

**SPEECH OF AMBASSADOR ANGELINA EICHHORST
HEAD OF THE DELEGATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION TO LEBANON**

« RECEPTION IN HONOUR OF THE PRESS »

29 JANUARY 2014

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Excellences,

Chers amis (es),

حَضْرَةٌ مُمَثِّلٌ مَعَالِي وَزِيرُ الإِعْلَامِ السَّيِّدِ أَنْدَرِيه قَصَاصْ،
أَصْحَابُ السَّعَادَةِ،
الصَّدِيقَاتُ وَالْأَصْدِقَاءُ الأَعْرَاءُ،

يَسْرُنِي أَنْ أُرْحَبَ بِالصَّحَافِيِّينَ اللَّبْنَانِيِّينَ وَالْأَجَانِبَ فِي بَيْتِ أوروْبَا La Maison de l'Europe فِي لُبْنَانُ.

Thank you for joining us to mark a very special occasion. Tonight the European Diplomatic corps honours the Press corps in Lebanon, recognising the essential role of free and diverse media in free and diverse societies: in Lebanon, in the region, in Europe.

I would like to briefly talk this evening about freedom in Lebanon, violence in the region and women in journalism. Before doing so I would like to give a special welcome to our Director Mr. Michael Koehler who joined us from Brussels and is on a two-day visit here in Lebanon to see with his own eyes the impact of the European Union's assistance to Lebanon and its people.

Lebanon is widely considered as an oasis of freedom in the Arab World with a climate of openness, free thought and creativity, guaranteed by the Constitution.

However and regrettably - in 2013 – media in Lebanon became more polarised and constrained by events in the region. Lebanon dropped eight places on the World Press Freedom index and there are credible reports that Lebanese journalists are nowadays more exposed to arbitrary detention and mistreatment. This is not only sad; this has to be addressed.

This is not only the case for Lebanon. The work of journalists in the field is increasingly dangerous, and in many cases increasingly hampered. Over 70 journalists were killed worldwide last year; two-thirds of them in the Middle East. Syria continues to be the world's most dangerous country for news reporters who are directly and deliberately targeted; as a result, access to reliable information about Syria has been severely constrained. Since the beginning of the war, many journalists and citizen journalists paid with their lives our right to know, our right to be informed. And while we speak, 40 journalists from Syria, and over 20 from Lebanon and

European countries are still missing. Tonight we pay tribute to those killed and injured, to those missing, to their families, friends and colleagues.

It is true that we are, in general, witnessing increasing violence in the region. However, countering violence by restricting freedom of expression or freedom of assembly runs against fundamental human rights and is ultimately counter-productive. History has proven that such measures do not increase security, do not solve political crises, but contribute to further destabilisation.

For its part, media should not instigate extremism but rather propagate moderation, consensus and peace building. In this respect, we encourage the broad implementation of the principles laid down in the *Journalists' Pact for Strengthening Civil Peace in Lebanon* (drafted in the framework of an EU funded project), which aims to boost peace through responsible reporting. The Pact, signed in June 2013 by over 34 media organisations, could be a powerful tool to strengthen civil peace by building a bridge of credibility and trustworthiness between the Lebanese media and the public.

The European Union's commitment to a free, pluralistic and professional media landscape in Lebanon and the region is reflected in the yearly edition of the Samir Kassir Award for Freedom of the Press. We also have a new programme, which aims to empower civil society as an effective watchdog of freedom of expression. (This initiative will be carried out by a consortium gathering the Lebanese associations Samir Kassir Foundation, Maharat, March and the British Thompson foundation).

Cher(e)s am(ie)s,

Less than fifty years ago, journalism was almost exclusively a man's job. Female journalists were the exception and women were discouraged from taking up journalism. I am personally heartened by the increase of women professionals. And yes there is still room for more women journalists (men still hold nearly two-thirds of the jobs) and more women managing media outlets (73% of the top management jobs are occupied by men compared to 27% occupied by women).

But I truly hope that, in the future, both men and women media responsables can operate in a more open and free environment, with more safety and security, so, you the creators, will have your professional satisfaction, and we the audience can enjoy to the full your creations.

May I wish you a happy and peaceful 2014.