



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

**Press point – Programme Steering Committee**

**“Agriculture and Rural Development Programme”**

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Your Excellency Minister of Agriculture Akram Chehayeb,  
Agricultural and Rural Development Programme Director Mr Mohamad Abu Zeid,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you very much for this interesting presentation. I am pleased to see how much progress has been achieved since the onset of the Agricultural and Rural Development Programme (ARDP). All planned initiatives have been launched and we can already see some tangible results benefitting Lebanon and the people living in Lebanon.

One of the main achievements is the guarantee of 122 agricultural loans worth €6.8 million through the Kafalat credit scheme. This will be of great benefit for both small farms and agri-businesses. Excellent work has also been carried out to

improve food safety, resulting in facilitating the export of Lebanese products and in raising the quality standards of agricultural produce in the domestic market.

More excellent results of the ARDP are yet to come! To give you an outlook for the end of this year: by December, the Ministry of Agriculture will have a strategy for 2015-2019; import and export capacities of the agricultural sector will be further enhanced through strengthening the Ministry's plant and animal quarantine services and through support to the laboratory in Kafarchima with the objective to receive its ISO certification.

In the course of the coming years, an additional 400 loans worth €25 million will be guaranteed through the Kafalat scheme and the necessary agricultural infrastructure will be set-up. For instance, 8 hill lakes will be constructed to increase irrigation capabilities and 6 pilot forestation programmes promoting co-operation between civil society organisations and local communities will be implemented across the country.

These are only some highlights of the expected results of this comprehensive programme. Although we are still in its early stages, the outlook of the ARDP in particular but also of the agricultural sector in general are encouraging.

In 2011 the Delegation of the European Union published a newsletter entitled *'Agriculture at the Crossroads'*. At that time the prospects for the sector were rather gloomy. Almost three years later, it seems that despite the events in the region, the figures of the agricultural sector continue to improve, albeit slowly. It is premature to say that the sector is at its full potential. In fact, in constant terms, the output value of the sector is to date below its level at the beginning of the 60s. However, due to the deliberate choice of the government to make Lebanon's

agricultural sector progress and improve, we could positively use our cooperation and collaboration to contribute to the efforts.

Indeed, many recent external factors have impacted the agricultural sector. Some are related to the war in Syria. On the one hand, the influx of refugees from Syria has boosted the domestic demand, which benefits some food crops producers such as potato farmers. On the other hand, the security situation in Syria has changed the traditional commercial routes out of the country hence increasing the cost of cash crops like bananas or apples.

In this challenging context, it is worth noting the record reaction time in which Lebanon has come up with alternative export routes, for instance by adopting shipping lines used by other sectors. Creativity and adaptation to a fast changing environment are certainly two essential assets of the Lebanese economic actors, and they are also essential for the development of the sector.

Many challenges still lie ahead for agriculture: water scarcity will certainly need to be mitigated - I am sure you join me in saluting with joy past weekend's rainfall -; structural actions and coherent plans by the government are still very much needed for instance in the area of food safety and a master plan of the country segregating agricultural lands from building lands is much needed.

Another major hurdle to overcome is to gain the trust of the agricultural communities. Too often farmers see governmental action as inefficient and not adapted to their needs.

As a result, they adopt an individualistic approach which in the end restricts the potential of the sector. We all know that a strong agricultural sector, and this can

be witnessed in all major agricultural countries in the world, requires strong public intervention.

Today's programme has succeeded in bringing together different stakeholders, in particular the Ministry of Agriculture, civil society, municipalities and the private sector. I hope that this collaborative work will contribute to restoring confidence and helping the agricultural sector as a whole to break the glass ceiling that is limiting its potential for growth. A healthy agricultural sector is very important for Lebanon: it accounts for €1.6 billion and generates direct or indirect income for approximately 200,000 families.

Last but not least, I would like to acknowledge another EU initiative in the agricultural sector that complements ARDP. This is the "European Neighbourhood Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development (ENPARD)". The ENPARD team is also meeting this week here in Beirut to support the Ministry of Agriculture in elaborating its agricultural and rural policy.

I want to wish them all the best of success in their endeavours as they will be addressing some critical structural aspects of governmental action.

Allow me once again to emphasise the enthusiasm and dedication of the successive Ministers of Agriculture, with today Minister Akram Chehayeb and of the involved services of the Ministry of Agriculture with special thanks to our colleagues working in the unit in charge of the programme's implementation.

Thank you.