

Lebanon Mountain Trail Annual Dinner

4 November 2011

Ambassador Angelina EICHHORST,

Head of European Union Delegation

Distinguished guests, dear friends, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to join you for this annual dinner to celebrate the 4th anniversary of Lebanon Mountain Trail Association. I would like to thank in particular the President of the LMT, Mr. Karim El-Jisr and his team, for his efforts to bring us together tonight.

As you all know, the Lebanon Mountain Trail is one of the flagship initiatives in Lebanon which promotes an alternative form of travelling; allowing Lebanese and foreigners to experience direct and close contact with the people, the culture and the natural environment of this beautiful country. It provides us all with a first hand experience of Lebanon's rich archaeological and cultural heritage, its scenery, majestic mountains, not to mention its famous hospitality and cuisine.

The establishment of the first long-distance hiking trail in the region (spanning 440km from Qobaiyat in the North to Marjaayoun in the South) is a real breakthrough. LMT needs now to maintain this momentum and to take its endeavours to

new audiences, to make hiking even more popular and attractive in both Lebanon and beyond.

The European Union, through the Regional Development Funds, supports eco-tourism in remote European areas. Examples in Greece and Sardinia show that thanks to major efforts by conservation organisations, governments, the European Commission, the private sector and the local population, adequate tourism planning and development can halt depopulation and introduce successful nature conservation, promotion of our heritage and economic revival.

In Europe, we now have 11 long distance paths crossing several countries from Sweden to Italy, from Spain to Bulgaria. Every rambler in Europe will soon discover the white and red markers to be followed through these paths.

Because I feel strongly about promoting the importance of the environment and the nature of Lebanon, and because there is so much more we can do together as Europe and Lebanon, through our existing partnership, I accepted this invitation. We have so much to learn from our encounters with new persons in unexplored regions. I will do my best to encourage as many Europeans as possible to fully explore Lebanon, and the region as a whole.

Thank you