

**SPEECH OF AMBASSADOR ANGELINA EICHHORST  
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**«LAUNCHING OF A TEMPUS PROJECT: TOWARDS THE LEBANESE QUALITY  
ASSURANCE AGENCY»**

**UNIVERSITY OF BALAMAND**

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***CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY***

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

Good morning and welcome to the launching of the Tempus project entitled 'Towards the Lebanese Quality Assurance Agency'.

*(This week has been a Tempus week for me and I am pleased to be spending more time among the Lebanese academic community).*

Those of you who attended Tempus Information Day at the Ministry of Education and Higher Education in Beirut will recall the challenges for higher education that several speakers alluded to: the need to constantly adjust to the changing economy and labour market, to strive for better employability and adaptability of graduates, and the need to fully embrace the concept of lifelong learning. In addition, there is a strong demographic reality: a quarter of the Lebanese population is under the age of 15 years.

These are grand challenges and a great responsibility rests on the shoulders of the higher education institutions today. Let's then go back to basics: basic standards of quality, basic principles of transparency and of accountability.

In Lebanon, the competition among universities was for some time considered to be the best guarantee of their quality. However, now that more than forty new private institutions opened their doors to students in Lebanon, competition alone no longer works. Today, in Lebanon, Employers and students cannot navigate safely in the complex system of programmes, degrees and diplomas. They need standardised information and protection against possible misinformation. Hence the call to establish a Lebanese national agency of quality assurance in higher education.

This call is not new. In the last decade much has been done to achieve towards this end: consultations and awareness workshops have been organised, analyses of legislation carried out, recommendations on the internal and external mechanisms of evaluation issued. Two Tempus-funded projects have contributed towards these efforts: QAHEL (Quality Assurance for Higher

Education in Lebanon) focusing on the definition of internal quality assurance systems, and LEPAC (the Lebanese Engineering Programs Accreditation Commission) which produced standards and procedures for the external evaluation of the Lebanese engineering programmes.

Equally, many Lebanese universities have recognised the need for quality assurance and put in place their own internal evaluations. Some have searched for quality assurance abroad and accredited their institutions and programmes in Europe or the USA. Yet fragmentation of the system continues and the need to put institutions, both public and private, old and new, on an equal footing in terms of accountability to students, to their parents and to society as a whole, remains.

It is only natural that there is a level of apprehension about an external and centrally-controlled evaluation of what has traditionally been a very autonomous academic sector. We all must warn against too much interference or a heavily top-down approach. Whatever form or shape the future national agency takes, I hope it observes three basic principles: 1) recognition of the autonomy of academic institutions, 2) independence and protection against undue political interference, and 3) as little administrative burden put on the academic institutions as possible.

Ladies and gentlemen, this year, we are celebrating the tenth anniversary of Tempus in Lebanon. Nearly 10 million Euros have been invested by the European Union in 38 projects and in one hundred mobility grants for Lebanese academics. Today, there is a broad agreement on the need for a draft of the law establishing a Quality Assurance Agency, now submitted to the Council of Ministers. I am hopeful that the joint efforts of the Ministry of Education, and Minister Diab in particular, and the eleven Lebanese and eight European universities and institutions under the Tempus project which we are launching today will bear fruits and bring us closer to the Lebanese-own quality assurance system that will benefit students, universities and employers alike.

Thank you. I wish you all the best of success.