

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Speech by Mr. Diego Escalona Paturel, Head of the Operations section – Delegation of the European Union to Lebanon

EU-funded project to support the Lebanese Parliament

Launching event of the “Advisory Unit for Parliamentary Oversight”

Monday 16 May 2011

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to be with you today to launch this Advisory Unit. The Unit is composed of a team of experts capable of providing strategic direction, input and advice to two of the most important Committees of the Lebanese Parliament: the Committee for Finance and Budget, and the Committee for Administration and Justice.

The parliament, composed of elected representatives of the people, is the democratic institution "*par excellence*". Democratic principles are at the core of the European Union and of its international action, including in the framework of relations with its closest neighbours. Indeed, they constitute the first pillar of our bilateral relation with Lebanon, in accordance with the jointly agreed EU-Lebanon Action Plan.

A sustainable democracy requires not only the existence of democratic institutions, but also their efficient functioning. Hence the importance of this project which supports the Lebanese Parliament by strengthening its professional skills in key areas such as financial oversight, legislative scrutiny analysis and information. In this regard, I am pleased to see that both Lebanese and European experts are taking part in this project, a complementarity which will be key for its success.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

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We are witnessing tremendous changes around us, in the Middle East and North Africa. Whatever their outcome, the Arab world will never look the same. The European Union has shown its determination to respond rapidly and effectively to these challenges and opportunities. It has started to develop a "new Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean". This strategy will offer greater support to its partners with an enhanced focus to supporting constitutional reforms and institution-building.

More than most countries in the region, Lebanon already enjoys a certain democratic culture, institutions inspired by the principle of separation of powers, and a spirit of dialogue. In that sense, by demonstrating that a democratic system can constantly improve, it could be an example for its neighbours in the crucial times that they are going through.

To conclude, I would like to welcome the commitment of President Berri to ensure the continued functioning of the Advisory Unit after the end of the project. This is a first crucial step towards ensuring the sustainability of this initiative. I would also like to thank the Westminster Foundation for Democracy for their dedicated work on this project.

I wish you fruitful discussions during this two-day workshop.

Thank you.