



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

*Circle of the Lebanese Ambassadors
"On some of the Challenges Europe is facing today"*

Headquarters Beirut

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Excellencies,

Dear Friends,

Thank you for inviting me to this distinguished "Circle of Lebanese Ambassadors". It is my true pleasure to have this exchange with you.

Some key words came to mind in preparing for today: diplomacy, protocol, reciprocity, dialogue. I want to address these before talking about the - global - challenges of populism, violent extremism and the refugee crisis.

You know, Ambassadors are regularly asked to speak about their perspective or the challenges their host country is facing. This is our bread and butter. I then often ask myself: What would the Lebanese Ambassador in Brussels say about the European Union when addressing

EU officials in public; or what would, for instance, the Lebanese Ambassador in Berlin say about Germany when addressing an audience of German Ambassadors?

I would address in Lebanon the important subjects with the same tone or intention as my colleague in Brussels. This is how I believe reciprocity and protocol come in and you all know this more than anybody: how *at all times the timeless formality of international diplomatic culture should remain in place*. The formality ensures that the representatives of each country will be respected uniformly and without bias. The reciprocity is the principle of treating the other the way you want to be treated.... you return in kind what you receive. This is important because we will never succeed in constructing a universally accepted global civilisation - and maybe we do not need to - but at least we need the most appropriate arrangements for reaching a consensus within humankind on how to deal with each other, and therefore protocol should be respected at all times.

This brings me to the importance of Dialogue - for EU diplomats like myself, Dialogue truly is our only weapon. Former European Council President Herman van Rompuy said it in his Nobel Lecture in 2012: "The European Union's 'secret weapon' is this very mechanism of constant negotiations on ever more topics, between ever more countries". He quoted the golden rule of Jean Monnet: "Mieux vaut se disputer autour d'une table que sur un champ de bataille." ("Better fight around a table than on a battle-field."). So we listen, we talk, we reason, we negotiate and we try to convince with peaceful means. That is why I

strongly believe that diplomats should maintain the possibility of Dialogue at all times. While politicians may choose not to, diplomats should always seek to talk, to establish contacts and to reach out. We should not close doors we cannot open again afterwards. "Altijd de deur op een kier laten," is a famous Dutch saying "Always give a possibility for the Other to come back to you and try and find a solution."

'The Dialogue principle' does not mean that military options are not on the table. I have been personally in favour of military action on different occasions, not as an objective or a principle but as a tool, as a red-line marker, in particular when the questions at hand need a game changer, a re-balancing act in order for, after the military action, negotiations to be taken forward or for the political track to take place. However, the planning of a military action should go hand in hand or be followed-up with the political and diplomatic track. This is not always the case, and we have all experienced in our diplomatic life the increasing complexity of resorting to military action and the many questions that such actions throw up for instance on the objectives, and the follow-up.

Allow me to still look at where an EU Ambassador stands in terms of diplomacy. (By the way in many countries we are recognised as Ambassadors like any other Ambassador representing a Member State and are on the diplo list according to Order of Precedence. In Lebanon we are listed just after the Member States. Perhaps one day this will change, at least this is what I hope for my successor...

If I take the example of the United States, the Ambassadors are - quote -

“the men and women our nation requires to fulfil our leadership role in world affairs and to defend U.S. interests” – unquote.

I like the US definition for the Members of their Corps Diplomatique yet you see how it differs with the EU on three fronts: the EU is not a nation; we feel and know that we have a leadership role but we do not always say it so explicitly; and we do not only defend the EU's interests but we also promote our values. It is often said the EU is a normative foreign policy actor. Others would refute this, on the grounds that there may be 'normative' or 'civilian dimensions to EU foreign policy, but that it is problematic to imply that the EU is a ‘force for good’ without identifying criteria and assessment standards that make it possible to qualify, substantiate or reject such a claim. I will leave this subject for another conversation.

In fact the mandate of an EU Ambassador is very much about representation, negotiation, coordination (of EU Member States), indeed protecting EU interests (*and of its nationals, within the limits permitted by the EU treaties and international law*) and then of course the daily work of ascertaining (*by all lawful means*) and reporting on conditions and developments. We also make a special point about *Promoting friendly relations between the EU and the receiving State and developing our economic, cultural and scientific relations.*

Let me say a few words about a European perspective on today's challenges. You notice that I have changed the title of my intervention. We can no longer only speak about the challenges of the European

Union. Most of what we are concerned about are also global challenges. There are three elements I would like to mention in particular that keep our leadership back home particularly busy: increasing populism, territorial security and the people who have no choice but fleeing to Europe (I on purpose do not use the word migration – will come to this later).

Europe used to be seen as a continent of the blessed, around which the rushing waters of the crisis would flow. In the same Nobel Lecture, the EU was portrayed as having succeeded in making 'peace self-evident' and 'war inconceivable'. That was in 2012. Now in 2015, waves are mounting, Europe is struggling with new realities of the aftermath of a severe economic crisis, followed by a financial, an increasing social crisis and possibly a political crisis and all of this surrounded by a more complex world.

First, there is the steep rise of populism in Europe, both 'right wing' and 'left wing', both within political parties and social movements. Often the populism colludes with anti-EU sentiments, and here the EU representatives and institutions have a major battle at hand.

Favoured topics by European populist parties include Islam and foreigners, be it migrants, refugees or asylum seekers. We do not shut our eyes in the face of this populist *Zeitgeist* all over Europe and we are still seeking a strong counter-narrative. Established political parties are confronted with competitors that do not compete on equal footing. Traditional party politics in Europe is based on the assumption that the

best idea to solve a problem – identified in the lengthy, but fruitful discussions of the *Agora* – will make its way through the institutions. Now, populism is based on the assumption that the *easiest idea* will win the hearts of the people. Populism benefits from the fact that people feel lost and overpowered in the complexities of highly interconnected political and economic systems. This assumption has proven to entail at least a spark of truth, as the success of populist parties and movements shows. And there is a danger for established European parties to drift towards a more populist discourse equally, since this does seem to promise 'quick fixes' for a continuous loss of voters. Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission, warned in December 2014 "If the established parties continue to follow the populist parties, European countries will become ungovernable."

Europe must with all means remain *unified* in the face of this political disenchantment. This is a matter of the political discourse in the European capitals with their unfortunate tendency to point at Europe when things go wrong, but to take the credit for joint successes. It is also a matter of concrete policies. It is an uncomfortable truth that the gap between those that are 'connected' to our complex world, politically, socially, economically, virtually - and those that are not - is widening. This is unhealthy for European societies that traditionally drew their legitimacy from their inclusiveness, from the participation of all citizens to the development of their area, village and cities.

The second challenge for Europe – territorial security and integrity. I am

sure you watched the masses of people who gathered on the Maidan in Kiev in February 2014. People who demonstrated to the world so fervidly and convincingly that they wanted to come closer to sharing Europe's values, ambitions. Then Russian intervened and Crimea was annexed - illegally. And here we are, fifteen months and many attempts later to come to a settlement between the EU and Russia. We are hardly closer to any sustainable solution. The Minsk II Agreement has halted major combat, but has not brought forward a political settlement that could be fully trusted.

Here, not only the military hostilities including the various violations of Minsk II are worrisome. It is also, maybe more so, the return of the thinking in 'spheres of influence'. Yet in the 'Charter of Paris for a New Europe' and the 'Istanbul Charter for European Security of the 1990s', European countries and Russia had agreed to give the game new rules and to work together in the framework of a co-operative security architecture. These rules rejected the notion of 'spheres of influence' and recognised the right of all countries to equal security and to choose their own alliances.

Some time ago, nobody would have believed that in the year of 2015, Europe would need to worry about its security and territorial integrity. That NATO is coming into the picture again. The de-stabilisation of Ukraine and other countries by Russia was and still is a concern of all European countries - not just of our Eastern neighbours.

There is also the territorial integrity from another angle: borders of the

Union are questioned not only from the outside, but also from within. We had the referendum in Scotland. Questions are put forward elsewhere. They all have to be addressed and thankfully we have the legal tools to do so. The strong legal framework built up over all these years of negotiations and treaties proves to be an important tool to guide change in a more organised way.

Terrorism is unfortunately back to dominate the political agendas of European capitals, following attacks in Paris, Tunis, Riyadh, Brussels, Copenhagen. An estimated 4 000 EU citizens have joined fighters in this part of the world some of whom want to continue their fight once back home in Europe. This means a lot of destructive potential inside our borders. Our infrastructures are vulnerable, as are our societies. Da'esh fanatics propaganda plays on the tunes of people's fear.

On terrorism, the EU Member States are united– we have a common agenda to counter violent extremism inside and outside our borders. We will cooperate more and better with key partners, the Arab League and Arab countries. With Lebanon, we have launched a dialogue on counter-terrorism in February. With Tunisia, we are even one step further, and hope to be signing soon a memorandum on cooperation in counter-terrorism matters.

Third challenge is often called Migration, but I would want to put the emphasis on refugees rather than migrants. We are directly confronted with the question of a massive influx – unprecedented. It is not only Italy, Spain, Greece and Bulgaria who are affected; it is a European

question that gets a European response. It goes to the very heart of what constitutes the Union, its values and how much solidarity countries are willing to show – both towards the people fleeing war, but also amongst each other.

Europe remains a highly attractive continent for people all over the world, despite the real or perceived 'deficiencies'. Therefore it is precisely the question of 'migration' – more than any debate on cultural relativism – that challenges our values and normative declarations, and measures them against reality.

The European Commission has proposed a quota system for Member States to accept refugees, taking into account the specific situation of each country - unemployment, economic strength, population. The initial proposal was rather modest: 40 000 refugees. Member States were not happy, and discussions on quotas will surely be on-going for some time. In 2014, 185 000 refugees were granted asylum in Europe. Refugees from Syria remained the main beneficiaries accounting for 37%. Germany may be hosting 200 000 Syrians by the end of 2015. Sweden, France, Italy together accepted almost 74 000 refugees in 2014.

To address 'mobility' in this region, the EU has established Mobility Partnerships with Morocco, Tunisia and Jordan. These partnerships revolve around four themes all related to migration: legal migration and mobility (visa facilitation), fight against irregular migration, asylum and international protection, and migration and development. Upon the request of the Lebanese Government, the EU-Lebanon Dialogue on

mobility, migration and security was launched last December.

These are steps in the right direction, as are our efforts to increase development spending and to step up security cooperation - but let us be honest: We are facing a structural problem here that will not evaporate into thin air, even if we wished so, as long as Iraq, Syria and Libya continue to be war zones. There is no "magic potion" to extremely complex questions. There is no easy answer. And here things come full circle... the rise of populism.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This year we are celebrating the 65th anniversary of the European Union. 65 years of peace and security on an ever growing continent. Europe is the largest peace project ever. Our mantra is 'Stay united, stay on course and work hard'. This is not about wanting to avoid dealing with our differences and divergences: these are essential. In fact, managing our diversity is the very 'raison d'être' of the European Union.

We do not have a clear-cut answer to all the questions at hand. But we know one thing for sure: we will move forward, maybe slowly but steadily. We do not have any other choice, neither in Europe nor in Lebanon. The interesting part is that Europe is opening up more than ever before. We are united around the questions of fundamental rights, open societies, a new energy policy, climate change. We seek increasingly more partners to address populism, extreme violence, security, assistance for refugees and we are building new partnerships

with Asia, Latin America and the Middle East, but also Africa and the Far East. We will continue to give full support to our neighbours on political and economic governance, as well as on security and stability. To all people here and in the region, regardless of their political affiliation or confessional background.

Thank you.