

**Speech of Ambassador Angelina Eichhorst
Head of the Delegation of the European Union**

**Joint dinner for Rotary Clubs Beirut Cedars and Beirut
'Role of EU as an advocate for Peace in the region'**

Wednesday 20 March (Bristol Hotel)

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear friends,

I would like to thank the Rotary Club Beirut Cedars and Rotary Club Beirut members for inviting me here tonight. It is a real pleasure to share with you a few thoughts on how I perceive the role of the European Union as an advocate for peace in the region and for Lebanon in particular.

Allow me to start with a quote from the Nobel Price Lecture given by the President of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy in December 2012: *Over the past sixty years, the European project has shown that it is possible for peoples and nations to come together across borders. That it is possible to overcome the differences between "them" and "us". My message... is: you can count on our efforts to fight for lasting peace, freedom and justice in Europe and in the world.*

I often use the President's speech as a reference point and I would recommend for you to read it. I particularly like the part about 'reconciliation'. It goes as follows: *In politics as in life, reconciliation is the most difficult thing. It goes beyond forgiving and forgetting, or simply*

turning the page. To think of what France and Germany had gone through ..., and then take this step ... Signing a Treaty of Friendship ... Each time I hear these words – Freundschaft, Amitié –, I am moved. They are private words, not for treaties between nations. But the will to not let history repeat itself, to do something radically new, was so strong that new words had to be found. For people Europe was a promise, Europe equalled hope. But symbolic gestures alone cannot cement peace. This is where the European Union's "secret weapon" comes into play: an unrivalled way of binding our interests so tightly that war becomes materially impossible. Through constant negotiations, on ever more topics, between ever more countries. It's the golden rule of Jean Monnet: "Mieux vaut se disputer autour d'une table que sur un champ de bataille." ("Better fight around a table than on a battle-field.")

I could use many additional references to explain to you my personal motivation to try to contribute to help building bridges between Europe and our neighbours. Especially for Lebanon which represents a unique multi-ethnic, multi-confessional, multi-religious and multi-linguistic society. Because of your suffering from a painful past and your potential for a bright future. Lebanon clearly is a message of diversity and moderation, I hope it will be also be a message of unity and peace.

When I first arrived as EU Ambassador in your country in January 2011 and I discussed the priorities of the partnership between the European Union and Lebanon with the authorities, I was given three points: 1) A lasting solution to the Israeli-Arab conflict; 2) full-fledged mobility (meaning the free movement of persons and goods, market access for business, entry for Lebanese citizens) and 3) increased financial assistance for the development of the country. This really meant: Peace,

Mobility, Markets and Money (and later on the EU developed precisely such a policy around the three Ms in response to the Arab Uprisings).

Five days later, the Hariri government fell and the country's priorities of security, stability but also progress on much needed reforms, came again to the fore. It is not easy to reform and keep the country stable in the same time but without security threats and with strong institutions, it is do-able. Yet, with the Syrian conflict getting more entrenched, the divisions and weaknesses of the State re-appeared. Lebanon chose to disassociate itself from any decision favouring 'one over the other'. Lebanon looked for new words: an-Nai bil Nafs (disassociation), al-hiyad (neutrality). The Baabda Declaration was a strong message to the world: do not force us to choose, respect our wish to remain neutral. This wise policy was to be endorsed by all political leaders in Lebanon and by the international community. Yet, Lebanon's security is being threatened on a daily basis from within, and by its very surroundings.

These surroundings, the events in the region have become unpredictable and sometimes seemingly unmanageable. As former PM Siniora said: the barriers of fear, silence, time and place have been broken. Indeed the identities of whole societies are being transformed rapidly. And yes the war in Syria is a stain on the world's conscience.

Tunisia, Libya and Egypt have organised pluralistic elections – which is a first step towards democracy. But democratic governance also requires an active and informed citizenry to exercise the right to take part in public affairs. It requires security. It requires human rights to be enshrined in society through laws, but also through daily practice. And democratic institutions to protect, inform, educate and serve the citizens.

In terms of democratic governance, your country has been for long a step ahead in the region. Elections are held periodically and Lebanon is a State party to nearly all core human rights conventions and treaties. Freedom of association and religion prevail. The media environment is relatively liberal and freedom of expression is generally respected. We know the remaining challenges: The independence and efficiency of the judiciary, the effectiveness of the Parliament, the legislative framework for the protection of refugees, migrants and asylum seekers, citizen-oriented and accountable security services, as well as greater participation of women and more structural reforms in the energy, transport and telecoms sectors are all examples we hear on a daily basis. But democracy is not just a set of definitions: it is a way of life.

2013 is the year of parliamentary elections in Lebanon. The importance of timely elections as required by the Constitution has been underlined by President Suleiman on many occasions. For outsiders it is difficult to understand why, at the time when your sovereignty is infringed by your neighbours on an almost daily basis, when you have more than 10% of the people living in your country depending on humanitarian assistance, when the formal economy is at risk and there is no social contract through which socio-economic pacts can be negotiated, it is really an intellectual challenge to submit to the notion there is probably no consensus about an electoral law in Lebanon. A law which, at least, could be in line both with international standards and recommendations of past election observation missions carried out by international partners such as the EU, but also by thousands of Lebanese citizens keen to exercise their rights.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The people now have a voice in the region. Politicians have to listen to the people. This goes for Europe, this goes for Lebanon. I receive on a regular basis individuals, groups, civil society, associations, unions, syndicates – from all backgrounds and all parties - in my office who ask for assistance, morally or financially. The needs are enormous, especially outside the big cities. And most intentions by the citizens, the requests for assistance, are really to promote good ideas. What connect us are our values. Our mutual interests keep us going. What makes us succeed is a sincere wish for peace and prosperity.

We may need to bring in more new words, a new vocabulary. We need innovation and creativity. Only through doing things differently, the ‘thinking out of the box’, it is possible to move ahead, with the right tools. This first words of the Schuman Declaration, the founding document of the European Union say "*World peace cannot be safeguarded without the making of creative efforts proportionate to the dangers which threaten it.*"

I sincerely hope Lebanon will succeed to make the right creative efforts to reconcile with its past and foster unity in order to be able to look at the future with confidence.

Thank you.