

**Speech of Mr Alexis Loeber, Head of the Cooperation Section
at the Delegation of the European Union to Lebanon**

"Launching of the National Water Conservation Campaign"

Sagesse University, Lectures Hall, Furn El Chebak
15 July 2014

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

H.E. Minister of Energy and Water Arthur Nazarian,
Distinguished participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thanks to the initiative and commitment of H.E. Minister of Energy and Water Arthur Nazarian, we have come together today to launch a very important European Union funded awareness campaign for an issue that concerns us all and affects our daily lives.

We have all noticed in the past six months the increasing scarcity of water resources in this part of the world, in Lebanon in particular. Rapid responses to this alarming issue are needed.

It is evident: nature has provided us with pure water – almost enough for the needs of the inhabitants of Lebanon on a daily basis. We all rely on – and in fact, often take for granted – a steady and safe water supply. However, are we responsibly managing and consuming this water? Do we adequately educate our children to use this limited resource in the most efficient manner?

The same question could be asked about the way we 'return' water to nature. In this regard, Lebanon has a huge margin of progress, as only 8% of the consumed water is adequately treated before being 'returned'. Not to mention the repercussions of low levels of seasonal and annual rainfall, which could, and have, as recently as this year, affected Lebanon, making the improvement of the management of water resources a more pressing need.

To tackle the problem of water (mis)-management, the Lebanese authorities have taken several steps in the past years. The National Water Sector Strategy approved by the Council of Ministers in 2012 is a good example and a very important milestone. In terms of legislative framework, the European Union seizes this occasion to encourage the Government of Lebanon and the Parliament to approve the Water Code that would strongly contribute to improving the governance of this sector.

And today, we are all gathered here to witness the launch of the European Union funded National Water Conservation Campaign. Awareness campaigns such as this one are very important, since they are actions that target the wider public, and which could have an immediate and consistent impact when they are properly planned and executed. This campaign was born out of the belief that a responsible and sustainable approach to tackling the issue of water scarcity should rely on raising awareness about the need to decrease water demand by saving water rather than advocating increasing water supply.

In addition to financing this awareness campaign, the European Union is currently preparing many water infrastructure projects in close collaboration with the Ministry of Energy and Water and the Water Establishments. Indeed, more than €50 million have already been committed to water supply and waste water infrastructures throughout the country, mainly in vulnerable areas affected by the consequences of the conflict in Syria.

In parallel, a large EU-funded technical assistance programme (Support Programme for Infrastructure Sector Strategies and Alternative Financing, better known as "SISSAF") currently assists the Ministry of Energy and Water in implementing its Water and Energy strategies on a long-term basis.

Moreover, the European Investment Bank has committed in the past fifteen years to co-financing the construction of major waste water treatment plants along the Lebanese coast (in Tripoli, Beirut, Tyre and the Keserwan area). Delays have affected the completion of these projects, but the European Union counts on the full cooperation of the Lebanese authorities to provide long-term solutions to the remaining open issues.

The European Union will continue to support the Government of Lebanon in its endeavours to tackle the critical situation of water scarcity, and I am convinced that this national awareness campaign will have a tangible impact.

To conclude, let me remind you that it is not only our duty, but also our responsibility to ensure that human needs can be met in the present and for generations to come. This challenge is ambitious, but clearly within our reach.

Thank you.