

# How serious is the EU about supporting democracy and human rights in Lebanon?

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## Executive summary

Europe is deeply involved in and affected by the situation in Lebanon. From the European Union's perspective, Lebanon's security is vital for the security of the entire Mediterranean region, which is judged to be producing increasingly serious threats to the EU's own stability and strategic security. For Europe, Lebanon is not only key to the Arab-Israeli conflict but also holds great symbolic significance as a model of confessional coexistence in a region rife with sectarian tension.

For almost four years, Lebanon has been in a crisis caused by the upsetting of the political equilibrium in place since the end of the Lebanese civil war in the early 1990s. The end of Syrian direct control over Lebanese politics unleashed a political game of musical chairs in which local and regional players have struggled to ensure that they hold the upper hand in the new consensus that will govern Lebanon. As feared by Lebanese citizens and predicted by many observers, the political crisis eventually erupted in the worst internal fighting since the civil war. The outbreak of violence in the second week of May 2008 forced politicians—through Qatari-sponsored mediation—to return to dialogue to resolve the 18-month political impasse between the governing March 14th coalition and opposition March 8th parties. The Doha Agreement of 21 May and the formation of a national unity cabinet on 11 July have ended the immediate risk of further violence. However, the underlying problems that prompted the crisis remain unresolved and are likely to resurface in the lead up to the elections for parliament in the spring of 2009.

The dynamics of this most recent crisis are not new to Lebanon. Due in large part to the confessional political system, which mandates that political and institutional

power be distributed among religious communities, the country's modern history has been characterised by waves of political gridlock and conflict interspersed with periods of relative calm as a result of temporary stopgap measures. This system has proven to be a fundamentally flawed mechanism for creating sustainable political representation in Lebanon.

Unlike the case of other countries in the European Union's neighbourhood where the dilemma of stability versus democracy has undermined the EU's commitment to political reform, the recognition that the Lebanese political system is in fact the cause of instability has led to a full European commitment to the need for reforming Lebanon's internal reality as well as geopolitical context in order to stabilise the country. As a result, European states as well as the European Union's institutions have attempted to tackle the multifaceted challenges facing Lebanon. Since the end of the Lebanese civil war, European diplomatic activity has focused on acting as a mediator between internal and regional forces to prevent the disintegration of the Lebanese political system. This has consisted mainly of an attempt to reinvigorate the Middle East peace process. Furthermore, European external aid has provided Lebanon with significant amounts of financial and technical aid and assistance to promote state reconstruction and institutional reform.

Despite the EU's commitment to reform, its record has highlighted the limits of its role as a positive agent for democratic reform in Lebanon. These impediments stem both from the EU's weakness as a strategic player in the Middle East capable of affecting the geopolitical context of the region, and from a flawed approach to reforming the

Lebanese state. The EU has been unable to develop a coherent and overarching strategy that addresses the real hurdles to political reform in Lebanon. The EU's state building approach in Lebanon focuses on traditional developmental and technical aid that does not address the main problems of state capacity and state accountability. Also, there is a lack of systematic coordination on assistance to Lebanon both between individual member states of the European Union in their bilateral cooperation with Lebanon as well as between member states and the European Commission. Furthermore, European states have pursued traditional diplomatic mediation approaches that do not attempt to coordinate with democracy assistance tools.

### The Lebanese confessional system: flawed but entrenched

Lebanon's political system is one of the most complex in the Middle East. Based on the premise that a careful balance in all aspects of political life must be maintained among the seventeen recognised religious communities, this confessional system has given Lebanon a semblance of democratic practice: regular elections, numerous political parties, and news media that are relatively free and lively compared with other Arab countries. At the same time, the distribution of power on a confessional basis has prevented the emergence of a state, let alone a democratic one.

All political and bureaucratic positions in Lebanon are allocated along confessional lines. The institutionalisation of long established social, cultural identities based on confessional and sectarian loyalties has resulted in a collection of de facto mini-states responsible for all the needs of their respective constituents rather than in a central authority capable and willing to deliver basic services to citizens.<sup>1</sup> Lebanon holds regular elections for the parliament but it cannot be described as an electoral democracy. The sectarian balancing act prevents the establishment of an electoral law that will guarantee fair representation. Electoral districts are blatantly gerrymandered before every election to ensure the re-election of incumbent deputies and to result in weak coalitions of independent candidates.<sup>2</sup>

The segmented political landscape and the absence of national institutions render Lebanon ungovernable when there are political disagreements among the leaders of the major communities. In the absence of a central authority to arbitrate, political actors are involved in zero sum negotiations where every compromise is seen as a threat

to their existence. As a result, systemic instability has haunted the country since independence, surfacing in episodes of violence, the most significant of which was the 1975–1990 civil war.<sup>3</sup>

The confessional system also makes Lebanon particularly vulnerable to the political and strategic battles of its difficult neighbourhood. The fact that it is impossible for any one domestic force to generate sufficient power to govern invites the disproportionate influence of outside actors, so that different Lebanese factions appeal to different external actors for financial and/or diplomatic assistance that can be translated into greater power internally. Syria, like many foreign powers before it, was able to exploit the weaknesses of the confessional system both during and after the Lebanese civil war, ultimately becoming the main power broker in Lebanon.<sup>4</sup>

Many Lebanese politicians acknowledge the flaws of the existing system and have paid lip service to 'deconfessionalisation', that is abolishing power-sharing arrangements that divide executive and legislative power into sectarian allotments.<sup>5</sup> The corrupt patronage system, however, has created vested interests in perpetuating the status quo. The confessional system has also prevented the emergence of powerful grassroots demands to change the system. The debate surrounding electoral reform is perhaps the most telling example of the fact that despite a realisation by the political elite that the current system is inefficient and unrepresentative, the focus is always on short-term benefits or concessions rather than structural change. The problems of Lebanon's election law are widely acknowledged and an independent National Commission on Electoral Law Reform was formed in August 2005 to identify needed revisions. The commission submitted a draft law to the Council of Ministers on 1 June 2006 that addressed the major flaws in electoral legislation. Following years of squabbling over the details, politicians finally reached an agreement in May 2008 that made a passing reference to the draft legislation proposed by the commission, but in fact ignored its key provisions.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> An informal agreement has existed since 1943 whereby the president must always be a Maronite Christian, the prime minister a Sunni Muslim, and the speaker of parliament a Shia Muslim. The members of this troika have almost equal power, though in different capacities. The parliament's 128 seats are equally divided among Muslims and Christians, and subdivided proportionally among the two groups' various denominations.

<sup>2</sup> Since the end of the civil war, the ad hoc districting system also served to undermine potential opponents to Syria's role in Lebanon.

<sup>3</sup> Changing demographic trends compounded by the involvement of external actors in Lebanon resulted in the outbreak of civil war in 1975. The Arab–Israeli conflict brought the inherent conflicts of the Lebanese system to a head as groups inside Lebanon split over the domestic presence of armed Palestinian forces. The 1989 Ta'if Accord, an agreement brokered by several Arab states (particularly Saudi Arabia), ended the Lebanese civil war and codified many of the provisions of the 1943 National Covenant, thus perpetuating the principle of confessional distribution of power.

<sup>4</sup> Syrian military forces first entered Lebanon as a peacekeeping force in 1976, invited mainly by Christian Lebanese and endorsed by the Arab League.

<sup>5</sup> The Ta'if Accord proposes ways to abolish confessional representation but these proposals are not part of a serious national political debate.

<sup>6</sup> As part of the Doha agreement of 21 May 2008 politicians agreed to return to the 1960 electoral law that adopts small electoral districts.

## Searching for a new *modus vivendi*: implications for political reform

The assassination of Rafiq al-Hariri, the former prime minister, on 14 February 2005, and the subsequent withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon in April 2005 have shaken the local and regional equilibrium that governed Lebanon since the end of the civil war. The end of Syrian tutelage over Lebanese politics unleashed issues that were suppressed since the close of the civil war, ranging from sectarian relations and the distribution of power to the question of Hizbullah's arms and the status of armed Palestinian refugees.

The withdrawal of Syrian troops also reflected the end of the wider international consensus that emerged at the end of the Lebanese civil war based on the assumption that stability was the first priority in Lebanon and that Syria could ensure this objective by keeping the fractious sectarian groups and militant organizations in check. Beginning in 2000 regional developments gradually eroded this international consensus. As a result of the collapse of Israeli–Syrian negotiations, the death of the Syrian president, Hafez al-Asad, Israel's withdrawal from South Lebanon, the US war in Iraq, and the ascendant power of Iran in the region, Lebanon is once again at the heart of a strategic tug-of-war between the region's main players: Iran, Syria, Israel, and the United States. The current situation in Lebanon must therefore be understood against the deterioration of the Arab–Israeli conflict and the increasing tension in US - Syrian and US - Iranian relations.

The upsetting of the old local equilibrium coupled with the fierce regional and international competition has pushed Lebanese politicians to adopt maximalist positions, which does not bode well for a process of democratic political reform. Within a year of the Syrian withdrawal, the disparate parties and confessional groupings had coalesced into two rival camps. The March 14 group (named after the largest of the protests in 2005 to demand Syrian withdrawal) is composed primarily of Sunni, Druze, and Christian politicians and controls the majority of seats in the parliament. It receives diplomatic support from the United States, France, and key Arab states such as Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Egypt. Its main goal is to contain Syrian ambitions and, more specifically, to ensure the implementation of a UN resolution to establish a tribunal to try suspects in the al-Hariri assassination. The March 8 group (named after the largest Hizbullah-led protest in 2005) brought together the two Shia parties (Hizbullah and Amal) with the Maronite Free Patriotic Movement led by Michel Aoun. The March 8 group denies the legitimacy of the March 14 coalition as the governing majority, claiming its actions have been unconstitutional. The March 8 group's international patrons are Iran and Syria, with Damascus providing political and material assistance and, in Hizbullah's case, military supplies.

Both groups believe that Lebanon's identity and its future relations with its neighbours and international actors are at stake in the current tug-of-war: March 14 strives to prevent further involvement in regional conflict and accuses Hizbullah of being subservient to Syria and Iran; March 8 accused March 14 of working for US and Israeli interests. In a very worrying trend, the conflict has been acquiring greater sectarian overtones.

The confrontation between the two blocs was exacerbated by a wave of assassinations of politicians and journalists belonging to the March 14 group that began in late 2004. In 2007, a series of car bombs also began targeting civilians and commercial neighbourhoods in and around Beirut.<sup>7</sup> The devastating 34-day war launched by Israel on Lebanon in summer 2006, after Hizbullah kidnapped two Israeli soldiers and killed three others, further exacerbated the political divide and renewed sectarian anxiety.<sup>8</sup> It also ended the attempt by Lebanese politicians to find through negotiations compromise solutions for the major issues that divided the two camps.<sup>9</sup> The standoff between the political groups virtually paralysed the institutions of the Lebanese state.

The outbreak of violence in May 2008—the worst internal fighting since the end of the civil war—demonstrated the extent to which the parties perceive the conflict as an existential one, one that was threatening their very existence as parties and communities of influence. A government decision on 6 May to reassign the head of Airport Security at Beirut International Airport and to investigate and dismantle a separate telecommunications network run and controlled by Hizbullah triggered violent clashes in which fighting units of Hizbullah and Amal attacked and overran positions defended by armed supporters of the government. The Qatari-mediated Doha agreement of 21 May has averted further violence by filling the institutional vacuum. The parties agreed to elect Michel Sleiman, the former commander-in-chief of the army, as president thus ending the six-month presidential vacuum. They also formed a unity government on 11 July, in which the governing majority has 16 seats and the opposition got their long-standing demand of 11 cabinet seats—which guarantees them veto power. The new president nominated the remaining three ministers.

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<sup>7</sup> The March 14 group accused Damascus of being behind these incidents in order to eliminate the group's parliamentary majority through a step-by-step physical elimination of legislators. On the other hand, the March 8 group claimed that only Israel would benefit from the disintegration of public order in Lebanon.

<sup>8</sup> The conflict between 12 July and 14 August 2006 resulted in the death of over 1,000 Lebanese civilians, displaced almost one million Lebanese, and caused extensive damage to infrastructure, public services and livelihoods. Prospects for Lebanon's economic growth and development were seriously undermined.

<sup>9</sup> The leaders of fourteen political groups launched a series of meetings—known as the National Dialogue—on 2 March 2006, and initially made some progress. They agreed to set up the tribunal to try the suspects in al-Hariri's assassination, disarm Palestinian factions outside refugee camps within six months, and establish full diplomatic ties with Syria. They also agreed that the Shebaa Farms—an Israeli-occupied area on the Lebanese-Syrian border—is Lebanese, not Syrian territory. But two of the most controversial issues remained unresolved: the UN calls for the disarmament of Hizbullah and the fate of President Emile Lahoud.

The situation, however, remains very volatile since the local and regional triggers discussed above are still firmly in place. Furthermore, Hizbullah's use of its arms internally has intensified communal animosity and provided fertile ground for radicalization and rearmament among other factions in Lebanon. The tension between the two camps in Lebanon continues to threaten domestic stability and undermine the chances of political reform. Debates about political and economic reform, which already had a slim chance of leading to significant change in the first place, have now been completely undermined by short-term tactical considerations as the various political forces struggle to obtain and retain the upper hand in the new balance of power.

The role of European states in the latest crisis has highlighted the centrality of Lebanon's stability for Europe's interests. From Europe's perspective, Lebanon's security is vital for the security of the entire Mediterranean region and therefore preventing the disintegration of the Lebanese political system is a priority. To achieve this objective, the focus has been primarily on diplomatic activity aimed at mediating between internal and regional forces.

### Europe's diplomatic power: strengths and limitations

The European Union's diplomatic record throughout Lebanon's recent crisis has highlighted its strengths and weaknesses as a strategic player not just in Lebanon, but also in the Middle East in general. A discussion of European diplomatic activity has to begin with the separate foreign policies of the EU member states most involved in Lebanon. Despite converging interests and greater coordination between their activities, European states continue to operate based on their own considerations.

#### 1. France

France's historic ties with Lebanon (Lebanon was governed by France as a League of Nations mandate between 1919 and 1943) have placed it at the forefront of European diplomatic activity. French policy since the end of the Lebanese civil war has focused primarily on maintaining special relations with Lebanon and avoiding instability. In light of this objective, France acquiesced to Syrian military presence in Lebanon based on the assumption that Syria would restore public order by keeping the fractious sectarian groups and militant organisations in check. At the same time, France was always keen to maintain its influence in both countries. Former French president Jacques Chirac had particularly close ties to Lebanon due to his personal relationship with Lebanon's former prime minister, Rafiq al-Hariri. With Bashar al-Asad's succession in Syria in 2000, France also

increased its contacts with Syria and involved itself in the new process of administrative reform in the country.<sup>10</sup>

By 2004, France had started to lose confidence both in Syria's stabilising role in Lebanon as well as in the Syrian government's willingness to deliver economic and administrative reform.<sup>11</sup> Syria's brazen interference with the Lebanese political system to keep former president Emile Lahoud in office—coupled with Chirac's growing disenchantment with Bashar al-Asad—exacerbated French concerns and ultimately led France to join the United States as co-sponsor of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1559 (September 2, 2004) calling for the withdrawal of "all remaining foreign forces," understood to mean Syria, from Lebanon. The resolution also called for the "disbanding and disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias," a clear allusion to Hizbullah. According to French officials, this clause went against French preferences of not alienating the movement but was included upon US insistence.

Following al-Hariri's assassination, France suspended relations with Syria and strongly backed the establishment of an international tribunal to investigate the murder. As the Lebanese political scene grew increasingly polarised, France also provided strong diplomatic support to the March 14 coalition.

The Élysée was also very active in pushing for a cease-fire agreement between Israel and Hizbullah following the summer 2006 war and France helped draft the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701 which was unanimously adopted on 11 August 2006. France committed 2,000 troops to the reinforced UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) mission.<sup>12</sup>

French policy toward Lebanon under President Nicolas Sarkozy has experienced some changes in its style. Firstly, in marked contrast to Chirac's mandate, Sarkozy has made an effort to depersonalise relations between French and Lebanese politicians. For example, in his first visit to Lebanon, Sarkozy led a delegation of French ministers and the leaders of France's major political parties to Lebanon, becoming the first Western head of state to

<sup>10</sup> Chirac invited Bashar al-Asad to make a state visit to France in June 2001, dispatched trusted advisers to help steer administrative modernisation, and sent a close aide (Jean-François Girault, a former presidential adviser) as ambassador to Syria.

<sup>11</sup> In addition, Syria granted a contract for exploitation of new gas fields to a US-British-Canadian consortium, not to France's Total.

<sup>12</sup> On 11 August 2006 the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1701, which called for: a cessation of all attacks by Hizbullah and an end to Israel's offensive operations; the parallel withdrawal of Israeli troops and deployment of the Lebanese army; an increase in the size of the UNIFIL force stationed in the area since 1978 from previously 2000 to up to 15,000 troops as well as a broader and more robust UNIFIL mandate authorizing force to ensure its area of operations was not utilised for hostile activities of any kind; a central role for the UN Secretary-General, who was to present specific proposals aimed at resolving disputed border issues within 30 days (report submitted on 12 September), notably including the status of the disputed Shebaa Farms. As of 30 April 2008, UNIFIL employs 12,341 military personnel, supported by 307 international civilian and 606 local civilian staff. European countries involved include: Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Luxemburg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, and Sweden.

meet President Michele Sleiman since his election on 25 May. According to Sarkozy, the decision to bring such a large and diverse delegation for the occasion was intended to show that “France’s solidarity with the Lebanese people and our country’s commitment to Lebanon’s independence and sovereignty have nothing to do with parties, or individuals.”<sup>13</sup>

Secondly, French policy under Sarkozy has adopted a more conciliatory position towards the “March 8” group than under Chirac in the hope of creating an environment more conducive to the resolution of the gridlock. This has been accompanied by a much more vigorous shuttle diplomacy approach. Soon after his election, Sarkozy sent a high-level envoy to Lebanon to restart the frozen dialogue between the parties and invited all the Lebanese factions involved in the national dialogue to an inter-Lebanese meeting at Celle Saint-Cloud in France in July 2007.

Thirdly, France has made considerable diplomatic investment in restoring high-level ties with Syria since Sarkozy’s accession in May 2007. After a highly publicised initial attempt by France’s foreign minister Bernard Kouchner to enlist Syrian support failed to push forward a resolution to the Lebanese crisis, Sarkozy announced he would freeze relations with Syria and would only renew them if Damascus collaborated in diffusing the Lebanese crisis. Soon after the election of a new president in Lebanon, France moved to restore high-level contacts with Syria, sending two senior envoys—Jean-David Levitte and Claude Guéant—to meet with Bashar al-Asad in Damascus on 15 June 2008. These efforts culminated in a very public and symbolic trip by al-Asad to Paris to attend the summit for the Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean and join in Bastille Day celebrations on 12-14 July 2008.

At the summit, Sarkozy announced that Syria and Lebanon would open embassies in both countries, a very significant development given Syria’s resistance to fully normalising relations with Lebanon. Such a normalisation would entail exchanging embassies, but more importantly, demarcating the border between Syria and Lebanon. Sarkozy also called for reviving efforts to negotiate the EU-Syria association agreement.

Despite the changes in style from Chirac to Sarkozy, French policy guidelines in Lebanon remain the same: promoting internal dialogue to avoid instability in Lebanon, and ensuring that Syria’s grip on Lebanon does not derail French influence in the country. It can be said that Sarkozy has tried to send the message to Syria that his approach is different from that of Chirac, but that he still has firm conditions for engagement. France has also continued

to collaborate with the United States on Lebanon policy and both countries have strived to portray an image of harmonised policy decisions.<sup>14</sup>

Other European member states have historically been less involved than France in the internal politics of Lebanon and view the country primarily through the lens of broader regional interests. Efforts in this context have focused on an attempt to reinvigorate the Middle East peace process

## 2. Germany

Germany is vested in maintaining stability in Lebanon due to a concern that conflicts in the region could have an impact on European security and due to its sense of historical responsibility for Israel’s existence and security. Under the leadership of Angela Merkel, German chancellor since November 2005, the German government declared the Middle East conflict to be one of its top priorities. The German presidency of the EU (from January to June 2007) had three main goals for its Middle East policy: to revive the Middle East Quartet, to stabilise Lebanon, and to achieve progress towards a comprehensive peace settlement. Following the 2006 war, Lebanon became one of four large-scale missions with a long-term orientation for the German government.<sup>15</sup> German sensitivities to the potential danger of German troops clashing with Israeli soldiers limited Germany’s involvement in UNIFIL (which began on 15 October 2006) to commanding the Maritime Task Force (MTF) along the coast of Lebanon, whose task, in conjunction with the Lebanese navy, is to prevent arms smuggling at the country’s maritime borders. On 29 February 2008 Germany handed over the command of the MTF to the European Maritime Force (EUROMARFOR) that is currently led by Italy.<sup>16</sup>

Germany has also taken the lead in assisting the Lebanese government in controlling the land border with Syria to curb cross-border smuggling and illegal arms trade. The project focuses on providing technical support and training to Lebanese security forces and is managed by the German Federal Ministry of the Interior and the Federal Foreign Office in collaboration with Denmark, the United Kingdom, and the United States with funds from the European Commission.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, Germany has also been carrying out a key role in the realisation of indirect talks on the exchange of prisoners and remains between Israel

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<sup>14</sup> Although the United States initially voiced unease over the Franco-Syrian rapprochement, US secretary of state, Condoleezza Rice said on 14 June she was confident that France would “communicate the right messages” to al-Asad.

<sup>15</sup> The others missions are Bosnia since 1995, Kosovo since 1999, and Afghanistan since 2002.

<sup>16</sup> As of May 2008, the German Navy is still the biggest contributor to the UNIFIL MTF sending four vessels. These four vessels are complemented by two Italian, two Greek, one French, one Spanish and one Turkish vessel to comprise the 11-vessel UNIFIL Maritime Task Force.

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<sup>13</sup> Interview given by Sarkozy to Lebanese newspapers on 7 June 2008. Full text: <http://www.ambafrance-uk.org/President-Sarkozy-gives-interview,10740.html>.

and Hizbullah.<sup>17</sup> Most recently, Germany helped mediate a deal on 16 July in which Hizbullah exchanged the bodies of two Israeli soldiers captured in July 2006 in return for five Lebanese prisoners and the remains of 200 Lebanese and Palestinian fighters.

### 3. Italy

Italy's involvement in Lebanon has reflected the shifts in its policy toward the southern Mediterranean in general, which has been characterised by a trend whereby centre-left governments have favoured relations with the EU whereas centre-right governments have favoured developing closer ties with the United States. In this context, Italy's increased involvement following the 2006 war reflected the eagerness of Romano Prodi's centre-left government (elected in April 2006) to cooperate with other EU members to reinforce a European foreign policy and depart from the "Atlanticism" of the Berlusconi era. Engagement in Lebanon presented Italy with a window of opportunity to take the lead in bolstering European efforts to revive the Middle East peace process and more broadly to inject momentum into the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP). Italy was very active in trying to end the 2006 war between Israel and Lebanon and hosted a conference in Rome on 26 July 2006 to discuss how to bring an end to the conflict and to pledge future support for Lebanon's reconstruction. Italy also pushed to enlarge the UNIFIL presence in South Lebanon and contributed the largest contingent with 2,450 troops.

Since Silvio Berlusconi's re-election in April 2008, statements both by Berlusconi and the Italian foreign minister, Franco Frattini, have reflected a harder stance on the issue of Hizbullah's disarmament. Berlusconi pledged to maintain Italian troops as part of UNIFIL, but alluded to the need to revise the rules of engagement for UNIFIL soldiers. Frattini formulated these demands initially, but in mid-June 2008 stated that for the moment, it was not possible to rework UNIFIL's rules of engagement given the situation in the country but that the rules of engagement in their current form, if fully applied, would suffice. In an 8 July visit to Israel, Frattini also expressed Italy's willingness to mediate in direct peace negotiations between Israel and Lebanon.

### 4. Spain

Spanish policy toward Lebanon has been framed within its policy toward the Arab-Israeli conflict and by its leading role in the Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean. In this context, involvement in Lebanon gives Spain the opportunity to be more involved both in the Middle East as well as within Europe. As in the case of Italy, the change

in leadership in Spain has also increased Spanish activity in Lebanon. Spanish foreign minister, Miguel Angel Moratinos (who assumed his post in March 2004), has a history of involvement in the Middle East peace process and a personal conviction that Spain should be more involved in the region. The numerous visits by Moratinos to Lebanon and Syria during the summer 2006 war and subsequent visits aimed at getting the Lebanese parties to agree on a new president, indicate a clear decision by the Spanish government to be involved in the crucial political moments in Lebanon. The Spanish contribution to UNIFIL (1,100 troops) has also raised the stakes for Spanish policy in the country.

### Strengths and limits of European diplomacy in Lebanon

European states' diplomatic record in Lebanon shows that Europe can play an important and constructive role in mitigating conflict, primarily by convincing domestic actors to step back from the brink and therefore avoid the disintegration of order. Unlike other foreign powers with interests in Lebanon, Europe has exhibited a conciliatory approach based on a consensus around the notion that Lebanon cannot be governed without the agreement of its principal political coalitions and, therefore, that Europe must actively pursue the role of mediator. This common approach was expressed most clearly through the coordinated visits to Lebanon of the foreign ministers of France, Spain, and Italy (Bernard Kouchner, Miguel Angel Moratinos, and Massimo D'Alema) in October and November 2007. Joint European involvement in UNIFIL has also increased the leverage of the EU in preventing a new violent conflict on Lebanon's southern border.

EU member states have also adopted a nuanced approach to the question of Hizbullah's arms. While acknowledging that the existence of an armed militia independent of the government is an obstacle to democratic reform in any country, European states have for the most part demonstrated acceptance of the fact that the debate over Hizbullah's status is very complex because it is not limited to the Lebanese context. Most European governments perceive that since its establishment in 1982, Hizbullah has become a multifaceted organization that is a political party, a vast social welfare network, and a regional movement and militia allied with Syria and Iran to deter US and Israel's ambitions in the region. Given this reality, European states accept the fact that barring a breakthrough in the Arab-Israeli conflict, the prospects of the group's disarmament remain very distant. This is accompanied by a belief that the disarmament of Hizbullah can only be done in a cooperative and gradual manner, in full consultation with Hizbullah itself. As such, European states have preferred to engage the group and make efforts to reduce or contain the likelihood of Hizbullah using its large military potential—an approach that has given Europe a fair degree of diplomatic leverage.

<sup>17</sup> The largest prisoner exchange took place in January 2004 when Israel released 400 Palestinians and 23 Lebanese, in exchange for an Israeli reservist and the remains of three other Israeli soldiers.

For example, Germany is interested in maintaining its rather unique role as a successful mediator in prisoner swaps between Hizbullah and Israel.

In light of these considerations, most European governments have resisted including Hizbullah on the list of terrorist organisations despite the fact that in March 2005 the European parliament branded Hizbullah as a terrorist organisation and urged EU governments to place the group on their terrorist blacklists.<sup>18</sup> France, Spain, and Italy have been particularly opposed to this designation. The Netherlands, on the other hand, included Hizbullah in its terrorism list in 2004. The British government added the military wing of Hizbullah to a list of terrorist groups banned in the United Kingdom on 2 July 2008.<sup>19</sup>

While these positions have helped European efforts at mediation, the recent crisis has highlighted the extent to which Europe is limited in its ability to bring about a sustainable solution. Europe has limited influence on the likelihood of a comprehensive regional, political, and diplomatic agreement between the United States, Iran, and Syria that would address all issues of regional concerns. Such an agreement would allow efforts at stabilisation to occur in a less explosive environment.

Despite the convergence of some member states' policies in Lebanon, deep disagreements among European states continue to impede a unified European policy. This was demonstrated most visibly in European states' response to the summer 2006 war between Israel and Lebanon. While the large majority of the EU's 25 states called for an immediate cease-fire, the United Kingdom mirrored US policy, insisting that it would be futile to demand an end to the fighting until the "necessary conditions for a durable, sustainable ceasefire that would prevent a return to the status quo ante" were present.<sup>20</sup> The EU's High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana visited Lebanon at the height of the conflict but he was not given a mandate by the Finnish EU presidency to speak on behalf of the 25 member states, as recommended by Jacques Chirac. At the end of the crisis, Chirac explicitly expressed his concern that the European Union was insufficiently active in the crisis and that its slow reaction to stop the destruction of Lebanon highlighted the weaknesses of the EU's foreign policy.<sup>21</sup>

In addition to vigorous diplomatic activity, the European Union's policy for stabilising Lebanon has relied on significant financial aid, allocated both at the multilateral level (mainly through EU institutions) as well as bilaterally through the individual member states.

## Member states' assistance to Lebanon

The EU member states' bilateral aid is very limited, relative to the levels of aid they channel multilaterally (either through the EU commission or through UN agencies). In general, European bilateral aid to Lebanon has consisted of financial and technical assistance aimed at improving socio-economic standards and strengthening state institutions. Although some funds have also been allotted to "governance" objectives and human rights projects, democracy promotion has not been a central objective of this aid.

### 1. France

France is one of the main contributors of aid, particularly since the French government declared Lebanon part of the Priority Solidarity Zone on 14 February 2002. French aid consists mainly of technical assistance and training in education, scientific research, and in public administration. It has also provided funding for reconstruction in the water, electricity, civil aviation, and health sectors. Following Lebanon's civil war, France was the main driver behind multiple donor conferences to develop an economic reform plan for Lebanon and request economic aid for the post-war reconstruction.<sup>22</sup> France also contributes limited funds to "governance," which entails mainly the modernisation and streamlining of state institutions. The French embassy in Lebanon has also worked on human rights issues with local NGOs, most recently on raising awareness of the violation of human rights of immigrant workers in Lebanon.

### 2. Italy

Italy's bilateral aid to Lebanon focuses on the environment, water management, agro-technologies, health, and technical assistance, and does not include any political reform aid. This is a reflection of Italy's wider foreign policy, which has never developed an external human rights and democracy support programme. The only office within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs dealing with human rights issues is the multilateral office. Under Berlusconi, Italy offered to chair the Democracy Assistance Dialogue of the US-driven Broader Middle East Initiative, but this was widely interpreted as an attempt to foster relations with the United States rather than an increased interest in the promotion of democracy per se.

<sup>18</sup> The European Parliament declared that "clear evidence exists of terrorist activities by Hizbullah" and that "[that EU] Council should take all necessary steps to curtail them," during a 10 March 2005 session in Strasburg. The resolution was nonbinding on the European Council, which would have to come to a unanimous agreement to approve such a designation.

<sup>19</sup> According to Home Office minister Tony McNulty, the action has been taken amid concerns over the extent to which Hizbullah is helping Shia militias in southern Iraq (where Britain has 4,000 troops). He clarified that Hizbullah's social and political work in Britain would be unaffected.

<sup>20</sup> The UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office: <http://www.fco.gov.uk/servelet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1155215622782>

<sup>21</sup> "Jacques Chirac deplore que l'Europe ait été trop absente de la crise libanaise," *Le Monde*, August 28, 2006.

<sup>22</sup> France convened the first meeting with international institutions to discuss Lebanon's economic development on 23 February 2001. The Paris I meeting raised €500 million in international aid. The Paris II meeting on 23 November 2002 raised €4.2 billion (€3.1 billion in financial aid and €1.3 billion in project aid).

### 3. Spain

Spanish bilateral aid to Lebanon has also focused on humanitarian objectives and socio-economic development. This reflects a general trend of Spanish policy in the Middle East. Guided by pragmatic considerations about maintaining good ties with governments because of geographical proximity, Spanish policy has been characterised by the low-level of involvement in democracy and human rights issues, regardless of the party in power. According to Spanish officials, due to its limited resources in Lebanon, the Spanish government would rather work on short-term projects with demonstrable impact. Spain has recently expressed its intention to start engaging in projects aimed to advance political development in Lebanon. The 2005-2008 Master Plan for Spanish Cooperation establishes Lebanon as a country deserving "Special Attention" and identifies "governance" as one of the strategic sectors.<sup>23</sup> The objectives include: strengthening political pluralism; encouraging greater participation of civil society; enhancing the rule of law by strengthening judicial and economic institutions; and modernising public administration. The projects introduced in this sector so far, however, have only focused on administrative reform: institutional building of the insurance control commission, a seminar on human resource management in public administration, a seminar on tax systems, and seminar on trade. Even programmes that can more readily be classified as "democracy assistance" have in practice only targeted technical issues. For example, Spain's programme on "strengthening the judiciary system in Lebanon" comprises modernising the organisation and material means of departments in the Ministry of Justice as well as training activities for judges.

Spain's Agency for International Cooperation (AECI) recently declared the launch of a programme on "governance and institution strengthening in the Mediterranean". The project is based on the explicit logic that Spain enjoys a comparative advantage as a democracy promoter due to its recent experience with democratisation. It aims to coordinate aid from public and private entities in Spain. It is not yet clear what type of projects this programme will fund since AECI's efforts to identify the priorities for engagement in Lebanon have been stalled by the country's political situation.

### 4. Germany

German assistance to Lebanon focuses on aiding reconstruction and development to maintain peace. The German government's bilateral aid has increased

significantly since the summer 2006 war, but the types of projects funded remain the same. Between 1990 and mid-2006, German funding for general development cooperation and humanitarian aid amounted to approximately €132 million.<sup>24</sup> The aid was geared mainly toward vocational and technical education as well as environmental protection. The German government classifies vocational training as human rights work, as reflected in the "Development Policy Action Plan for Human Rights 2004-2007."<sup>25</sup> After the war, Germany approved a €40 million package for 2006 and 2007 and pledged a further € 40 million for humanitarian aid and development assistance, but the priorities have remained the same.<sup>26</sup>

The German embassy in Lebanon funds projects by local NGOs on human rights issues, including abolishing the death penalty and promoting Lebanon's ratification of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. In addition, the embassy has financed a number of projects run by the Sustainable Democracy Centre (a Lebanese NGO) on strengthening inter-communal dialogue and abolishing confessionalism in the management of economic life and in the organisation of electoral and institutional influence.

Germany also provides assistance to Lebanese civil society through the party-affiliated political foundations (politische stiftungen), which are funded by the German Ministry of Economic Cooperation and have an explicit mandate to promote democracy at home and abroad. Several political foundations have projects in Lebanon, but only the Heinrich Böll Foundation (affiliated with the Green Party) and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (affiliated with the Social Democratic Party) have offices in Beirut.<sup>27</sup> Through its "Statehood and Participation" programme, the Heinrich Böll Foundation supports local NGOs "working on initiatives that demand accountability and due process and encourage citizens to become active and organised around issues of democratic participation".<sup>28</sup> The Friedrich Ebert Foundation has established "good governance" as one of its priorities in Lebanon and focuses on municipal politics.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Germany also provided Lebanon with bilateral aid worth approximately €42.3 million in the form of low-interest loans under Financial Cooperation (FC) and €23.2 million in the form of consulting services or supplies of material under Technical Cooperation (TC) proper.

<sup>25</sup> Federal Ministry for Economic Co-operation and Development, July 2004.

<sup>26</sup> Germany also provided immediate relief aid with over €6.5 million channeled through international aid agencies.

<sup>27</sup> Friedrich Naumann Stiftung, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung and Hanns Seidel Stiftung are covering projects in Lebanon from their offices in Amman.

<sup>28</sup> The Heinrich Böll Foundation's annual budget for projects in Lebanon is approximately €1 million. Its work includes improving electoral standards in Lebanon, regional initiatives to promote the independence of Arab judiciaries, and campaigning for equal nationality rights for women in Arab countries (women in Lebanon cannot pass on their nationality to their foreign spouses and children). <http://www.boell-meo.org/>

<sup>29</sup> The Friedrich Ebert Foundation had a 2007 budget of €155,000 and a 2006 budget of € 200,000. Its activities include: organizing workshops to increase the awareness of local politicians concerning the integration of environmental and women NGOs in municipal politics; training employees in municipal administrations within the fields of municipal law; integrating civil society in municipal politics; and encouraging youth participation. <http://www.feslb.org/>

<sup>23</sup> Spain's 2005-2008 Master Plan for International Cooperation places 15 countries in the "Special Attention" classification, which brings together countries in special circumstances due to the need to prevent conflict, weakness on human rights and the democratic system, and financial and social crises that increase the level of poverty in the most vulnerable sectors of society.

## 5. United Kingdom

The United Kingdom's bilateral aid to Lebanon integrates political reform aid in a more structured way than other European countries. The Global Opportunities Fund (GOF) established in 2003 at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office identified four priorities for democratisation in Lebanon: promoting the participation of women in society, good governance, the rule of law, and counter-terrorism. Between December 2005 and 2006, the UK provided £203,354 for technical assistance for Lebanon's National Commission on Electoral Law Reform and £101,000 for empowering youth civic organizations. Lebanon was also part of a number of regional GOF projects such as the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) for Arab Women Parliamentarians and the BBC Journalism Standards Training in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

In 2008 a new program replaced the GOF: the Strategic Programme Fund (SOF). The SOF has shifted the focus exclusively to counter-terrorism and frames political reform goals such as developing civil society, human rights, and rule of law within the counter-terrorism strategy. So far two new programs have been introduced aimed at "mobilizing youth against extremism" and "countering the influence of radical parties in Palestinian refugee camps".<sup>30</sup>

The British embassy in Beirut also funds small projects (between US\$1000 to US\$5000) in the following sectors: empowering youth, women, and underprivileged and marginalized segments of society; development and capacity building; human rights; and inter-communal dialogue.

### EU multilateral aid to Lebanon

EU multilateral aid to Lebanon has incorporated political reform objectives to a much greater extent than member states' bilateral aid. Certain elements in the approach, however, limit the effectiveness of this aid in promoting democracy. The most significant problem in the EU's approach to political reform in Lebanon is that it avoids dealing with the main blockages to democracy in the country. The framework's objectives, while worthy in and of themselves, do not target the sensitive but core issues of political representation and institutional power in Lebanon. Also, levels of aid destined to political issues continue to be very limited relative to other traditional developmental aid.

### The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership Initiative or Barcelona Process

The Barcelona Process, launched in 1995 to foster cooperation between the European Union's member states and the countries that qualified as "Mediterranean partners," introduced the issue of democracy into EU-Mediterranean relations, for the first time explicitly identifying political pluralism as a norm that should govern relations between Europe and the Arab world. The declared aim of developing a pluralistic democratic society based on respect for human rights and the rule of law would be pursued indirectly through three pillars: a political and security partnership to establish "a common area of peace and stability", an economic and financial partnership aiming to create "an area of shared prosperity" mainly through the establishment of a free trade area, and a social and cultural partnership dedicated to human resources development, better understanding between cultures, and exchange between civil societies.

The EU-Lebanon Association Agreement, which was signed in June 2002 and entered into force on 1 April 2006, focuses on reforms affecting EU-Lebanese trade relations, but also includes a clause stating that "relations between the two parties, as well as the provisions of this Agreement itself, shall be based on democratic principles and fundamental human rights as set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights."<sup>31</sup> The agreement establishes continuous "political dialogue" whereby Lebanon is expected to discuss political reforms with the EU.

Despite the stated intention to advance political reform, the distribution of MEDA assistance, the main financial instrument of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, has demonstrated that political reform is not a priority. Between 1995 and 2006, the total amount of funds committed under MEDA I and II was €417 million, but a very limited portion went to programmes related to political reform. MEDA focused instead on the rehabilitation of Lebanese administration, an investment-planning programme, industrial modernisation, and social and economic development.

Furthermore, in the few cases where programmes were defined as political aid, they focused on administrative and technical issues, not on democratisation. For example, the MEDA programme provided €1,500,000 for the reform of the Lebanese judiciary system, but this entailed providing conference halls for training judges, exchange study courses for judges in Europe, providing technical support to the Ministry of Justice for the preparation of a master plan for computerising all Lebanese court work, and purchasing works and magazines pertinent to the European legal

<sup>30</sup> The project "Mobilising Youth Against Extremism" will receive £ 189,000 for one and a half years to "build the capacity of youth-focused civil society organizations to use community action projects to divert youth from extremism". The program to "counter the increasing influence of extremist political parties on the youth in the Palestinian refugee camps of Rashidieh and al-Buss" will receive £ 70,665 for one and a half years.

<sup>31</sup> These principles "guide [the] internal policy and constitute an essential element of [the Euro-Lebanese Association] agreement", Association Agreement with Lebanon (Article 2).

system. MEDA also launched a €1,000,000 programme for strengthening Lebanese civil society, known as AFKAR, with the objectives of promoting of citizenship and rule of law, fostering inter-communal dialogue, and supporting marginalised groups.<sup>32</sup> The 16 projects funded had very worthy objectives, but only very few address issues that can be considered relevant to democratisation in Lebanon.

Another problematic element of the EU's financial support under MEDA was that the method of fund allocation reinforced the problems of political representation in Lebanon. For one thing, state representatives on MEDA's grant-awarding committee in Lebanon, attached to the Office for the Minister of State for Administrative Reform (OMSAR), are appointed according to sectarian affiliation. Also, OMSAR selected the Lebanese NGOs that would receive funds from the EU.

The priorities established in the National Indicative Programmes (NIP) 2002-2004 and 2005-2006 (which awarded €80 and €50 million respectively) also excluded political reform, and focused instead on support for the implementation of the Association Agreement, social and rural integrated development, support for environmental protection, cooperation in higher education, support for knowledge economy, and strengthening the competitiveness of the private sector. Although the 2005-2006 NIP mentions human rights and democratisation as a priority for EU policy in Lebanon, it does not allocate any funds for this goal. The priority defined as "supporting the implementation of the Association Agreement" includes sections on the "rule of law" and "support for human rights, civil society, and democracy" but these are comprised of short vaguely worded paragraphs that pledge support for "better protection of fundamental rights and civil liberties" without providing any details of what this entails.

### The European Neighbourhood Policy

The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), developed in 2004, places a more explicit emphasis on democracy and human rights compared with its predecessor Euro-Mediterranean Partnership Agreement. In line with its aims to differentiate more between southern Mediterranean states, the ENP introduced a more targeted approach to political reform in Lebanon. The financial support for the European Neighbourhood Policy has been provided for through a European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI), which replaced the former programmes of EU funding in Lebanon (such as MEDA).

The central element of the ENP is the bilateral Action Plan, which lays out the strategic objectives of cooperation between Lebanon and the EU. The Action Plan, adopted on

19 January 2007, includes the following priorities related to democratisation and human rights: support ongoing efforts to improve good governance and transparency in line with relevant UN conventions; implement plans for decentralisation and local government reform; strengthen measures against corruption through the effective implementation of a national anti-corruption strategy; reform of the electoral law; continue to develop an independent and impartial judiciary; establish a comprehensive human rights strategy, including protection of rights of minorities, marginalised populations and non-citizens; support freedom of media and freedom of expression; support freedom of assembly and association; development of civil society; and promotion and protection of the rights of women and children.<sup>33</sup>

The 2007-2010 NIP is the first document of its kind to allocate funds to political reform in Lebanon. Of the €22 million it allocates for this purpose (11.76% of the total allocation of €187 million), €10 million are destined to judicial and prison reform and €12 million to political reform.<sup>34</sup> The judicial component involves the improvement of transparency and the effectiveness of the judiciary, the improvement of prison detention conditions, and cooperation with the Lebanese government on security related issues. The political reform component includes multiple objectives: reforming the electoral law and electoral framework; supporting the preparation and implementation of the National Action Plan on respect for human rights; reforming the administrative framework to promote freedom of expression, association and assembly and independence of the media; supporting women's participation in political, economic and social life; promoting a child welfare strategy; strengthening measures against corruption through national anti-corruption strategy; and strengthening the capacity of civil society organisations to implement reforms and support initiatives that promote national identity and social inclusion.

The ENP has attempted to incorporate more monitoring mechanisms and benchmarks for its objectives. Firstly, progress reports evaluate the implementation of the Action Plan and, more precisely, the NIP. The first progress report for Lebanon (published on 3 April 2008) states that the political context has not yet allowed Action Plan objectives to be meaningfully addressed.<sup>35</sup> Secondly, sub-committees have been created to deal with the sectors contained in the Action Plan. A subcommittee on human rights, democracy, and governance has been established in Lebanon, but the progress report only cites two activities by the subcommittee.

<sup>33</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/lebanon\\_enp\\_ap\\_final\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/lebanon_enp_ap_final_en.pdf).

<sup>34</sup> Two other pillars are "support for social and economic reform" which receive € 86 million (45.99% of total) and "support for reconstruction and recovery" which receives € 79 million (42.25% of total). The last pillar reflects the change in the EU's cooperation objectives in the aftermath of the 2006 war. The European Commission boosted its contribution to Lebanon to €107 million for the year 2006 at that international donor conference that took place in Stockholm on 31 August 2006 to address immediate reconstruction needs of Lebanon.

<sup>35</sup> Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament, "Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2007", Sectoral progress report, Brussels, 3 April 2008.

<sup>32</sup> The maximum amount granted by project was €50,000. AFKAR II was recently launched with a budget of €3,000,000.

In April 2007 the subcommittee agreed to promote a public debate on the basis of the work of Lebanon's National Commission on Electoral Law Reform but no progress was possible in view of the political standoff. The subcommittee also renewed its pledge to implement the legislation that provides for a gradual transfer of prison management from the Ministry of Interior to the Ministry of Justice.

The NIP also integrates the concept of positive political conditionality by including the promise of more aid being granted in response to reform promises, namely through a "governance facility" that will deliver increased financial assistance to better-performing partners.<sup>36</sup>

The NIP also calls for the creation of a Lebanese national action plan on human rights and democracy, as proposed in the 2003 Commission Communication on "Reinvigorating EU actions on Human Rights and Democracy with the Mediterranean Partners." This plan—which is separate from the general Action Plan—would include a list of specific action points (which have not yet been indicated) as well as measurable benchmarks of performance with a clear timeline. The Lebanese parliament stated its intention of developing such a plan by the end of 2006 and of attempting to get it approved by the government in 2007, but these activities have been severely constrained by the political crisis.<sup>37</sup>

### **The European Initiative on Democracy and Human Rights**

In contrast to the ENPI, which only involves government-to-government cooperation, the European Initiative on Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) cooperates directly with Lebanese civil society and is able to fund NGOs without the Lebanese government's consent. Between 2002 and 2006, the EIDHR financial allocation for micro projects (managed by the EU Delegation in Lebanon) totalled €1,325,000, with a maximum of €100,000 per project. Micro projects focused on: training youth in human rights issues, protecting the rights of migrant workers and refugees, and promoting children's rights. The EIDHR has also funded macro projects (managed by the commission in Brussels) dealing with torture prevention and monitoring (€153,150), rehabilitation for torture victims (€348,693), and assistance for victims of torture (€642,000). The EIDHR also funded (with €1.9 million) an electoral observation mission to monitor the parliamentary elections of June 2005. This was the first time international observers monitored a Lebanese election.

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<sup>36</sup> The Governance Facility builds on the concept of a Democracy Facility that was launched in the 2003 Commission Communication on "Reinvigorating EU actions on Human Rights and Democracy with the Mediterranean Partners." This initiative was introduced for Mediterranean countries in 2006 and Morocco benefited from an increase in its annual allocation from the last year of the MEDA budget.

<sup>37</sup> Commission Staff Working Document Accompanying the Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament, "Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2007" Progress Report Lebanon, Brussels, 3 April 2008.

### **Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean (UMed)**

The most recent deliberations over EU policy in the Mediterranean reveal the continuing hurdles in the ability and willingness of the EU to promote democracy in its neighbourhood. The initiative of Nicolas Sarkozy, the French President, to launch a "Union of the Mediterranean" reveals that while many European leaders recognise that the Barcelona process has failed to deliver on its promises, a serious and much-needed introspective re-evaluation of the framework is not imminent. In addition, this most recent impulse to revitalise Euro-Mediterranean relations has moved the dialogue even further from the issue of political reform.

Sarkozy's "Union of the Mediterranean" proposal—first mentioned in his election night press conference on 6 May 2007—seems to be based on his concerns about the marginalisation of the Mediterranean in the world economy, the inadequacies of the EU's Mediterranean policy, and the erosion of France's role as a geopolitical actor in the Mediterranean. Many EU member states feared that the scheme—which excluded non-Mediterranean EU countries—was an attempt to revive French foreign policy at the expense of the framework of the Barcelona Process.<sup>38</sup> This opposition, particularly from Germany, ultimately transformed the original plan into what is currently being presented as an "upgrading" of the Barcelona Process.<sup>39</sup>

As a result of the rough evolution of this initiative, the details—particularly how it will fit into the framework of the existing Euro-Mediterranean agreements—remain murky. The European Commission proposed some broad guidelines in May 2008, but the official summit on 13 July 2008 in Paris under the French EU presidency has postponed hammering out the institutional and logistical details until a meeting of the foreign affairs in November 2008. What is clear after the July summit, however, is that the "upgrading" that is being envisioned does not include re-examining the issue of political reform.

The new initiative identifies the shortcomings of the Barcelona process as "the perceived lack of co-ownership by Mediterranean partners, the lack of institutional balance between the weight of the EU on one side and the

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<sup>38</sup> At a meeting of the heads of state and governments of France, Italy and Spain in Rome on 20 December 2007, the initiative was turned into a "Union for the Mediterranean" making room for some form of participation of the commission and, eventually, of non-Mediterranean EU countries eager to play a role in the region. At a meeting in Hanover on 3 March 2008, Angela Merkel, the German Chancellor's opposition to Sarkozy's plan led to the full inclusion of the EU's 27 member states.

<sup>39</sup> According to the joint declaration at the summit to launch the new initiative: "The Barcelona Declaration, its goals and its cooperation areas remain valid and its three chapters of cooperation (Political Dialogue, Economic Cooperation and Free Trade, and Human, Social and Cultural Dialogue) will continue to remain central in Euro-Mediterranean relations. The Five-Year Work Programme adopted by the 10th Anniversary Euro-Mediterranean Summit held in Barcelona in 2005 (including the fourth chapter of cooperation on "Migration, Social Integration, Justice and Security" introduced at that stage) and the conclusions of all ministerial meetings will remain in force." Full text: <http://www.ambafrance-uk.org/Summit-of-the-Union-for-the.html>

Mediterranean partners on the other, and the weak visibility and the perception by citizens that little is done to tackle their daily problems and their real needs".<sup>40</sup> In response, the new initiative will try to enhance co-ownership, primarily through the co-presidency of the UMed by an EU member and a partner country. It will also "make multilateral relations more concrete and visible through additional regional and sub-regional projects relevant to the citizens of the region".<sup>41</sup> So far, the projects presented at the inaugural summit are very technical projects focused on energy and energy security, environment, civil protection and transport.<sup>42</sup> The joint declaration at the summit of the Union for the Mediterranean includes only a brief mention of the commitment of governments to strengthen democracy and political pluralism.<sup>43</sup>

### Getting to the core of political reform in Lebanon: policy recommendations for the EU

The challenges to democratisation in Lebanon are colossal. In addition to entrenched domestic interests in the undemocratic system, the obstacles include an unreceptive regional environment characterised by seemingly intractable conflicts. Ultimately, EU policy is not a crucial factor in these dynamics. However, the EU can still serve as positive force for democratisation. In order to fulfil this role, EU policy must address both the structural domestic roots of the Lebanese predicament as well as external factors. This requires a coherent policy that coordinates between the different European tools in Lebanon: diplomatic mediation, political dialogue with Lebanese leaders, and democracy assistance. The following recommendations are intended as guiding principles for EU engagement in Lebanon:

- In the absence of a modicum of stability in Lebanon, political reform is a moot point. Thus, despite the limits to its ability to bring about a breakthrough in the regional context (as expounded in this paper), the EU should continue to pursue its conflict reduction role in Lebanon to ensure that the deep divisions that exist among political

<sup>40</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council, "Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean," Brussels COM (2008) 319/3.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> The projects include: an agreed plan for de-pollution of the Mediterranean; new sea routes and upgraded port facilities; a new road link for the Maghreb Arab states, Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya; a joint Civil Protection programme on prevention, preparation, and response to disasters; the creation of a Mediterranean Solar Plan to tap into alternative sources of energy; the establishment of a Euro-Mediterranean University; and a Mediterranean Business Development Initiative. Financial resources are expected to come from the private sector, international financial institutions and bilateral cooperation and contributions from EU member states and Mediterranean partners.

<sup>43</sup> The sixth paragraph of the joint declaration states: "Heads of State and Government underline their commitment to strengthen democracy and political pluralism by the expansion of participation in political life and the embracing of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. They also affirm their ambition to build a common future based on the full respect of democratic principles, human rights and fundamental freedoms, as enshrined in international human rights law, such as the promotion of economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights, strengthening the role of women in society, the respect of minorities, the fight against racism and xenophobia and the advancement of cultural dialogue and mutual understanding."

forces continue to be managed through institutional politics, and do not degenerate into renewed confessional and sectarian anxieties and conflict. In this context, the EU can:

- support a consensual debate in Lebanon that focuses on developing a national defence strategy. In his inaugural speech, President Sleiman mentioned the formulation of such a strategy as a priority for his term. Such a debate would address:

- security sector reform,<sup>44</sup>
- Hizbullah's weapons,
- the international tribunal,
- the need for border demarcation with Syria,
- the threat posed by Sunni militant forces within Lebanon targeting Lebanese security forces and international peacekeepers.

- continue its dialogue with Hizbullah. In that context, the EU should continue to resist US and Israeli pressure to include the group on its terrorism list.

- pressure Syria—through diplomatic engagement and negotiations on the EU-Syria association agreement—to release Lebanese prisoners in Syrian jails and fully normalise diplomatic relations with Lebanon, building on the recent announcement in Paris that the countries will open embassies in each other's capitals.

- search for diplomatic openings to promote a Syria-Israel and Lebanon-Israel comprehensive peace agreement.

- utilise its involvement in UNIFIL, not only to prevent violent conflict on Lebanon's southern border, but also to aid with the long-needed reconstruction of southern Lebanon.

- continue to provide humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon.<sup>45</sup>

- While acknowledging that there are no short-term prospects for a secular non-confessional and non-sectarian

<sup>44</sup> Lebanon's various security forces are politicised and divided into disparate elements that do not respond to a common higher civilian authority. There are no institutionalised relations among the different services or clearly delineated responsibilities.

<sup>45</sup> In 2006, 404 170 Palestinian refugees were registered with the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), with about half living in 12 official refugee camps. In addition, an estimated 45 000 refugees are not registered with UNRWA. Palestinian refugees in Lebanon have very limited access to the government's public health or educational facilities, and no access to public social services. The camps suffer from inadequate infrastructure, overcrowding, poverty, and an unemployment rate of 40 percent (Palestinian refugees are prohibited from working in seventy trades and professions). In addition to the humanitarian challenge, the camps pose grave security challenges for Lebanon. The political and security situation inside the camps lies outside the domain of the Lebanese security forces. In May 2007, a radical Islamist group, Fatah al-Islam, based in a Palestinian refugee camp in north Lebanon attacked Lebanese army posts launching a fierce battle in the camps.

Lebanon, the EU must push for reforms that address the key flaws in the confessional system. The EU's political reform programmes should target the sensitive but core issues of political representation and institutional power.

○ The confessional and sectarian system can only be challenged through the creation of institutions and processes that allow multiple socio-economic interests to cut across sectarian ones. The EU should support and foster movements and activities which are not limited or defined by sectarian interests. While technical assistance to different Lebanese institutions is helpful, it does not target the real causes of the deficiencies in their capacity and accountability.

○ Reform of the electoral system is a crucial area where some progress towards the eventual breakdown of the confessional and sectarian pressure on the electoral process could be made. While reform must be primarily a Lebanese process, the EU can assert its support for a reform of the electoral framework on the basis of the proposals by the independent National Electoral Commission formed in August 2005. It can also—at the request of the Lebanese parliament—help in election observer missions.

● If the EU is truly committed to political reform in Lebanon, the levels of aid allocated to political reform by the European Commission as well as member states to Lebanon should reflect this commitment.

● The EU's involvement in Lebanon should develop more institutionalised and systematic coordination on reform aid.

○ Member states should temper disconnects between different internal bodies involved in aid distribution. Some member states have taken steps in this direction, but so far these efforts have addressed security and development issues, not political reform. For example, the United Kingdom's Stabilization Unit (previously known as the Post Conflict Reconstruction Unit) has institutionalised liaison between the foreign, defence, and development departments in the context of responding to crisis situations. The unit, which was engaged in Lebanon during and after the conflict of summer 2006, coordinated British bilateral initiatives and other multilateral programmes for reconstruction and worked to develop options for longer term and more sustained support aimed at reforming Lebanon's security sector. The Italian and Spanish embassies in Beirut are also trying to promote synergy between UNIFIL, development NGOs, and the cooperation offices. These efforts should be encouraged and similar ones developed in the context of a political reform strategy.

○ While European embassies in Lebanon coordinate detailed funding issues and share information, this has not been matched by greater coordination in Brussels or national capitals over some of the bigger conceptual issues involved in reform strategies. Not until 2000 did commission officials begin preparing "country papers" incorporating information on member states' bilateral efforts as well as on commission programmes. Local coordination with member states now takes place in the framework of the annual work plans and is conducted through regular and thematic meetings.

● The EU should abandon its misguided tendency to assume that political change will follow naturally from economic reform. The EU's Association Agreements with Arab countries express an underlying logic that economic liberalisation—and particularly privatisation—necessary to meet the trade and economic reform requirements of the agreements will create new economic power centres that will, in turn, press for democratic political change. The experiences of countries in Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and elsewhere in the Middle East have shown that poorly run privatisation programmes can increase rather than decrease patronage and corruption. A privatisation programme in the context of Lebanon's sectarian system would consolidate networks of sectarian patronage, because Lebanon's political leaders would be acting as gatekeepers to free trade agreement-linked reforms. Furthermore, Lebanon lacks the tools to regulate private industries and prevent privatisation from becoming nothing more than an exchange of state corruption for private corruption.

● There is a need for more detailed benchmarks on the EU's political reform priorities and expected commitments to match the existing framework for economic and social priorities. There have been some attempts to devise mechanisms for a deeper and more operational focus for political dialogue on human rights, particularly through the call for a National Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy. This effort should be completed, encouraged, and emulated.

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