



**EUROPEAN COUNCIL
THE PRESIDENT**



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**Remarks by President of the European Council
Herman Van Rompuy
after his meeting with Prime Minister of Lebanon
Najib Mikati**

I held a very interesting and useful meeting today with the Lebanese Prime Minister Mikati, during his first visit to the European Union institutions.

The Prime Minister and I had productive discussions, focused on the relations between the EU and Lebanon and on the developments in the region, particularly in Syria.

Prime Minister Mikati set out the difficult circumstances in which Lebanon currently finds itself due to internal and external challenges.

I commended his efforts to maintain stability in his country, who is an example of cultural and religious diversity, and encouraged him at the same time to progress with domestic reforms. The EU is ready to accompany Lebanon on these reforms, to transform challenges into opportunities. The revised European Neighbourhood Policy offers the right framework. I am encouraged by the commitment on both sides to work on a new Action Plan that will guide our cooperation in the coming years.

I also encouraged Lebanon to accede to the WTO and to increase its participation in the process of regional integration.

I welcomed Lebanon's continued commitment to honour its international obligations, in particular with regard to the Special Tribunal for Lebanon.

I expressed the full commitment of the EU to the United Nations International Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) to guarantee stability in the Southern part of the country. I welcome the Lebanese commitment to the implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution 1701.

P R E S S

Dirk De Backer - Spokesperson of the President - ☎ +32 (0)2 281 9768 - +32 (0)497 59 99 19
Jesús Carmona - Deputy Spokesperson of the President - ☎ +32 (0)2 281 9548 / 5150 - +32 (0)475 65 32 15
press.president@consilium.europa.eu <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/>

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As the Arab world is going through major changes, where people are asking for political reforms and improved social and economic opportunities, hearing the Prime Minister's views on developments and their implications in the region was particularly useful.

The EU remains deeply concerned about the fragile situation in Syria, with systematic and widespread violations of human rights by the regime and reports of heavy weaponry in civilian areas.

The growing number of displaced people fleeing the crisis in Syria is a matter of great concern for both of us. A significant number of them are finding temporary refuge in Lebanon. I welcome the efforts of the Lebanese authorities to provide assistance to these refugees, and I salute the generosity of the Lebanese people that provide shelter to those in need.

The European Union will continue working with UN and relevant humanitarian organizations to facilitate the provision of humanitarian assistance in the affected areas.

I recalled to the Prime Minister that the EU welcomed the recent United Nations Security Council resolutions, adopted unanimously, as an important step forward. As I recently expressed to the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon here in Brussels, the EU supports the Special Envoy Annan's mission and his 6-point Plan. We strongly urge the Syrian government to allow the effective operation and deployment of the fully-fledged UN observation mission without delay. I also recalled the further sanctions adopted last week by the EU targeting the Syrian regime.

I expressed to the Prime Minister the EU's deep concerns over Iran's nuclear programme. The EU has introduced robust restrictive measures, which are important in convincing Iran to return to meaningful negotiations. The recent talks lead by the High Representative in Istanbul give us reason to hope that Iran will engage in a sustained process of serious dialogue on the nuclear issue.

Finally, I underlined to the Prime Minister the full engagement of the EU in the Middle East Peace Process through the work of the Quartet. The resumption of direct talks remains our top priority.

Let me conclude by recalling that Lebanon and the European Union have always been linked by a strong bond, and that I am happy to see that with this visit our partnership is further developing.