



**Speech of Ambassador Christina Lassen, Head of the Delegation of the
European Union to Lebanon**

Beirut Start-Up Weekend

Friday 13 May
Ecole supérieure des affaires (ESA)

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear atart-upers,

I am happy to be here today for the kick-off of this intense three-day event. I feel privileged to be surrounded by so many dynamic entrepreneurs and 'startupers', as you are sometimes called.

This is the first time the European Union is financing such an initiative and we do so because we firmly believe that creative and innovative entrepreneurs are the backbone of a healthy, strong and sustainable economy. We also believe in the importance of investing in people and

we know that you all can make a significant contribution to growth and job creation in Lebanon, which is urgently needed.

In fact, economic growth and job creation is one of the main priorities of the renewed cooperation between the EU and Lebanon that we are currently working on with the government. And if we can at the same time manage to create high-tech jobs that benefit environmentally friendly solutions, it does not get much better than that. We invite you all to be creative, to think *out of the box* and come up with – perhaps - 'revolutionary' solutions in this area.

Support to the private sector has long been a priority for the European Union. In Lebanon, like in most countries, it is the private sector that drives growth and creates jobs. Substantial sums have been spent from our side to enhance the capacity of Small and Medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), to boost the private sector and to improve the business environment. This support is even more relevant now, when so many Lebanese companies struggle in their daily business because of the difficult situation in the country and the region.

But we are optimistic. No matter what happens in Lebanon – and we all know how challenging the environment can be – Lebanese entrepreneurs

do not give up; they persevere, innovate and continue with their business ventures.

This weekend, you will have the chance to interact with high-profile mentors and business coaches, including from Europe. Let me warmly welcome those who came to Beirut for this event to share their experiences and know-how.

I also would like to acknowledge the crucial role played by the 'ecosystem builders', such as AltCity, SPEED, Berytech, the UK Lebanon Tech Hub, BIAT, SouthBic, the recently-created business incubator 'SMART ESA', Kafalat, without forgetting the Banque du Liban and its undeniable support to entrepreneurship. All these institutions provide access to critical resources needed for an entrepreneur to grow: talent, technology, capital and network.

You are all essential for what we in lack of a better word have dubbed the incredible "resilience" of this country. Lebanon needs people like you, and the European Union is proud and excited to be part of this venture.

Thank you.