

Moving forward in the EU-Lebanon relationship

I am happy to visit your beautiful country on 28 October for the first time in my capacity of European Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy, to discuss ways for strengthening the relationship between Lebanon and the EU.

Lebanon and the European Union have come a long way since the signature of their first Cooperation Agreement back in 1977. With the Association Agreement signed in 2002, Lebanon embarked on a new partnership with the EU. Our privileged relationship has been further reinforced since 2004, when the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) was launched, helping to strengthen our mutual prosperity, stability and security.

We offered Lebanon closer political links, gradual economic integration and practical cooperation across the policy spectrum. Our dialogue helps us target our financial assistance where it is most needed. It also enables us to discuss in an objective way even the most sensitive issues in the field of human rights such as the abolition of the death penalty.

The EU is committed to the stability of Lebanon. It is essential that reforms advance steadily despite a political situation in the country that has often slowed down the pace of implementation of agreed measures. There is, in my view, a real opportunity to push for further social and economic reforms, including a comprehensive infrastructure programme, a business environment which encourages investment, and effective social services for the benefit of all citizens and all regions of Lebanon.

Lebanon can remain confident that the EU will continue to support the country in its drive to reform. I look forward to signing during my visit to Lebanon on 28 October with Prime Minister Saad Hariri a financial package of €150 million for the period 2011 to 2013. This will support the Lebanese government's efforts in three main areas: political reform, social and economic reforms, and the reinvigoration of the economy.

Our partnership is based on a mutual commitment to common values, such as democracy and human rights, rule of law, good governance, market economy principles and sustainable development. It is important that all sections of society participate in building the EU-Lebanon relationship. The public debates organised in Beirut, with representatives of the Lebanese government and civil society, in October 2009, are a good example. The debates identified practical steps to implement the reform agenda with the EU's continued support.

The timing of this visit could not have been better. As we are now in the process of reviewing our policy with our neighbours, I look forward to hearing and discussing the views from Lebanon. What matters at the end of the day, is that EU and Lebanon cooperate in a spirit of mutual trust, for the benefit of their citizens. This is my objective for this visit in particular, and for the EU-Lebanon relations, in general.

Stefan Füle,

Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy