

**Opening speech of Ambassador Angelina Eichhorst
Head of the Delegation of the European Union to Lebanon**

EU-Lebanon Cooperation Days

UNESCO PALACE – Auditorium - 18 March 2013

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

H.E. Member of Parliament Yassin Jaber,
H.E. Minister of State Marwan Kheireddine,
Excellencies the Members of Parliament and Ministers,
Excellencies Ambassadors of the European Union Member States,
Ladies and gentlemen, representatives of Embassies, Ministries,
international organisations, civil society and the private sector,
Distinguished guests,
Dear friends,

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you here today to inaugurate this second edition of the EU-Lebanon Cooperation Days.

During the next two days, we will be showcasing a broad range of the manifold programmes and actions the European Union and the Member States are undertaking in Lebanon to support the development of the country and the wellbeing of its people. We will engage with all of you in a series of debates about what has already been achieved and what remains to

be addressed in the context of the partnership between Lebanon and the European Union.

All initiatives, implemented by a range of actors - the Lebanese public institutions (Government, Parliament, Council for Development and Reconstruction, Ministries), international organisations, Chambers of Commerce, civil society organisations, associations, municipalities and the private sector - are a *vivid testimony* of the *increasing intensity of EU-Lebanese relations* in a number of important areas: from Human Rights to Economic Development, from Support to Decentralisation to Peace and Reconciliation, and from Social Development to Infrastructure. The EU-Lebanon cooperation also strongly benefits from the *public expertise the EU Member States* bring in: their contributions to capacity building - for example in the areas of Public Finance Management or Justice – are an *indispensable* and an *essential pillar* of our support.

You will see for yourself in the various stands that you are going to visit: in Lebanon, all European instruments are mobilised to address the multiple needs and also to respond to foreseeable or unforeseeable situations, in all the regions and above all to support the most vulnerable.

In terms of volume, the European Union is *the* most important donor for Lebanon. We allocate on average 210 million Euros annually in grants and loans to the country (European Union, Member States and the European Investment Bank).

More important than the figures are the activities we carry out in cooperation with our Lebanese partners and which reflect our common values, interests and ambitions.. Not only in Beirut, but *all* across Lebanon. For *men, women, children, the youth and the elderly*. Not only for *Lebanese citizens*, but for *those who sought refuge and those who came here to work, the migrant workers*.

As you know and in close cooperation with the Government and implementing partners, in particular the United Nations and specialised NGOs, the European Union reaches out to thousands of *Syrian refugees, to the Lebanese host communities* and individuals that have opened their homes and offered support to their neighbours with remarkable hospitality and generosity. We welcome the Lebanese authorities' efforts to address the refugees' needs for support and protection in partnership with UN agencies, donors and humanitarian organisations, and we commend the Government for keeping the borders open and for upholding the principle of non-refoulement.

Again, the European Union is the biggest donor of aid to address the consequences of the crisis in Syria in Lebanon. In total, the European Union and the Member States have so far pledged almost 550 million Euros in response to the crisis in Syria and its spill-over into neighbouring countries.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

All this wouldn't be possible without the spirit of cooperation between the European Union, the EU Member States and the *Lebanese authorities at all levels*, guided by the principles of partnership and ownership, as we saw during our discussions on a new Action Plan in the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy. The Action Plan lays down the key priorities for EU-Lebanon relations for the years 2013-2015. With this new basis agreed and the priorities laid out, we are now hoping for a swift follow up and implementation.

We are also eager to continue our fruitful cooperation with the *Lebanese civil society* and strengthen our involvement through a *structured dialogue* that goes more into substance on policies and on concrete programmes.

Unity, growth and the *well-being* of the citizen cannot be achieved without passing key reforms that the *political leadership* has to initiate and implement. The European Union and the Member States make means and expertise available to accompany these dynamics and processes. While doing so, we consult all Lebanese, regardless of their political or religious affiliations, all across Lebanon. Our cooperation strives to be a sustainable and predictable one, a long-term partnership that is planned in cycles of seven years and rolled out according to priorities defined by the Lebanese Government.

Where priorities change, we have to adjust, in particular in times of crisis. Today, we know we cannot stay on business as usual in Lebanon with now almost 10% of the people living in the country relying on humanitarian assistance.

At the end of the day, it is the direct tangible benefits for the population that count. Support must be well targeted, defined and implemented by credible actors, according to the real needs of population in a transparent and participative manner. It is through technology, transparency and investment (to quote Bono) that we can make it work.

Pour finir, je voudrais tout particulièrement remercier les ambassades et les missions de coopération des Etats membres de l'Union européenne pour leur contribution ainsi que la Banque européenne d'investissement, ainsi que toute l'équipe de la Délégation de l'Union européenne et tous nos partenaires, responsables des programmes, qui contribuent à cet événement.

Cette coopération est bien évidemment perfectible et nous sommes tous - Européens et Libanais - redevables et responsables de la bonne gestion de ce partenariat ambitieux afin de transformer les nombreux défis en opportunités, dans l'intérêt de tous.

Je vous remercie.