of Business Development Centres (BDCs) was launched. This network also includes Berytech in Beirut and SouthBIC in Saida, which today are also instrumental actors in Lebanon's economic and entrepreneurial fabric. Since 2007, we have seen an expansion and consolidation of the work of these Business Development Centres.

Today, we are launching the new Innovation Centre and the satellite services in Akkar region, allowing new sectors to be nurtured and remote regions to seize their economic opportunities. Great potential for job creation and economic growth exists in this region, and we are assured of the positive role that BIAT can play to boost it.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A thriving competitive private sector is even essential to improve living conditions of the Lebanese people. Since 2004 the EU has provided more than 33 million euro to develop the capacity of Lebanese small and medium enterprises to compete in the global market, to create jobs and to contribute to a friendlier business environment conducive to business creation and foreign investment.

It is essential to continue developing and diversifying the economy all over Lebanon in order to create jobs. The European Union will provide an additional 22 million euro for the period 2010-2015 through a wide array of activities: such as support to Kafalat, to the Euro-Lebanese Centre for Industrial Modernisation – ELCIM –, to the Qualeb Unit at the Ministry of Economy and Trade; and to the network of Business Development Centres.

I would like to particularly thank the Minister of Economy and Trade, and his team at the Ministry which has been a crucial partner in the establishment and development of the Lebanese network of Business Incubation Services. I also express my appreciation to the Project Administration Office at the Presidency of the Council of Ministers for their fruitful cooperation.

I feel privileged to be in Tripoli today amongst you because as entrepreneurs, businessmen, businesswomen, start ups, investors, you are the engine for growth and job creation. You can make a significant contribution to the socio-economic development of this region helping to bring progress and stability.

Thank you for your attention.