

PRESS RELEASE

Visit of the European Parliament Delegation for Relations with the Mashreq Countries in Lebanon

11-15 February 2013

The European Parliament Delegation for Relations with the Mashreq Countries visited Lebanon between 11-15 February 2013, as part of the 11th Interparliamentary Meeting between the EU and Lebanon. The EP Delegation was headed by Ms Marisa Matias (GUE/NGL, Portugal) and composed of Mrs Rodi Kratsa (EPP, Greece), Mr. Sajjad Karim (ECR, United Kingdom) and Mr. Franz Obermayer (Non-attached, Austria).

The program of the visit included meetings with the President, Prime Minister and Speaker of Parliament, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs, Social Affairs and the Interior, the heads of political parties, members of the Foreign Affairs and Human Rights Committee of the Lebanese Parliament, the President of the State Council and the Commander-in-Chief of the Lebanese Army. The Delegation also met the representatives of international organisations and NGOs working in the areas of elections, human rights and refugee issues and visited Syrian refugees in the Bekaa Valley in order to acquaint itself with their situation on the ground.

During the meetings, discussions focused mainly on the crisis in Syria and its repercussions on Lebanese politics and society, the refugee crisis and the electoral reform process.

The Delegation strongly supports the efforts made by the Lebanese government to preserve the stability, security and territorial integrity of Lebanon.

In the light of the appalling violence in Syria, the Delegation highly appreciates the open-border policy and Lebanon's efforts to help the Syrian refugees in coordination with international organisations. It also recognises the huge political, security and economic burden on Lebanon caused by the rapidly growing number of refugees, added to the presence of Palestinian refugees. The European Union and its Member States are the leading donor for humanitarian assistance. The Delegation reiterates the EU's commitment to stand by Lebanon and to support it in all possible ways to deliver an appropriate response to this significant challenge, which is beyond its capacity. In this respect, it commends the excellent and unrelenting efforts made by UN bodies and humanitarian NGOs and calls upon all international donors, especially the Gulf States, to cooperate more closely with international organisations to increase the effectiveness and continuity of the assistance in the interests of the most vulnerable.

The Delegation welcomes the ongoing electoral reform process and expresses the hope that a new comprehensive electoral law will soon be adopted, in the best democratic interests of the Lebanese people and in time for the legislative elections to be held in June 2013. Nevertheless Members of the Delegation call all Lebanese parties to address the electoral framework and technical aspects of the elections as soon as possible, including the issues of pre-printed ballots, women's representation,

an independent election commission and the simplification of voter registration procedures as set out in the EU election observation report of 2009. The Delegation also urges all Lebanese parties to encourage and increase the participation of women in political life and the decision-making process.

The Delegation underlines the importance of an independent, impartial judiciary and supports comprehensive judicial reform in Lebanon. This is a focus of EU cooperation with Lebanon. A well-functioning judicial system is a prerequisite for good governance, the rule of law and a credible and predictable business environment which will also improve the economic perspectives of the country.

For more information:

Secretariat of the EP Mashreq Delegation 0032 498 98 32 48