

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

Roumin – Tuesday 14 June 2011

Excellencies,
Mayors and Municipal Members, representatives of EU Member States,
Friends and colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today we see the concrete results of the European Union's commitment in South Lebanon. The inauguration of this new and very special municipal building gives us a unique opportunity to reflect on the sense of our support.

This is the last destination of a full day tour, during which I visited several villages which benefited from our assistance. I met with mayors and citizens in Kfarhamam, Helta, Al Mery, Nabatieh, who have seen their living conditions improved. There is now increased, sustainable access to water for more than 200000 households. The environment has been significantly improved through the construction of a sewage system and the rehabilitation of a waste water treatment station. Hundreds of hectares of land now benefit from modern irrigation techniques allowing farmers to increase their production and their revenues.

Let me therefore warmly thank all those who made this possible: the Council for Development and Reconstruction (CDR) with President Nabil el Jisr and his team steadily and successfully working on achieving results; the team of Economic and Social Fund for Development (ESFD) who did a great job in bringing together local actors to develop their economy and their infrastructure; IMG who provided precious technical support; and the various contractors and supervisors who delivered good quality work. But I would like, above all, to express my gratitude and my respect to the mayors and members of municipalities many of whom I met today, who demonstrated a high sense of responsibility and a real commitment to enable a more sustainable environment for their citizens.

I would like to tell you that you are at the heart of European Union support to Lebanon. Because regional development and support to local communities are key for the future of your country. Because sustainable growth and stability can not be ensured if regional imbalances persist. Since 2006, we have allocated more than €54 million to local development in Lebanon. More than 70% was allocated to the South of Lebanon as this region has suffered so much from conflicts and deserves targeted support.

It is essential to dedicate special attention to communities which are most vulnerable. Without job opportunities, an adequate environment, access to basic services, and without full attention from the national authorities, citizens can not develop their full potential.

Local actors should have a leading role in their development process. Of course the central government has a listening ear to the voices of the people, but it should also acknowledge the inhabitants of this region are far better placed to deliver local services and to take decisions on rural infrastructure, solid waste collection or local urban development. This is why the European Union does not only wish to help build the capacity of municipalities to provide local services but also strongly advocates for a decentralisation reform in Lebanon.

The inauguration of this building has, in this context, a highly symbolic value: it literally creates a space for local democracy, for decision making and for the participation of all citizens to the future of their community. Those who assume the municipal mandate are aware they must be accountable and responsive to the needs and rights of the electors. It is to make all this possible that this building will now open its doors.

أنا أحتفل معكم بهذه المناسبة كما لو كنت مواطنة من رومين وهذا فخر كبير لي.
شكراً على حسن إنصاتكم.