

Project "Strengthening Civil Peace and Reconciliation in Lebanon"

**Speech by Ambassador Angelina Eichhorst, Head of
Delegation of the European Union to Lebanon**

Launching of the Journalists' Pact for Strengthening Civil Peace in Lebanon

Tuesday 25 June 2013

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

H.E. Mr. Walid Daouk, Minister of Information,
Mr. Robert Watkins, UNDP Resident Representative,
Excellencies,
Representatives of the National Media Council, press syndicates
and media outlets,
Ladies and gentlemen,

The European Union is an active player in trying to prevent conflicts and fostering resilient societies not only in the Middle East, but throughout the world. We believe in dialogue as a 'secret weapon', in exchange of thoughts and ideas to overcome divisions, based on our own experience in superseding centuries of conflict within Europe. This is why the European Union was

awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012, as a tribute to the efforts made - until today - to turn Europe from a continent of warring nations to an ever closer union between its peoples.

A concrete example of the EU's contribution to peace and stability in Lebanon is our support to the programme "Strengthening Civil Peace and Reconciliation", implemented by UNDP.

Through this programme, not only do we encourage a collective, mutually-shared memory of Lebanon's troubled past, but we also support local initiatives and efforts by civil society at national level, aimed at mitigating conflict and fostering civil peace.

Engaging with the media is a **key** aspect of this work. Media can play an important role either in **fuelling** tensions **or in preventing** conflict from escalating. Media can help **consolidate peace by promoting** reconciliation, respect and understanding. As agenda setters, media also play a crucial role in selecting and framing

sensitive topics and can be powerful agents for peace, through influencing and shaping public opinion. This is why credible, unbiased and accurate information is so important.

In this context, Lebanon is a very special place for its generally free and pluralistic media. But freedom of expression also comes with responsibilities. Unfortunately, in times of increasing tensions and divisions, moderate voices, reconciling messages and constructive analysis are easily sidelined (overlooked). After all, the media landscape is a reflection of society at large, and media in Lebanon tend to mirror the complexities of a society where political pluralism coexists with divisions along confessional, economic and social lines.

For this reason, the EU decided to strongly support initiatives that work towards **bridging** – not deepening - existing divisions and promoting constructive debate and national cohesion. The work carried out by editors'-in-chief to arrive at this Pact is an excellent example in this regard.

Improving credibility and confidence between the Lebanese media and the public on the basis of the principles outlined in the Pact is an extremely important goal in order to foster dialogue, bridge divides and promote peaceful coexistence.

I would therefore like to take the opportunity to express my strong appreciation to all those who have been involved in the discussion and drafting of this Pact.

I wish to personally thank H.E. Minister Daouk for his commitment and involvement in this programme: such initiatives can help us all enhance civil peace and build deep democracy, based on strong and accountable institutions, active civil society and well informed citizens.

Thank you.