

Speech by HE Angelina Eichhorst, Head of EU Delegation, Lebanon
Press conference on potato decision
Ministry of Agriculture - 09.09.2013

H.E. Excellency, Minister of Agriculture, Hussein Al Hajj Hassan
Representatives of the agricultural community in Lebanon,
H.E. Ambassador of Italy, Guisepe Morabito,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen.

It is with great joy that we are here today to mark the important decision taken by the EU and its Member States which will make it possible for Lebanon to export potatoes from the Akkar and the Bekaa to the EU.

As you might be aware, since 2000 there has been a general ban on the export of potatoes to the EU in order to protect the European potato crop from plant diseases such as brown rot and ring rot. Following a long process of exchanges of information and field visits, sanitary experts of the EU and its Member States have examined the sanitary conditions for potato farming and handling in Lebanon and recommended that an exemption from the ban was given for ware potatoes from the Akkar and the Bekaa regions in Lebanon.

This is an important decision for several reasons:

i) It is an acknowledgement of the efforts made by Lebanese authorities - notably the Ministry of Agriculture - as well as the Lebanese farming community to improve the sanitary quality of the products and supply chain – and the support by Italy through a €400.000 project implemented by L'Istituto Agronomico Mediterraneo di Bari between 2010 and 2012;

ii) It provides a substantial opportunity for economic, social and rural development to some of the areas of Lebanon that are the most in need of employment opportunities and economic injection – areas that witness the highest levels of poverty levels and which host most of the refugees from Syria;

iii) It will allow Lebanon to benefit from the 50.000 tonnes quota of duty free potatoes negotiated under the EU-Lebanon Association Agreement.

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Now that the formal decision has been taken in the EU, it is up to Lebanon to take full advantage of the market opening. In order to do so Lebanon has to fulfil the requirements set out in the decision:

a) The decision so far only covers ware potatoes (not seed potatoes) from Akkar and Bekaa;

b) The potatoes can only be introduced into the Union through designated points of entry which have the necessary facilities to ensure effective controls of any phyto-sanitary risk;

c) Consignments/shipments must be accompanied by a phyto-sanitary certificate issued by the competent authority in Lebanon.

It is important that the great success achieved with this decision is maintained. It is the responsibility of the farmers and traders to maintain the high phytosanitary standards they have achieved - and it is the responsibility of the Ministry of

Agriculture to monitor and certify the upkeep of these standards through the establishment of a well functioning monitoring system.

The ball is now in the court of the Ministry of Agriculture so to say – two pre-conditions are required for exporters to be able to send their first shipments of potatoes from the Akkar or the Bekaa to the EU:

1. A list of approved establishments (producers and exporters) have to be established by the ministry;
2. A phyto-sanitary certificate on the basis of a given EU model will have to be developed and used for each shipment.

Naturally, the EU delegation and Member States remain ready to assist the Lebanese government and administration in the implementation of the Decision so that commercial opportunities can be fully exploited for the benefit of the Lebanese farmers in particular, and the Lebanese people as a whole.

We look forward to getting news of the first Lebanese potatoes making their way from the beautiful fields of Lebanon to the tables and plates of Europe.

Thank you for your attention.