

Lebanon: Remarks by the High Representative / Vice-President Jos



Check against delivery!

Honourable Members [of the European Parliament],

Let us now focus – as you have requested – on the difficult situation in Lebanon.

As you know, there was a devastating explosion on the 4th of August in Beirut that struck the country in the financial, economic, and political dimension. The situation is compounded by the [coronavirus] pandemic and the consequences of the conflict in Syria, including the fact that Lebanon has been hosting over a million Syrian refugees for many years now. Last week, additionally, we witnessed a huge fire in the port of Beirut.

I am proud to say that our response to the explosion was swift and solid. We mobilised civil protection, immediate humanitarian and crisis response in the amount of €63 million. Our civil protection mechanism mobilised 17 Member States plus Norway and Turkey, with search and rescue teams and medical care providing life-saving assistance.

Our determination is strong and clear. The European Union is a long-standing partner and a major donor of humanitarian, development and other assistance to Lebanon and we remain committed to assisting the Lebanese people in the upcoming period.

Going forward, and as called for by President Macron during his visit on the 1st of September, we want to quickly see the formation of a capable, representative and accountable Lebanese government. It should deliver on a credible reform agenda as the Lebanese people has long been claiming. Concrete steps to reform the financial system and to adopt anti-corruption measures remain vital. As important are the reforms of the electricity sector and public procurement.

Lebanon also needs to reach an agreement with the International Monetary Fund in order to solve its deep economic crisis. It is also a precondition for a possible Macro-Financial Assistance programme from the European Union. We cannot do that without an agreement with the International Monetary Fund first.

We have recently finalised with the World Bank and the United Nations a joint Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment for rehabilitation and reconstruction, and work continues on its operationalisation. This should help to provide assistance in the future, and we will continue to apply safeguards to ensure that funds reach the intended beneficiaries. That is what the people of Lebanon asked, to give the help directly to the people in need. They do not seem to rely very much or to trust a lot their institutions and government.

Finally, an independent and credible investigation into the explosion should be conducted – and we stand ready to help.

We want to help Lebanon, but Lebanon must also do its part and urgently proceed to implement longstanding reforms.

Link to the video: <https://audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/video/I-194060>

Closing remarks

We require from Lebanon to implement reforms, helping to ensure the stability of the country and the stability of the region. We allocate the resources we have, but you know that we are at the end of the financial perspective, and as long as we do not have new resources, we cannot do more than what we are doing.

Some of you asked to change the position on Hezbollah. For the time being, the EU position on Hezbollah remains unchanged: the military wing of Hezbollah is under our sanctions regime. The presence of Hezbollah in the government is not new. We are convinced that engaging in a constructive dialogue with all political parties is a way of strengthening Lebanon's institutions, including the Lebanese Armed Forces, state security agencies, and this is key for the stability of Lebanon and the Middle East. To change the position on Hezbollah would require once again unanimity of all Member States and this is not the case.

Link to the video: <https://audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/video/I-195015>