



Plenary sitting

B9-0323/2023

5.7.2023

MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

to wind up the debate on the statements by the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

pursuant to Rule 132(2) of the Rules of Procedure

on the situation in Lebanon
(2023/2742(RSP))

**Christophe Grudler, Olivier Chastel, Dacian Cioloș, Bernard Guetta,
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on behalf of the Renew Group

**European Parliament resolution on the situation in Lebanon
(2023/2742(RSP))**

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on Lebanon, in particular that of 16 September 2021¹,
- having regard to its resolution of 23 November 2022 on promoting regional stability and security in the broader Middle East region²,
- having regard to the Euro-Mediterranean Agreement of 30 May 2006 establishing an Association between the European Community and its Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of Lebanon, of the other part³ and the EU's new agenda for the Mediterranean,
- having regard to the final report of the EU Election Observation Mission to Lebanon of 2022,
- having regard to the commitments agreed in the framework of the EU-Lebanon Partnership Priorities in November 2016, the CEDRE (Conférence économique pour le développement, par les réformes et avec les entreprises) Conference in Paris of 6 April 2018, the Reform, Recovery and Reconstruction Framework (3RF) of the EU, UN and World Bank of 4 November 2020, the International Support Group for Lebanon meeting of 23 September 2020 and the International Conference on Assistance and Support to Lebanon of 9 August 2020 and 2 December 2020 organised by France and the UN,
- having regard to the visits to and statements made on Lebanon since the explosion of the port of Beirut by French President Emmanuel Macron, Vice President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell, Council President Charles Michel and European Commissioner for Crisis Management Janez Lenarčič,
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 7 December 2020 on Lebanon,
- having regard to Council Decision 2021/1277 of 30 July 2021 concerning restrictive measures in view of the situation in Lebanon⁴, providing for the freezing of funds and economic resources of natural persons responsible for the grave financial, economic, social and political crisis in Lebanon and the prohibition on making funds and economic resources available to them and natural or legal persons, entities and bodies associated with them,

¹ OJ C 117, 11.3.2022, p. 143.

² OJ C 167, 11.5.2023, p. 25.

³ OJ L 143, 30.5.2006, p. 2.

⁴ OJ L 277I, 2.8.2021, p. 16.

- having regard to the Staff-level Agreement of 7 April 2022 between the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Lebanon for a four-year extended fund facility for a comprehensive economic reform programme and the statement by the EU, UK, US, Canada and Japan of 7 April 2023 that ‘one year from the Staff-level Agreement with the IMF, little has been done’,
 - having regard to the reports by Human Rights Watch (HRW) on the explosion of the port of Beirut, in particular the report of 3 August 2021,
 - having regard to the World Bank’s Lebanon Economic Monitor of 1 June 2021 and to the Beirut Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment prepared by the World Bank Group in cooperation with the European Union and the United Nations,
 - having regard to Decision No 1/2016 of the EU-Lebanon Association Council of 11 November 2016 agreeing on EU-Lebanon Partnership Priorities and to the proposal for a Council decision on the position to be taken on behalf of the European Union within the Association Council set up by the Euro-Mediterranean Agreement establishing an Association between the European Community and its Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of Lebanon, of the other part, as regards the extension of the EU-Lebanon Partnership Priorities until new updated joint documents are adopted by the EU and Lebanon (COM/2021/0406),
 - having regard to the joint statement by 38 UN member states including France, Germany and Italy, delivered at the UN Human Rights Council on 7 March 2023, calling for an international fact-finding mission to investigate the explosion,
 - having regard to the four Geneva conventions of 1949 relating to the status of refugees and their additional protocols, ratified by Lebanon,
 - having regard to Rule 132(2) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas since 2019 Lebanon has been enduring one of the world’s top three most severe economic and financial crises since the mid-19th century, according to the World Bank; whereas on 17 October 2019 mass protests broke out with protesters calling for deep economic and political reforms to address corruption; whereas the Lebanese lira has lost more than 90 % of its value since 2019 and most depositors are still unable to access their savings;
- B. whereas Riad Salameh, Governor of Lebanon’s Central Bank since 1993, is the subject of an international arrest warrant issued in May 2023 at the request of France and Germany on charges of money laundering, fraud, forgery, embezzlement and participation in a criminal association; whereas he is under investigation for these offences in five European countries; whereas on 22 May 2023, Lebanon’s caretaker government convened to discuss his case and took no decision;
- C. whereas on 4 August 2020, the world’s largest non-nuclear explosion occurred at the Beirut port, killing over 220 people, including over 20 EU citizens, wounding 7 000, displacing 300 000 and destroying or damaging 74 000 homes; whereas 2 750 tons of military-grade ammonium nitrate had been stored at the port since 2013; whereas the US Federal Bureau of Investigation probe revealed that the amount of exploded

ammonium nitrate, estimated at 500 tonnes, was a fraction of the original shipment of 2 750 tonnes, indicating that most of the chemicals had been taken away before the explosion;

- D. whereas the findings of independent investigations published in the Guardian newspaper revealed strong ties between the company used to import the 2 750 tons of military-grade ammonium nitrate to Beirut's port and Syrian-Russian businessman George Haswani, who has been under EU sanctions for supporting Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's repression since 2015; whereas Mr Haswani's business was registered on the same day and in the same shelf company in the UK as the company importing the ammonium nitrate; whereas the Assad regime has needed ammonium nitrate to manufacture containers filled with explosive material in order to drop approximately 82 000 barrel bombs on its population in the past decade, killing at least 11 087 civilians, including 1 821 children, according to the Syrian Network for Human Rights;
- E. whereas the national investigation into the explosion, led by Judge Tarek Bitar, has been obstructed by Lebanese authorities including the Finance, Justice and Interior Ministries, the Public Prosecutor and members of Lebanon's Parliament who mostly share similar political affiliations; whereas Judge Bitar has been subjected to an intense smear campaign in media controlled by the accused, spreading multiple unfounded allegations;
- F. whereas on 2 July 2021 Judge Bitar requested that Parliament lift the immunity of three of its members in order that they could be charged for criminal negligence and homicide with probable intent concerning the explosion of the port, due to their ministerial responsibility while the dangerous material was being stored; whereas two of the charged former ministers have since been reelected and are currently sitting members of parliament; whereas a majority of Lebanon's Parliament had not lifted their immunity as of June 2023;
- G. whereas the Minister of Finance is affiliated with the same political party whose politicians have led over 25 legal challenges to disqualify Judge Bitar and the judge who confirmed the competence of Judge Bitar; whereas the Minister of Finance publicly stated that he would not sign the judicial appointments required for the investigation to move forward;
- H. whereas on 25 January 2023 the Public Prosecutor ordered the release of all suspects held in pre-trial detention without any due process; whereas his wife was among those charged by Judge Bitar a few days prior to her release; whereas the Public Prosecutor is appointed by the Higher Judicial Council, which in turn is mostly appointed by the Government; whereas the release was considered illegal by the Beirut Bar Association, the Lebanese Judges Association and the Lebanese Coalition for the Independence of the Judiciary;
- I. whereas the Interior Minister publicly stated in December 2020 that he would not task security forces with arresting the accused former ministers despite Judge Bitar's order;
- J. whereas no national investigations have identified any suspects in the murders that preceded and followed the explosion at the port; whereas according to HRW's report of

February 2022, national authorities committed gross negligence, failures and procedural violations in multiple politically sensitive murder investigations related to the explosion; whereas whistle-blower Colonel Joseph Skaf, former director of the port's narcotics department, who had warned his hierarchy of the danger of storing the chemicals in 2014, was murdered in 2017; whereas Joe Bejjany, who photographed the hazardous hangar before and after the explosion, was murdered and his telephone was stolen in December 2020; whereas activist and publisher Lokman Slim was murdered in February 2021, 10 days after he accused Hezbollah of providing the Assad regime with the ammonium nitrate;

- K. whereas in a joint statement of 7 March 2023 at the UN Human Rights Council, 38 states, including 24 EU Member States, condemned the obstruction and interference in Lebanon's domestic investigation and called for the investigation to proceed;
- L. whereas, a report published on 5 May 2023 by anti-corruption non-governmental organisation Reform Initiative for Transparent Economies and published in the EU Observer on 27 May 2023, found wastage of EU funds and poor mitigation of risks of fraud regarding EUR 30 million of EU funds for 16 solid-waste management facilities under the ARLA (assistance to the rehabilitation of the Lebanese administration) and SWAM (upgrading solid waste management capacities in Lebanon) programmes;
- M. whereas, following the Arab Spring and the popular uprising in Syria in 2011, the Assad regime launched a campaign of brutal repression against its own population, killing over half a million people and displacing almost half of its total population, leading to 6 million people becoming refugees and 7 million internally displaced;
- N. whereas, in this context, millions of Syrian woman and men have fled to neighbouring countries, including an estimated 1.6 million to Lebanon; whereas the Lebanese people welcomed them despite their own economic hardships and political sensitivities; whereas the Assad regime, with direct military support from Iran and Russia as well as Hezbollah, has held on to power in Damascus;
- O. whereas the EU is the largest donor of humanitarian aid to Syrian as well as Palestinian refugees in the region, including in Lebanon; whereas building schools, hospitals and infrastructure to provide minimum living standards to refugees has helped the region overcome the multiple challenges related to hosting refugees;
- P. whereas the EU has simultaneously funded Lebanon's infrastructure such as its sewage system and basic food imports such as cereals, and has significantly increased its humanitarian support to Lebanon since the 2019 crisis;
- Q. whereas Syrian refugees have been wrongfully blamed for the current economic and political crisis in Lebanon despite endemic corruption and financial mismanagement in Lebanon itself;
- R. whereas many Syrian refugees returning to Syria have suffered enforced disappearance, torture and death in custody according to HRW's reports; whereas no effective guarantees have been provided by the Assad regime as regards the right of Syrian refugees to safely return and enjoy their basic rights, such as the right to having their property returned, which is often looted and sold to regime officials;

1. Condemns in the strongest terms the lack of any progress in Lebanon's fight against corruption and impunity since the beginning of the 2019 economic crisis and the explosion at the port; urges the Council to make use of the EU sanctions framework on Lebanon established in July 2021; calls for targeted EU sanctions on five individuals, including the former Prime Minister, the State Security Chief, the Finance Minister and the two former Ministers of Public Works overseeing the port, given their role in the explosion at the port and their obstruction of the investigation and of the rule of law;
2. Urges the Member States to form an international coalition ahead of the UN Human Rights Council session of October 2023 and to call for an international and independent commission of inquiry on the explosion at the port of Beirut;
3. Recalls the particular responsibility of all political factions in the current crisis; urges them all to finally endorse and defend the Lebanese people's claims;
4. Condemns the arbitrary suspension of Lebanon's Parliament by its President from October 2022 to May 2023, in violation of Lebanon's Constitution, which states that the Parliament should remain in session until a president is elected; underlines the essential role played by the Lebanese Parliament in the country's democratic life;
5. Expresses its deepest concern at the additional institutional vacuum created by the lack of a president since October 2022; calls for an election of a Lebanese President to be held as soon as possible in order to appoint a prime minister and a government as swiftly as possible in order to restore trust in the Lebanese state;
6. Commends Lebanon's leading role in hosting Syrian refugees since the Syrian uprising of 2011; is, however, deeply concerned about the repatriation of Syrian refugees to Syria organised by Beirut; reiterates that Syria cannot be considered a country of safe return; condemns the Syrian regime for torturing and imprisoning returning refugees; stresses that only the voluntary, safe and dignified return of Syrian refugees should be contemplated in the long term and that the conditions for such a return are not being met at present by the Assad regime; calls on Lebanon to abide by the customary principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution; demands, in order to support all those who have suffered persecution in Syria, the registration of all the Syrian refugees on a special list in order to provide more efficient aid granted through international solidarity and to ensure that contributions reach those who need help the most;
7. Urges the Lebanese Parliament to pass new legislation to ensure the independence and impartiality of the judiciary, in line with international standards; regrets that this legislation in its initial draft proposed in 2018 was in line with international standards and was subsequently rendered ineffective through amendments;
8. Urges the authorities to fully cooperate with Judge Bitar, who is leading the investigation into the explosion of the port; strongly condemns the culture of impunity that has flourished in Lebanon; is concerned about attempts to intimidate independent members of civil society through various means; notes that victims and families cannot wait any longer for justice to be done;
9. Invites the Commission and the European Public Prosecutor's Office to investigate the case of the alleged misuse of EU funds for waste management facilities; underlines that

the EU should oversee the projects and deliver funding in instalments following independent verifications for each phase of the relevant projects in order to compensate for Lebanon's high risk of corruption; stresses the importance of credible experts carrying out due diligence on contractors with clear objectives, lines of accountability and minimised conflicts of interests; calls for stronger anti-fraud measures, including via whistle-blower platforms; calls for the EU and its partners to publish all relevant documents allowing for independent scrutiny by civil society; underlines that such standards and best practices should be shared across all international donors wishing to help Lebanon;

10. Calls for all EU economic assistance to be conditional upon the effective implementation of reforms aimed at enhancing transparency and democratic practices within the institutions; calls for humanitarian aid to continue to be provided to the Lebanese population and refugees, with strict controls;
11. Reiterates its call on the Commission and the Member States to release additional humanitarian aid given the dire conditions on the ground, in particular food aid and hospital and pharmaceutical material;
12. Calls for the prompt appointment of a new Governor of the Lebanese Bank and the establishment of an independent audit to identify malfunctions and initiate proper legal prosecution;
13. Calls for the European Union, the international community and friends of the Lebanese people to react immediately following the reforms undertaken and support all Lebanese people impacted by the crises;
14. Calls once again on the Lebanese authorities to resume talks with the IMF as soon as possible and to implement prior commitments made;
15. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the UN Secretary-General, the Secretary-General of the Arab League and the Government and Parliament of Lebanon, and asks that it be translated into Arabic.