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*Plenary sitting*

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**B9-0324/2023**

5.7.2023

## **MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION**

to wind up the debate on the statement 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))

**Marisa Matias**  
on behalf of The Left Group

**B9-0324/2023**

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

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to the Charter of the United Nations,
  - having regard to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the additional protocols thereto,
  - having regard to the statements of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and her spokesperson on the situation in Lebanon,
  - having regard to the reports of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) on the situation in Lebanon,
  - having regard to UN Security Council Resolution 1701 (2006) of 11 August 2006,
  - having regard to 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<sup>1</sup>,
  - having regard to Rule 132(2) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas Lebanon held a general election on 15 May 2022, electing a new parliament in which none of the country's existing political blocs has a clear majority; whereas the term of office of President Michel Aoun expired on 31 October 2022, yet after 12 voting sessions, the most recent of which took place on 14 June 2023, the Lebanese Parliament has been unable to elect a new president;
- B. whereas the Lebanese Parliament voted to allow President Aoun and his cabinet of 24 ministers, of whom only one is a woman, to continue holding their positions indefinitely as a caretaker cabinet, even though the party of Prime Minister Najib Mikati, the Azm Movement, failed to gain any seats in the May 2022 election;
- C. whereas this political deadlock is a consequence of a multi-layered political, economic and social crisis affecting all spheres of the Lebanese State; whereas there have been major mobilisations by the Lebanese population in recent years to demand changes in the sectarian system and an end to corruption and neoliberal economic policies;
- D. whereas Lebanon's economic situation has deteriorated continuously in recent years and the situation is currently dramatic; whereas Lebanon's GDP per capita fell by 36.5 % between 2019 and 2021 and the Lebanese pound has lost 95 % of its value since 2019, resulting in a massive loss of purchasing power for the majority of the population; whereas the devaluation of the Lebanese pound has caused the country's minimum salary to be the equivalent of USD 17 per month; whereas according to the UN, 74 % of

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<sup>1</sup> OJ L 143, 30.5.2006, p. 2.

the Lebanese population now lives in poverty, up from 42 % in 2019;

- E. whereas Lebanon has recorded the highest nominal food price inflation rate in the world, at 350 %; whereas the World Food Programme estimates that 37 % of the Lebanese population is food insecure, a percentage that rises to over 65 % in the case of the Syrian refugee population; whereas the World Food Programme has donated USD 5.4 billion to Lebanon for 2022-2025;
- F. whereas public water companies in Lebanon are in a critical condition as a result of the devaluation of the Lebanese pound, which makes it impossible for them to sustain their infrastructure or services as they cannot pay for fuel or staff salaries; whereas the UN has estimated that this puts 71 % of the population at immediate risk of losing access to a safe water supply; whereas there have already been episodes of social conflict around access to water;
- G. whereas there are currently serious electricity and gas shortages in the country, which are causing the Lebanese people's livelihoods to further deteriorate; whereas people have on average access to around two hours of electricity each day; whereas this situation affects key infrastructure, including hospitals; whereas the shortage of fuel has created social tensions, resulting in outbreaks of violence;
- H. whereas the deteriorating economic situation and the rise in poverty have led to difficulties in accessing basic rights, such as healthcare and housing, and to increased emigration; whereas certain sectors have been particularly badly affected by this situation, in particular the health sector, which suffers from medicine shortages and a lack of professionals; whereas many hospitals have had to cease all or some of their operations after large numbers of health workers left the country because of the economic and political situation;
- I. whereas pensions, social benefits and public servants' salaries have been subject to steep cuts in recent years; whereas the last cut was on 31 March 2023, when public sector salaries were halved, sparking massive protests among pensioners and public sector workers;
- J. whereas Lebanon is one of the most unequal countries in the world, with a high rate of billionaires per capita despite the poverty rates; whereas the richest 10 % possess over 70 % of the country's wealth;
- K. whereas economic hardship, austerity policies and widespread corruption have sparked several waves of protests in recent years, the largest of which took place around the 17 October Revolution, which began in 2019; whereas protests and social unrest are still common for these reasons, and continue to take place throughout the country;
- L. whereas in recent decades Lebanon has experienced waves of privatisations and market deregulation, which have paved the way for this situation; whereas in April 2022 Lebanon agreed to a EUR 3 billion financing programme entailing a series of obligations related to the development of public-private partnerships, the deregulation of strategic sectors, and austerity policies that have aggravated the social consequences of the economic crisis;

- M. whereas Lebanon has suffered from widespread corruption, exacerbated by the confessional political system, which deters any form of social and political organisation on a national level and promotes a sectarian approach; whereas Transparency International ranked Lebanon 150th of 180 countries in its Corruption Perceptions Index; whereas Monaco's Prosecutor General is conducting a money laundering investigation against Prime Minister Mikati, who also features in the Pandora Papers;
- N. whereas in the context of widespread social protests against austerity measures and other neoliberal policies, on 4 August 2020 an explosion in the port of Beirut, the result of 2 750 tonnes of ammonium nitrate being stored without appropriate security measures, caused 218 deaths and over 7 000 injuries and left an estimated 300 000 people homeless; whereas those politically responsible for this explosion are yet to be held accountable and judicial investigations have repeatedly been blocked by political interference;
- O. whereas the port of Beirut received over 70 % of the country's imported goods, whereas the explosion has had a dramatic economic impact on the country, including on the availability of basic products, with the effects still being felt to this day;
- P. whereas the Lebanese electoral system is based on sectarianism and does not ensure adequate representation of the country's political reality; whereas protesters in the different waves of demonstrations that have taken place in recent years have repeatedly called for a new and proportional electoral system;
- Q. whereas local elections were initially due to take place on 7 May 2023; whereas on 17 April 2023, less than a month before the elections, the Lebanese Parliament passed a law to extend the municipal councils' term for a maximum of one year, in a vote boycotted by several opposition parties;
- R. whereas in July 2021 the Council adopted a framework for targeted sanctions against Lebanese officials or organisations responsible for obstructing or undermining the democratic political process or the implementation of plans and reforms approved by the Lebanese authorities and supported by international actions, or against those involved in serious financial misconduct; whereas this framework was extended until 31 July 2023 but has still not been applied against any individual or organisation;
- S. whereas there have been serious attacks on press freedom, particularly in connection with journalists reporting on social protests and corruption cases, including unjustified arrests of journalists and censorship of Lebanese media;
- T. whereas Article 534 of the Lebanese Penal Code is still used to prosecute and arrest LGBTI people; whereas in some areas of the country, men suspected of same-sex relations are routinely arrested and subjected to degrading treatment in police stations;
- U. whereas there are over 1.5 million Syrian refugees in Lebanon; whereas the Syrian population in Lebanon has been hit very hard by the ongoing economic crisis and over 90 % of them live in extreme poverty, up from 55 % in 2019; whereas the Lebanese authorities routinely deport Syrian refugees because of their administrative situation; whereas since April 2023, controls and security at Lebanon's borders have been stepped up in an attempt to block further arrivals from Syria;

- V. whereas there are around 250 000 Palestine refugees in Lebanon, 45 % of whom live in one of the country's 12 refugee camps and depend entirely on UNRWA assistance for their livelihood; whereas UNRWA continues to operate and play a crucial role, despite its chronic lack of funding; whereas the conditions in these camps have deteriorated and are characterised by overcrowding and poor housing conditions; whereas, as they are not formally citizens of a state, Palestine refugees are discriminated against in Lebanon and cannot own property or access 39 professions; whereas 80 % of Palestine refugees live below the poverty line; whereas around 30 000 Palestine refugees from Syria are now in Lebanon, having suffered two displacements; whereas they are in an extremely vulnerable situation, with 95 % of them being food insecure;
- W. whereas the Israeli military routinely attempts to intimidate the Lebanese authorities and population by conducting military flights and other exercises in Lebanese airspace; whereas since the end of the 2006 war, Israel has continued to launch airstrikes on southern Lebanon, most recently on 7 April 2023, with three strikes on the town of Rashidieh;
- X. whereas the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon has been present in southern Lebanon since 1978, having been established with the mandate of confirming Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon after its invasion; whereas since the mission was established, Israel has launched military invasions of the country on two more occasions; whereas Israel has continuously occupied a portion of Lebanese land known as the Shebaa Farms since 1967;
- Y. whereas in October 2022, Lebanon and Israel reached an agreement on the delimitation of their maritime borders and on the joint exploitation of gas in the Qana gas field; whereas concerns have been raised about the environmental impact of this project;
- Z. whereas relations between the EU and Lebanon are guided by the Association Agreement, which entered into force in April 2006; whereas since 2011 the EU has supported Lebanon with EUR 2.77 billion in financial aid and technical assistance, including humanitarian assistance and support to respond to the Syrian crisis;
- AA. whereas a European Parliament delegation visited Lebanon from 19 to 23 June 2023 for the 16th Interparliamentary Meeting with the Lebanese Parliament, having the opportunity to meet with institutional counterparts but also to hear the voices of Lebanese people, including families of victims of the Beirut port blast;
1. Expresses its full solidarity with the Lebanese people in the current context of overlapping political, economic and social crises; expresses its support for civil society and demonstrators calling for social and economic justice, as well as all those fighting for an end to corruption and sectarianism;
  2. Strongly echoes the Lebanese people's powerful calls for change, transparency, accountability, good governance and democratic reform;
  3. Commends the role of essential public sector workers who, despite having their salaries cut by more than half in recent years because of austerity measures, have continued to deliver key services to the population in areas such as health, education and care;

4. Expresses concern about the current deadlock and calls on all parties to act responsibly and put the interests of the Lebanese people before particular interests, allowing for the election of a president and the formation of a government that can address the urgent needs of the Lebanese people;
5. Recalls the importance of adopting a clear stance against corruption to improve transparency and accountability among Lebanon's political and economic powers;
6. Insists that the Lebanese people must decide on their own future without external interference and recalls that the ongoing crises are connected to foreign meddling in Lebanon's internal affairs with a view to exercising political power over the country and making its economy completely dependent on outside actors;
7. Recalls that the current economic situation, including the massive increase in prices of basic products, growing poverty, and lack of access to rights such as healthcare, is directly linked to neoliberal and austerity policies; warns against the adoption of new packages stemming from international financial institutions that are conditional upon a series of reforms that would further entrench this failed model and calls on the International Monetary Fund not to put forward any further requirements relating to privatisations;
8. Recalls the important role of the taxation system in ensuring that key public services continue to function; stresses, in this regard, the need to introduce a tax system based on the principle of progressivity and to introduce measures to fight tax evasion at all levels;
9. Highlights the need to promote sustainable solutions to tackle the food insecurity and energy crises and the need to provide direct humanitarian support, in line with the recommendations of the Food and Agriculture Organization; calls for the EU's humanitarian support to be coupled with support for farmers and agricultural workers and other forms of support for local food production, as well as investment in infrastructure for generating renewable energy in the country;
10. Insists on the need to include local civil society organisations in the design, planning, coordination, implementation and evaluation of all international cooperation interventions with both Lebanese and non-Lebanese populations; stresses the need to protect and promote an independent civil space for activists, human rights defenders and local civil society organisations in the ongoing context;
11. Expresses deep concern over the postponement of the local elections and calls for them to be held without further delay; recalls the important role played by municipalities in Lebanon in delivering key services that have collapsed or been on the verge of doing so in recent years, such as waste collection;
12. Calls for an immediate end to the culture of impunity that prevails in Lebanese institutions and urges the authorities to remove all obstacles to ongoing judicial investigations, particularly in cases of corruption;
13. Highlights the need to ensure accountability in connection with the 2020 Beirut port explosion through an independent investigation into the facts; condemns the obstacles repeatedly placed in the path of judge Tarek Bitar by political actors, including attempts

to dismiss him to prevent the investigation from continuing; insists that the port of Beirut is key infrastructure for Lebanon and needs to be reconstructed;

14. Stresses Parliament's previous call for the EU and its Member States to take the lead at the UN to secure a resolution establishing an international, independent investigation into the Beirut port explosion mandated with conducting a thorough investigation into violations and abuses related to the explosion and the domestic judicial investigation, and formulating recommendations on measures necessary to guarantee that those responsible for these violations and abuses are held accountable and to address the underlying systemic failures that led to the explosion and to the failure of the domestic investigation;
15. Calls for the repeal of Article 534 of the Lebanese Penal Code and for an end to all forms of legal and institutional violence against and persecution of LGBTI people; calls for the abolition of other discriminatory laws such as those barring Palestinians from having the same rights as other foreign residents;
16. Praises the tremendous efforts made by the Lebanese people to host Syrian refugees;
17. Deplores deportations and other violations of the principle of non-refoulement with respect to Syrian refugees in Lebanon; recalls that Syria cannot be considered a safe country for returns; calls on Lebanon to become a party to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and to its 1967 protocol;
18. Expresses concern regarding the increasing public speech against Syrian refugees that has infiltrated Lebanese debate and that tends to mask the other dimensions of the crisis, including the failure of the Lebanese State to address the basic needs of its own people;
19. Calls for additional EU support for the UN's Lebanon Humanitarian Fund in order to guarantee a high degree of protection for Syrian refugees in Lebanon; stresses the need to also make more resources available to the hosting communities and to locally led and locally owned organisations and initiatives supporting the livelihood of refugees, including research initiatives documenting human rights abuses in Lebanon and in the context of forced returns;
20. Highlights the important role of UNRWA and the contribution it makes to the livelihoods of Palestine refugees, and therefore stresses the need to ensure continued and additional political and financial support for UNRWA so that it can fulfil its mandate and meet increasing needs on the ground; raises concerns about the significant shortfall in UNRWA's emergency appeal, which is crucial in addressing the worsening humanitarian situation faced by vulnerable Palestine refugees in Lebanon;
21. Calls for Israel's immediate and unconditional withdrawal from the Shebaa Farms and all other territories it occupies;
22. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the President of the European Council, the President of the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the presidents of the parliaments of the Member States, the Parliament of Lebanon, the UN Secretary-General, the Secretary-General of the Union for the Mediterranean, and the League of

Arab States.