

**SPEECH OF AMBASSADOR ANGELINA EICHHORST  
HEAD OF DELEGATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION TO LEBANON**

**« TEMPUS NATIONAL INFORMATION DAY 2012 »**

**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND HIGHER EDUCATION  
19 JANUARY 2012**

\*\*\*\*\*

***CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY***

His Excellency Mr. Hassan Diab, Minister of Education and Higher Education  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning and welcome to the annual Tempus Information Day. The purpose is to inform the wider public of the concrete ways in which the European Union supports the development of higher education in Lebanon.

*Tempus* is the principal tool of the European Union for cooperation in higher education. I am proud to celebrate with you today the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the programme in Lebanon. A ten-year anniversary is a good opportunity to take stock of the achievements thus far and to set our sights on the road ahead.

In the last decade, nearly 10 million Euros have been invested by the European Union in 38 projects and 100 hundred mobility grants for Lebanese academics. At present, 23 Lebanese institutions are participating in Tempus. Tempus has helped Lebanese universities modernise curricula and teaching methods and create new Master and Doctoral programmes. Through addressing issues such as biotechnology, sustainable energy in construction or aeronautical technologies, Tempus has assisted the Lebanese higher education to keep up with new challenges and demands of the globalised world. Several Tempus structural projects have supported the Ministry of Education and Higher Education in the process towards quality assurance and accreditation. Many are the achievements of the EU-Lebanon partnership in this area.

But many are also the challenges.

In the tumultuous economic period we have been experiencing in the last few years, higher education has become one of the most prominent economic issues of our time.

The number of high-skilled jobs is growing. Indeed, in Europe, it is estimated that by 2020 nearly 35% of all jobs will require high skills, innovation capacity and the ability to adapt. At the same time, scores of graduates are unemployed upon finishing university or emigrate in search of jobs. This alarming trend has worried universities and governments on both sides of the Mediterranean for a long time, but the turbulences of the last year have accentuated the urgency to act. In the Arab world, a new term has been coined to describe the long period of unemployment that fresh graduate undergo before securing employment: 'waitthood'. In Europe, the unemployed graduates have taken to the streets in several countries to demand real employment opportunities.

That is why we not only need to increase the number of graduates but, most and foremost, we need to ensure that graduates are ready for a career when they leave the gates of their *alma mater*. Tying the skills taught in the classrooms to the needs of the businesses in the growth sectors of the economy, must be one of our primary goals. Tempus has reflected this commitment by an 80% boost to the available budget envelope (from 50 to 90 million Euros) and by putting more and more stress on employability over the past years. The latest Tempus-financed project in Lebanon '*OIPULES: Orientation et Insertion Professionnelle dans les universités du Liban, d'Égypte et de la Syrie*' is a clear proof of this direction: establishing career guidance and employment service centres for sciences, economy, finance and management specialties at all the partner universities, including six of them in Lebanon.

The second great challenge for higher education today is the need for graduates to adapt to the ever-changing world of today. One of the means may be a study abroad. Studying abroad allows students to develop world-class skills while also promoting dialogue, boosting personal development and adaptability. That is why, **Erasmus**, the second core programme of the European Union for Higher Education and the flagship for scholarships and academic cooperation between Europe and the rest of the world, announced just two months ago a 70% increase of its budget and scope. 'Erasmus for All' as the new programme is called, will provide an investment of 19 billion Euros for the 2014–2020 period (including 1.8 billion Euros for international cooperation). Up to 5 million people, almost twice as many as now, will get the chance to study abroad. Among them will be 135,000 international students coming from non-EU Member States. Already this year, the Lebanese students can be among them thanks to three new Erasmus Mundus cooperation schemes funded last year: the 'ELEMENT', 'MEDASTAR', and 'WELCOME' which will be introduced to you at this conference.

Ladies and Gentlemen, education and opportunity always go hand in hand. I want to assure you here today that despite the financially hard times the European Union is currently going through, the EU continues to hold the firm belief that investment in higher education and academic cooperation is essential for the prosperity of the

EU and its neighbourhood partners. We will continue to support the Lebanese students, universities and government to this end.

Thank you. I wish you all a fruitful conference.