

Newsletter

April 2011
Beirut, Lebanon
www.feslb.org

Dear colleagues and friends,

I proudly present you the second newsletter of the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Beirut in 2011, which will provide you with the most recent information about our friends and partners, current projects and upcoming events, as well as the social and political atmosphere in Lebanon.

All societies in the Arab region are experiencing today rapid and important political change. In Lebanon, the government has collapsed during the first months of this year, while the region was swept by an unforeseen revolutionary wave.

In this context, the FES representations in the Middle East have the role to further the societal dialogue by providing analysis and information on regional socio-economic and political matters and transmitting the values of social democracy. In this sense, our office in Beirut is organizing numerous projects within the fields of civil society, human rights and the media, which will be presented in the following newsletter.

We hope you will enjoy reading about our work, and we will appreciate your constructive comments.

Finally, I would like to thank my colleagues of FES Beirut for their efforts in creating this electronic newsletter.

Samir Farah

Representative FES Beirut

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Focus: Political Report

RECENT EVENTS

Seminar: Media Skills for a Sustainable Civil Peace



**United Nations Youth Association,
Le Crillon Broumana, April 6-10**

Together with the United Nations Youth Association of Lebanon, the FES foundation has organized on April 6-10 2011, a training workshop concerning the theme "Media Skills for Sustainable Civil Peace in Lebanon". Young students exchanged their ideas about the media, and found it to be an important actor in social-political conflicts and a vehicle of change that can contribute to forming a strong civil society and a sustainable civil peace in Lebanon. The role of the media (especially the one of social networks, such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube) and its influence on political processes was widely discussed with a particular focus on the recent political and social uprisings in the Arab world.

During the five day workshop in Broumana, the participants attended seminars on various topics. These included: The ambiguous role of the television which at the same time manipulates and guides; the importance of providing information, the different forms of journalism and today's new

forms of media (numeric, electronic and social). Besides, the attendants participated actively in group projects and discussions aiming to tackle important questions about their profession, such as *Why I am a journalist?*



**Conference: Human Rights Mechanisms
CCSOL Geneva Human Rights Association,
Crown Plaza Beirut, April 7-8**

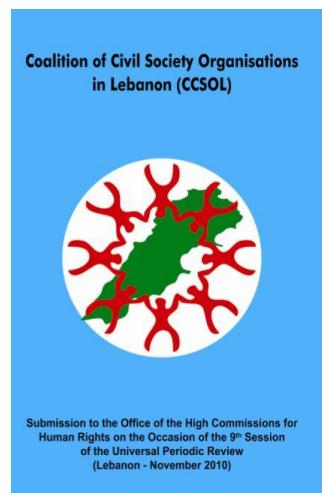


In collaboration with the CCSOL Geneva Human Rights Institute and OHCHR, FES has organized a conference on Human Rights Mechanisms in Lebanon on April 7-8.

With the intention of building a strong coalition of civil society organizations, the conference covered key human rights issues in order to contribute actively to the implementation of UPR recommendations in the field. By this, the FES and the CCSOL have highlighted ongoing progress in the domains of social, economic, cultural, civil and political rights, but also remaining deficits concerning the respect and the defense of human rights in Lebanon.



While positive changes were reached in the process of abolishing the death penalty, issues like the treatment of Palestinian refugees, reforms of the electoral law and the deficient health care system remain causes of serious concern. Moreover, recommendations for legal, policy and institutional reforms to be undertaken by the Lebanese government have been produced in order to improve the protection of human rights.

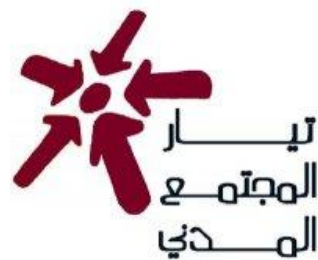


The publication is available online at:
<http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/beirut/07486.pdf>

Workshop: Citizenship CSM, Padova Sin el Fil, April 9

The FES and the CSM have organized a workshop concerning the Lebanese education system at the Hotel Padova in Sin el Fil, Beirut the 9th of April.

The majority of private schools in Lebanon are affiliated with a certain confession so that the education system reflects the pluralistic nature of Lebanese society. With their religiously-oriented curricula and teaching programs, they are each addressed to a specific community of Lebanese society. However, the intrinsic objective of every educational system is to prepare the students to become integral members of society. Especially in a multi-confessional country such as Lebanon, the education system plays a primary role in the development of a sense of citizenship. Accordingly, the FES and the CSM have organized a workshop to point out the importance of opening up the Lebanese education system in order to avoid discrimination and further social divisions that currently impede the evolution of a strong national and civic identity in Lebanon.



UPCOMING EVENTS



**Conference:
Cedars, Roses and Jasmine:
Revolutionary Change in the
MENA Region and Eastern
Europe (1980-2011).**

Causes, Actors, Instruments and
Democratization Processes.

**DAAD- German Academic Exchange
Service. Embassy of the Federal
Republic of Germany in Beirut,
Institute of Political Science,
Saint-Joseph University, Beirut, June
9-10.**

As a reaction to the recent socio-political transformations, FES together with the German Embassy Beirut and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) in Beirut will organize a conference to discuss the different revolutionary movements in Eastern Europe of the 1990s and the current civil uprisings across the Arab world from a comparative perspective. Two major questions are going to be the guidelines of the conference: *Why and when is a democratization process successful? How can stable democratic structures be consolidated?*

Focal points are the peoples' mobilizations in Poland in 1980/81 and 1988/89, in Germany in 1989, in Georgia in 2003, in Ukraine in 2004, in

Lebanon in 2005, in Iran in 2009 as well as the recent upheavals in Tunisia and Egypt (and other MENA countries). The aim of the conference is to understand the revolutionary stages in the different countries by breaking them down into their political, socio-economic, and military components in order to propose a more accurate explanation of the most relevant impulses of social change and to avoid simple dichotomies. The program is based on five main panels: causes, internal versus external actors, instruments, impact and consequences (democratization?) of these revolutions. Each panel consists of three discussants and one moderator coming from diverse cultural and professional backgrounds: journalists, professors, etc.



The conference will be accompanied by a photo exhibition presenting pictures taken by professional photographers and spontaneous witnesses of revolutions.

PUBLICATIONS

State and Religion - Comparing Cases of Changing Relations

Edited by Angela Hermann and John Richardson, in cooperation with res gerendae, AUB, Orient Institut Beirut and FES.
(Publication Date - April 2011)



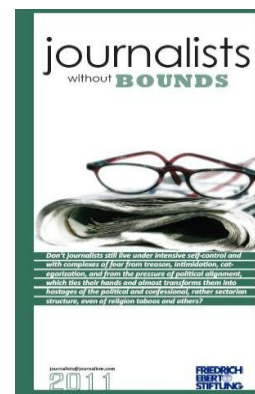
According to a widely accepted typology, relations between state and religion can be broadly divided into three categories: first, systems with an established (i.e. a state or a privileged) religion; second, systems of strict separation between state and religion and, third, mixed systems.

State and Religion is a conference report that analyses 12 cases of change in the relation between state and religion and explores case studies from Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Asia in order to give an idea of the variety of cultures and religions affected by this process of change in the relations between state and religion.

Publication available online at:
<http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/beirut/07946.pdf>

Journalists without bounds

Edited by FES



The study *Journalists without Bounds* portrays the current social, professional and legal situation of journalists in Lebanon by revealing some important information and data concerning their personal, educational and legal status, social protection and the journalist syndicate order.

This publication clarifies the image and the role of the media within Lebanese society and calls for the strengthening of the media as an independent entity which would push further the development of democratic and pluralistic structures as well as of a real citizenship in Lebanon.

Publication available online at:
<http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/beirut/07878.pdf>

FOCUS

Sectarianism in Lebanese Society

Recent demonstrations

Several demonstrations protesting against the confessional regime took place over the last months all over Lebanon. The country's system of government is rooted in a 1943 power-sharing agreement along confessional lines adopted after Lebanon won its independence from France. Aimed at maintaining a balance between the 18 religious sects, the agreement calls for the president to be a Maronite Christian, the Prime Minister to be a Sunnite Muslim and the speaker of parliament a Shiite Muslim. The protesters hold the delicate power-sharing system responsible for stagnating socio-economic development and rising corruption in their country.

Origin of Sectarian System in 1926

When the Ottoman Empire collapsed, its territories in the Arab East were divided between Great Britain and France whereupon Lebanon became part of the French mandate. When the state of Greater Lebanon was proclaimed in 1920, the territory of Mount Lebanon was extended to regions with predominantly Muslim populations while the percentage of the Christian population therefore fell from 80% to approximately 55%. The Lebanese constitution which was drafted in 1926 and amended several times since, set a focus on religious diversity in Lebanon: public offices were distributed in among different communities in proportion to their demographic importance. The newly established state was under Christian political hegemony, but efforts were made to integrate Muslim communities.

In 1943, the country became independent and the parliament amended the 1926 constitution, especially by adding the "national pact",

a gentlemen's agreement between President Bishara al-Khouri and Prime Minister Riad al-Solh that distributed the prominent political positions between the different communities. It was decided that the presidency of the republic would be reserved to Christian Maronites, while the premiership went to the Muslim Sunnites. Soon the agreement was extended to include the parliament speaker designated to be a Muslim Shiite and then the deputy premiership and deputy speaker were reserved to Greek-Orthodox Christians. The constitution allocated key positions to members of the Maronite sect.

Following the 1975-1990 war, the former constitution was amended, reflecting the demographic change in the country (the Muslim community had grown to 56% by the 1980s) and the dominant position of the Maronites as it was ensured by the formula of 1926 was eradicated. The so called *Taif Agreement* restructured the former political system by transferring some of the power away from the Maronite Christian community, which had been given a privilege

before¹: prior to Taif, the Sunnite Muslim Prime Minister was appointed by and responsible to the Maronite President. After Taif, the Prime Minister was responsible to the legislature, as in a traditional parliamentary system. The principle of parity between Muslim and Christians replaced the former formula of six Christian MPs for every five Muslim MPs. The influence of the Christian community decreased drastically.

Current Calls for Change

The current protests blame this power-sharing arrangement for most of the country's problems over the past decades, including corruption, cronyism and above all the devastating civil war and subsequent crises. Four large scale demonstrations have taken place in the past month, reaching their peak with the latest demonstrations in Beirut and

¹ Although the Taif Agreement identified the abolition of political sectarianism as a national priority, it provided no timeframe for doing so. The Chamber of Deputies was increased in size to 128 members, shared equally between Christians and Muslims, rather than elected by universal suffrage that would have provided a Muslim majority. A cabinet was established similarly divided equally between Christians and Muslims.

Byblos. Not wanting to focus solely on the capital, the organizers of the Facebook group “Topple the sectarian system” underlined the need to stage protests across Lebanon. Last Sunday they raised banners with slogans like “We want a nation, not a farm” or “Bread, knowledge, freedom. And no to political sectarianism.” while singing “Everyone standing on the balconies...come down and join us to bring down this corrupt system”². “We cannot live in a country where Lebanese university teachers cannot be hired full-time unless they fit the quota of the year,” said Kinda Hassan, one of the march’s organizers. “We cannot live in a country where they divide the chairs of the ministers according to their confessions, not their merits.”

However, people were not only protesting against the sectarian regime but also in favor of a civil status law and a civil marriage which does not exist in Lebanon. Under current Lebanese law, women who marry foreign men are not

² See also http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_ID=1&article_ID=126502&category_id=1#axzz1Hyiq9gl8

allowed to pass their citizenship to their spouses or their children, ostensibly to preserve the current sectarian balance between Muslims and Christians. Marriage, divorce and child custody are also handled by religious courts³. “Civil marriage, not civil war⁴” was among the banners carried by the mostly young, educated protesters. Sunday’s protest was the third organized against the sectarian system which was led by a broad coalition of mainly civil society, political and youth organizations.

³ Lebanese who marry someone from another religion must now either convert or get married abroad, with Cyprus being the closest option.

⁴ See <http://www.yalibnan.com/2010/04/25/lebanese-rally-for-a-secular-system/>