

European Commission confirms EU support to competitiveness, local development and justice

During a visit to Lebanon, the Director for Europe, Southern Mediterranean, Middle East and Neighborhood Policy at the EuropeAid Co-operation Office of the European Commission, Marcus Cornaro, signed two Financing Agreements with the Government of Lebanon in the presence of H.E. Prime Minister Saad Hariri.

This brings to three the number of EU/Lebanon Financing Agreements that enter into force in 2009, for a total amount of €42 million:

1. Reinforcement of private sector competitiveness (€14 million) which aims at strengthening enterprise support, with a specific emphasis on innovation and a further upgrade of the national quality management system.

2. Support to local development in Northern Lebanon (€18 million) which will address the poorest region of Lebanon by promoting sustainable development.

This project seeks to develop the sectors of agriculture, environment and infrastructure in the North, especially in Akkar. The local population will play an active role in the definition and implementation of priority projects.

3. Modernisation of the Lebanese justice system (€10 million). This program aims at consolidating the Rule of Law by supporting the modernization of the justice sector. It will support the implementation of the Ministry of Justice's Information Technology Master Plan, improve access to justice and provide specialized training to judiciary staff.

During his visit, Mr. Cornaro also held bilateral meetings with H.E. Prime Minister Saad Hariri, H.E. the Minister of Finance, Raya el-Hassan, and the President of the Council for Development and Reconstruction, Nabil el Jisr, exchanged views on EU-Lebanon co-operation and further encouraged Lebanon to use the European Neighborhood Policy to help guide and implement its reform agenda and consolidate its relationship with the EU.

After these meetings, Mr. Cornaro said: "I am pleased to see for myself the optimism and motivation which has prevailed since the formation of the new Government. I hope this



will give a new momentum to EU/Lebanon cooperation". He recalled that the EU confirms its commitment, with an average of €50 million per year, to accompany Lebanon in its reform process, and to help promote a growth agenda. He also emphasized that "the European Neighborhood Policy provides a comprehensive framework to support Lebanon's priorities and help develop and implement sectoral policies".

Mr. Cornaro also met with representatives of Lebanese civil society to discuss and identify areas for cooperation in the fields of human rights and political reform. He also exchanged views on economic challenges with private sector representatives.

Mr. Cornaro also visited the Palestinian refugee camp of Burj el Barajneh for a stone laying ceremony, together with the Director of UNRWA affairs in Lebanon, Mr. Salvatore Lombardo. The EU is funding a €4 million project aiming at upgrading the environmental health infrastructure (water supply, sewerage and storm water drainage systems) in Burj el Barajneh and Mar Elias camps, as part of its total ongoing contribution to help the refugees in Lebanon of more than €50 million.