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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council

To: Delegations

Subject: Relations with Lebanon
- European Union's position for the Association Council's eighth meeting
(Brussels, 18 July 2017)

Delegations will find attached the European Union's position for the eighth EU-Lebanon Association Council.

**EIGHTH MEETING OF THE EU-LEBANON ASSOCIATION COUNCIL
(BRUSSELS, 18 JULY 2017)**

Statement by the European Union

1. On the occasion of the EU-Lebanon Association Council, the EU congratulates the government and people of Lebanon on the progress made since the last Association Council in February 2015 and reiterates its full support as the country faces multiple economic, social, humanitarian and security challenges. The EU considers the stability of Lebanon and the region as a major objective and is committed to strengthening and deepening its partnership to contribute to Lebanon's stability and socio-economic development. The EU also commends Lebanon's resilience as it continues to host around 1.5 million refugees.
1. As demonstrated by the visits of the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini, as well as the visits of Commissioner Hahn, to Beirut, in 2015, 2016 and 2017, the EU attaches great importance to its bilateral relationship with Lebanon as a key partner.
2. The EU welcomes the progress achieved in Lebanon's democratic process and the significant institutional advances that have been registered following the election of President Aoun on 31st October 2016, the formation of a new government led by Prime Minister Hariri on 18th December 2016 and the endorsement of a new electoral law by parliament on 16th June 2017. The EU welcomes this new law and reaffirms its commitment to support Lebanon in holding inclusive and transparent parliamentary elections and looks forward to working with all stakeholders on preparations towards that end by May 2018. The EU stresses the importance of women's representation in the parliament and inclusion in political processes. In a spirit of partnership, the EU is committed to continue working with the government and support it through a variety of policies and instruments.

3. The EU notes that this progress has been achieved through constructive dialogue between all political parties and recalls that national unity based on the Constitution, the Taef agreement, an ongoing commitment to a policy of disassociation from all regional conflicts in line with the Baabda Declaration, and commitments to relevant Security Council resolutions remain crucial for the future of Lebanon. The EU welcomes the ambition of the Lebanese Government to 'restore trust', as expressed in the Government Declaration of December 2016.
4. The EU reiterates its readiness to stand by Lebanon during this important phase and to continue developing a partnership that is closer, more focused and strategic, in line with the revised European Neighbourhood Policy and the Global Strategy. The EU-Lebanon Partnership Priorities and Compact that were agreed in November 2016 are a testimony to this approach and the implementation of the mutual commitments and priority actions undertaken in these agreements will guide actions for the years to come. The EU is committed to further deepening dialogue and cooperation with Lebanon, setting a strategic agenda around the four themes identified therein: security and counterterrorism, governance and Rule of Law, fostering growth and job opportunities, and migration and mobility.
5. In addition to EU Member States' significant contributions, since the start of the Syrian crisis, the EU has allocated over €1 billion to Lebanon in both humanitarian and development aid. €800 million was specifically allocated as a response to the Syrian crisis to support host communities in Lebanon and refugees from Syria, including via the EU regional Trust Fund in response to the Syrian crisis. At the Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region of 5th April 2017, the EU reiterated the pledge made in London a year earlier for 2017 and confirmed its willingness to have similar levels of support for 2018 and maintain the level of engagement also in 2019, bearing in mind the mutual commitments set out in the Brussels Conference output document on 'Supporting Resilience of Host Countries and Refugees in the context of the Syrian crisis'. Furthermore, Lebanon will be a beneficiary of an extra €5 million from the EU's 'umbrella' programme, which lends recognition to progress made in the field of democracy and human rights and other reforms contributing to that goal.

Security and Counterterrorism

6. The EU commends and supports the efforts of the Lebanese authorities and security institutions in their fight against terrorism and the prevention of radicalisation in a challenging regional environment. It also commends the increased commitment of the security agencies to work in a cooperative way in managing the land border with Syria and the progress that has been achieved in the field of integrated border management with EU support.
7. The EU welcomes the constructive counterterrorism dialogue with Lebanon and the progress made in the implementation of initiatives in the field, especially the high-level meetings to develop a national counterterrorism strategy and the seminars on aviation security and fighting the illicit traffic of firearms. The EU remains fully committed to provide further support through its various instruments to initiatives aiming at strengthening the operational capabilities of the Lebanese Armed Forces, and other state security and justice institutions, as the sole providers of stability, order and security in the country while abiding by international human rights law. This would also include the organisation of CT dialogues on a regular basis. The EU welcomes improved cooperation between Lebanon's security agencies and encourages further cooperation in responding to terrorist threats.
8. The EU reaffirms its commitment to the unity, sovereignty, stability, independence and territorial integrity of Lebanon. The EU commends the positive role of UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces, whose deployments are crucial to maintain stability and security in southern Lebanon. The EU welcomes the LAF's co-operation with UNIFIL forces and encourages the deployment of LAF across the south of Lebanon. The EU reaffirms its support to UNIFIL, to which several member states are making significant contributions. The EU insists on the importance for UNIFIL to have at its disposal all the necessary means and equipment, in view of preserving its full operational capability to implement its mandate. The EU also stresses the importance of Lebanon's continued commitment to the full implementation of its international obligations, including United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolutions 1559, 1680, 1701 and 1757.

Governance and the Rule of Law

9. The EU warmly welcomes the institutional progress achieved in setting up a National Commission on Human Rights and encourages Lebanon to ensure that the work of the Commission can be carried out fully and in line with its mandate in order to achieve better protection of human rights in Lebanon for all starting with the approval of qualified members and allocation of an appropriate budget. Progress has also been achieved in other areas such as the establishment of a National Preventive Mechanism to fight torture and the creation of specific ministries for human rights, women's affairs and anti-corruption within the new government. The EU is ready to lend its full support so that the new ministries and bodies can accomplish their tasks in improving governance and the rule of law.
10. The EU also welcomes progress in human rights' protection and calls on the Lebanese government to strengthen its efforts in protecting the human rights of all including women, children, forcibly displaced people and other persons of concern, in particular persons in vulnerable situations such as Syrian and Palestinian refugees. There should be guaranteed access to quality education for both Lebanese and refugee children. Full implementation of these policies will also serve to further reduce gender discrimination, protect minors and juvenile prisoners as well as address mistreatment of prisoners and over-crowded prisons. The EU also calls on Lebanon to take the necessary measures to address corruption in line with the Government's Declaration of December 2016.
11. The EU regrets the continued and increased use of death penalty sentences and calls on Lebanon to uphold the de facto moratorium, with a view to ultimately abolishing the death penalty.

12. Lebanese civil society has been playing a vital role in ensuring the respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms and protection of the environment in Lebanon. The EU commits to continue engaging with civil society and with the government as a way of ensuring that all players within the Lebanese political landscape have a say in the formulation and implementation of policies. The EU commends Lebanon's vibrant and active civil society that stands out in the region and stands ready to provide further support towards enhancing its role in Lebanon. The EU encourages empowerment of women through political, economic and social initiatives and calls for strengthened participation of women in public life.
13. The EU will continue supporting Lebanon's reform agenda to put in place all the essential administrative, institutional and legislative reforms to strengthen the capacity of the state to operate in accordance with the principles of good governance and the rule of law and which increase the impact of EU and other international cooperation channelled towards the country.
14. In particular, the EU remains committed to build on ongoing cooperation in the justice sector, including cooperation between EU and Member State judges, that enhances the independence, impartiality efficiency and accountability of the judiciary, including extending competences of civilian courts.

Fostering Growth and Job Opportunities

15. The EU welcomes efforts by the Government of Lebanon to present a new vision for stabilisation and development of the country, as presented in Lebanon's Statement of Intent at the London Conference of 2016 on Supporting Syrian and the Region, the Government's Statement of December 2016 and by Prime Minister Hariri at the Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region of 5th April 2017. The EU is ready to continue working closely with Lebanon to generate employment for all and foster economic growth. This can play a complementary role to the stabilization and structural reform measures that the Lebanese government needs to undertake in order to put the country on a path towards economic sustainability.

16. The EU is committed to seek ways of further supporting Lebanon through innovative financial vehicles to attract more investment into the country including through blending of grants with loans as provided by the Neighbourhood Investment Fund and the External Investment Plan. In this context, the EU welcomes progress made towards Lebanon attaining recipient status with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and will promote the necessary coordination with other international financial institutions in support of the Government's strategy for economic recovery. The adoption of a national budget by Lebanon will also allow the EU to consider further expanding its support actions.
17. In 2016, the EU was Lebanon's most important trading partner and second largest export destination. Since the start of the free trade area, which fully liberalised trade in industrial products and removed tariffs for most Lebanese agricultural goods, Lebanese exports to the EU have doubled but they remain at a relatively low level. The EU recognises the severe impact of the Syrian conflict on Lebanon's economy, notably with the closure of major trade routes and markets in the region. While the EU is fully committed to supporting Lebanon to improve its competitiveness and trade capacities, it is also critical that Lebanon in parallel addresses the pre-existing structural weaknesses that make Lebanon a difficult and challenging environment for doing business, and respects international obligations. Concerning the objective of improving the business environment, the EU is also ready to provide the required support through different instruments.

18. The EU and Lebanon have demonstrated a strong will to facilitate mutual trade. They remain committed to addressing and preventing trade barriers in accordance with the Association Agreement. The EU is determined to assist Lebanon to fully exploit its preferential access to the EU market, increase its exports and stimulate investment. Work is ongoing within the newly established Joint Working Group on Trade and Investment, set up as a result of the Partnership Priorities, to identify Lebanese products with an export potential and help them achieve better compliance with EU technical and phytosanitary standards. This Working Group should also discuss issues relating to market access, and feed into future sub-committees discussions. Technical exchanges on compliance of Lebanese products with EU food safety rules is an example of such good cooperation and the EU is ready to accompany this process through a structured dialogue and with technical assistance. The EU is also ready to explore trade related cooperation in other sectors such as pharmaceuticals, textiles or services. However, this would need to be matched with a strong political will by Lebanon to undertake reforms. The EU therefore urges Lebanon to strengthen its food safety system including having in place a competent authority overseeing the good functioning of the system in line with EU and international standards, to acquire international certification of its good manufacturing practices in the pharmaceutical industry, stimulate shifts in agricultural practices and improvements of the value chain to target more attractive markets within the EU and ensure better access to finance for Lebanese SMEs. The EU will also continue to encourage and support Lebanon towards membership of the World Trade Organization.
19. The EU is fully aware that the impact of the Syrian crisis has been felt deeply at the local level exacerbating pre-existing structural challenges. Municipalities have experienced increased strain on resources such as water and electricity, as well as services such as waste water and solid waste management. The EU is therefore keen to continue supporting Lebanon's decentralisation process and build on the support it has provided to municipalities to construct or rehabilitate infrastructure that supply basic services to all. Importantly, the EU emphasises that future assistance should foresee sustainable ways in which infrastructure is maintained and operated efficiently that would include also support in terms of governance and financial stability of municipalities in line with national policies.

20. The EU strongly welcomes Lebanon's efforts to move away from dependency on fossil fuels by investing in renewable sources of energy in line with its national strategy and other incentives, as well as commitments undertaken at the Paris Climate Change Conference of November 2015. The EU is willing to offer more support to Lebanon in its transition to low-carbon, resource efficient growth and sustainable energy systems by linking it to assistance provided in other sectors, such as under trade and agriculture, as a means of reducing production costs, boosting competitiveness and creating jobs.
21. Recent developments related to the oil and gas industry provide a significant opportunity for Lebanon's economic development. The EU encourages that a fair settlement is reached over the demarcation of the maritime boundary line between Lebanon and Israel. The EU encourages Lebanon to provide a sound regulatory framework in line with international standards, including on environment protection and sustainability in order to comply with the Paris commitments.
22. The EU also welcomes Lebanon's interest in space cooperation including EGNOS/Galileo. In this regard, the EU will continue discussing and examine interest in EGNOS extension to the whole ENP South region.
23. Similarly, in the field of research and innovation the EU and Lebanon are actively engaged to collaborate within the forthcoming Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area (PRIMA) programme which is expected to mobilise joint research on two of the most urgent challenges to the Euro-Mediterranean area: the efficiency and sustainability of food production and water provision and work closely with private industry for finding innovative and cost-efficient solutions that can contribute to making Lebanese trade, agriculture and industry more competitive and performing. In this context, the EU welcomes the successful finalisation of negotiations on an international agreement for Lebanon's participation in PRIMA.

Migration and Mobility

24. The EU commends Lebanon's extraordinary efforts in hosting more than a million refugees who fled the Syrian conflict, on top of the close to half a million Palestinian refugees that were already in the country. The EU underlines the importance of sustainable funding to UNRWA and of enabling its work to provide relief to Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and in the region while the necessary reforms continue to be undertaken by UNRWA to ensure cost-effectiveness of aid. Regarding the security situation in the Palestinian refugee camps, the EU supports efforts made by the Lebanese government to explore, together with the Palestinian authorities, measures for de-escalating the situation and reducing tension.
25. The EU looks forward to continuing its cooperation with the Lebanese Government to ensure progress in improving the situation of refugees, their rights and protection, and vulnerable host communities in line with the commitments under the EU-Lebanon Compact, Lebanon's Output document of the Brussels Conference, and the London Statement of Intent as well as international standards of protection. The EU-Lebanon Compact is specifically designed to address the impact of the Syrian conflict on Lebanon, and is guiding the EU response, including with funding on top of existing bilateral assistance. Major actions already undertaken include: an assistance package for Lebanese primary health care centres and a Water, Sanitation and Health (WASH) programme; funding by the EU of the Reaching All Children in Education Programme (RACE II). In this context, the EU commends Lebanon's waiver of the fee for renewing residence permits for certain Syrian refugees. This should now be consistently applied across the country and extended to all Syrians irrespective of their current legal status in Lebanon or date of entry in Lebanese territory, as an essential protection mechanism and in accordance with international law and standards.
26. Return of refugees to their country of origin should only occur when the conditions allow and on a voluntary, dignified and safe basis, in accordance with applicable norms of international law and the principle of non-refoulement. The EU also supports the resumption of registration of Syrian refugees with UNHCR to ensure refugees' access to livelihoods and right to protection.

27. The EU looks forward to re-launching discussions on a Mobility Partnership with Lebanon. Building on the EU support already provided to Lebanon for the refugee crisis, the mobility partnership would offer a long-term framework for cooperation for tackling migration and mobility. It would offer an opportunity to launch new initiatives of support for Lebanon, in particular for improving the mobility of Lebanese citizens, protecting its borders and fighting against irregular migration into Lebanon. The link between migration and development could be strengthened including by reaching out to the Lebanese community living abroad and supporting Lebanese returnees. The Mobility Partnership can provide a framework within which the EU can coordinate activities by the Member States that sign up to the Partnership; this will include additional support initiatives, based on Lebanese needs.
