

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

**TEMPUS TLQAA final conference
"Towards the Lebanese Quality Assurance Agency"
Balamand University – 5 December 2013**

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Your Excellency Dr. Ahmad Jammal, Director general of higher education
representing The Minister of Education and Higher Education Mr Diab
President and rectors of the universities,
Head of orders of the professional associations,
Representatives of EU Members states,
Members of European and Lebanese Academic institutions,
Dear students,
Distinguished guests,

Thank you for inviting me to be here today at the Balamand University to
discuss Quality Assurance in the context of Higher Education.

Education is the key to: Personal and intellectual development, professional
skills and job opportunities. Most importantly, education lays the basis for a
constructive and active societal participation and for economic security and
personal gratification. Education unleashes and "maximises" human capital,
and it does even more so in young people.

My colleagues tell me we are pleased with the results of this EU funded
TEMPUS project:

It represents a fine example of national and international cooperation between varied Lebanese and European Higher Education Institutions.

The Lebanese partners have shown a high level of commitment and capacity in coordinating this project here from Lebanon. I would like to particularly thank at this point the Balamand University and Professor Chafic Mobei for the successful implementation and steering of the project.

Finally, and most importantly because of the results it has delivered: You have shown that dialogue, mediation, and mutual respect can lay the basis for trust which is necessary to create a climate for the exchange of good practices which will benefit the entire society.

Dialogue, mediation and respect, along with transparency, independence and integrity are the values that be needed at the heart of the new Quality Assurance Agency. We are asked why this entity is needed? Why have all these renowned universities come together to advocate for such a process?

The answer is that increasing quality in higher education is a question of survival.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Both the education and the labour market are increasingly international. Lebanese work all over the world. Remittances are key for the country, this is not a secret. Being competitive in an increasingly competitive global employment market means qualifications have to meet global standards.

Technologies and social needs are evolving very quickly and so does the necessity for education and training institutions to adapt. Education institutions have to respond to the requests from demand-side; from employers (national and international) who request graduates with the skills that today's and tomorrow's labour markets need. But also the citizens

require – and request- higher education to pass on the moral and social values and experiences essential to our democracies.

Higher Education institutions in many parts of the world are adapting, including in this region. The results obtained by the Jordanian Higher Education and Accreditation body is only one example of progress in the region in this area. We can also find some new institutions in the Gulf that have made substantial institutional, human and capital investments.

Lebanon, which had until recently been recognised as having some of the most reputable universities in the region, is running the risk of falling behind: Amongst the very few Arab universities in the international top 500 university rankings there are no Lebanese institutions.

Students have more and more options to study abroad and look for the best education in other countries and sometimes at better prices than at home, which is a major issue for them and their families.

Higher Education Institutions are obliged to seek cooperation with partners abroad and to get internationalised in terms of programmes, practices, academics, and students. But in order to engage in these partnerships and in order to attract human capital and investments they need trust in each other.

In summary, if Lebanese Higher Education institutions want to be able to face these challenges, quality assurance has to be at the very heart of the system.

This project has provided the possibility to develop components of an evaluation agency and test them in real life. As an outcome of this fruitful collaboration of public institutions and all the universities involved, a

proposal for a law for the creation of the quality assurance agency has been submitted to Parliament.

We are now eagerly waiting for the legislation to be approved by the parliament after having passed two committees (education and legislation) so that the agency can become operational. I hope this important step will be made in the coming months.

For the agency's success, it will be important that it can operate independently. Its leadership, composition and performance will be fundamental for the entity's legitimacy, credibility and viability as well as for that of the whole Lebanese Higher Education system.

I really hope the agency will develop standards that encourage innovations in teaching practice and knowledge delivery.

Thank you