

Newsletter

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Beirut, Lebanon

www.feslb.org

Dear colleagues and friends,

I proudly present you the third newsletter of the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Beirut in 2011, in order to provide you with the most recent information concerning our friends and partners, current projects and upcoming events, as well as major issues that effect the Lebanese state and society.

The ongoing Arab revolutions, especially in Lebanon's direct neighborhood, Syria, and the formation of a new governmental coalition in Lebanon currently determine the Lebanese political scene. This important phase of change for Middle Eastern societies also affects the role of all the FES representations in the MENA region, as their work gained in importance in this particular context. Accordingly, our office in Beirut has propelled forward projects in the fields of civil society, human rights, media and inter-cultural dialogue, which will be presented in the following pages.

We hope you will enjoy reading about our work, and we will of course stay available for your constructive comments.

Finally, I would like to thank my colleagues of FES Beirut for their efforts to create this online newsletter.

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Seminar: Lebanese State & Current Challenges (Sin el Fil, May 20th)

Together with the Antelias Cultural Movement, FES Beirut has organized a seminar concerning the Lebanese state and its current challenges. The seminar took place on the 20th of May in the Padova Hotel, Sin el Fil.



At the center of the discussion stood the current government formation process and the power struggles, clashes of interest and political and religious conflicts overshadowing it as well as the revolutionary uprising in Syria and its influence on Lebanese politics and stability.



Conference: Cedars, Roses and Jasmine: Revolutionary Change in the MENA Region and Eastern Europe. Causes, Actors, Instruments and Democratization Process (Beirut, June 20th-22nd)

With the support of the DAAD, the German Embassy in Beirut and the Saint Joseph University, FES Beirut has given a conference concerning the causes, actors instruments and democratization process in the MENA region and Eastern Europe. In the context of the current uprisings in the MENA region, FES Beirut has invited scholars, experts and activists from the Middle East and East European countries in order to reveal the similarities and differences between the revolutionary waves in the Arab world and those in some post-communist countries, such as Ukraine, Poland and Georgia during the late 1980's.



The program was divided into five discussion panels where different aspects of the revolutions that took place in the respective countries were analyzed. After the presentation of the various guest speakers, each panel left room for discussions and remarks by the auditory, which was composed of professors, members of national and international organizations, NGO's, journalists and students from Lebanon and Europe.

Incoming: Media Professionals and Experts (Berlin, June 26th - July 2nd)

With the outlook of shaping a new legislation concerning the media in Lebanon, FES Beirut offered the Maharat organization the opportunity to participate in a conference given in Berlin on the topic *Media Law and Media Landscape in Germany*. Through this conference, the participants learned about important issues in the field of media, such as the dual

system (private-public) of audiovisual media, the competition between published and online News, journalists unions and the working conditions of journalists in Germany, data protection, the principle of freedom of information, the limits of freedom of press, censorship, broadcasting and its regulations as well as the relation between citizens and the media. The participants were also invited to visit the German Federal Press Conference. Besides members of the Maharat organization, some journalists of An-Nahar newspaper and the General manager of Aljadeed TV participated in the project.



Summer Youth Camp: Conflict Resolution. Palestinians Fraternity Association (Ain Zhalta-Shouf, 15th-25th July)

In co-operation with the Palestinian NGO al-Uchwa, FES Beirut organized a 10 days summer camp for Palestinian youth from Lebanon and Palestine which took place at a training center in the Ain al-Zhalta Cedar Reserve.



The young men and women were invited to discuss their situation



during seminars and group projects in order to identify major problems in everyday life and to develop proposals for possible solutions. These seminars were guided by trainers and teachers from Lebanon and Palestine. Through leisure activities and outings, youth from Palestine and Lebanon got to know each other better, learning about their communalities and differences and exchanging viewpoints concerning their common cause.

The encounter had the aim of fostering the participants' role as important actors of civil society by informing them about their rights and empowering them to defend their interests in the socio-political arena. contributing to a dialogue between both communities.



Training: Youth Citizens of Today (Harissa, 15th -19th July)

FES Beirut and Massar Organization organized a youth summer camp entitled “Citizens of Today”. This training invited Lebanese youth to learn more about their duties and rights as citizens. On the program were diverse seminars that explained the idea and different concepts of citizenship to the young participants and informed them about other major issues in

relation to this topic, such as the concept of leadership, communication skills or the Lebanese youth policy. Besides, some important questions will be discussed, such as which political system fits best to Lebanon. Finally, there were also several creative activities on offer, like the making of a TV spot, self expression exercises, theater plays and trips.



Trade Union's Youth Camp (Broumana, 22nd – 24th July)

In order to strengthen youth activism in Lebanon's trade union movement, FES Beirut, in cooperation with the Lebanese Trade Union Training Center, offered a youth camp for 70 young professionals from different backgrounds.



Different speakers had prepared presentations about subject relevant to young laborers, such as labor rights, political movements in the Lebanese Trade Union Federation etc. These informed the discussion in the plenary sessions, during which the participants had the opportunity to exchange their viewpoints and ideas.

This event took place between the 22nd and 24th of July in the mountain town of Broumana.



As a result, the young professionals were able to work out concrete proposals for action, envisaging an important role for youth in influencing labor law and politics.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Conference: Administrative Decentralization (09th – 10th September, Beqaa)

Together with the Cultural Center of the Beqaa, FES Beirut will organize a conference on administrative decentralization in the Lebanese political system.

On this occasion, politicians and state functionaries as well as experts in the domain of political systems and public administration will have the opportunity to work out feasible and effective ways to decentralize tasks from the central government and hence to endow Lebanese regions and municipalities with a more important role in the political process.

Conference: Potential of Alternative Energy (Beirut, 27th September)

Another interesting upcoming project of FES Beirut will be a conference on the potential of alternative energy that will be organized in cooperation with the Lebanese environmental party.

The event will provide a forum for experts and decision makers in the field of energy and environment to discuss and exchange viewpoints on the challenges and prospects of renewable sources of energy to meet the needs of modern society's and economies.

Renewable energies will be discussed in the light of general concepts such sustainability and environmental responsibility but also in terms of their applicability to the Middle Eastern and Lebanese context in particular.

FOCUS

The controversy concerning the Special Tribunal for Lebanon investigating the killing of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri increased during the year 2010 and increased the deep polarization of Lebanon's political parties. As a consequence, the functioning of key institutions including the parliament and cabinet were in a deadlock. This development hindered the advancement of the reform agenda, and finally led to the collapse of the Lebanese Government in January 2011.

New government : A *wind of change?*

After five months of wearying negotiations between major political parties and religious leaders, President Michel Suleiman and Prime Minister Najib Mikati succeeded in forming a new government on Monday 13th of June 2011. The latter, that is supposed to put terms to the political deadlock in Lebanon, comprises 30 members: the March 8 group garnered 18 ministers, while the 12 other cabinet positions went to supporters of President Michel Suleiman, Premier Mikati, and the president of the Progressive Socialist Party, Walid Jumblatt¹. Accordingly, the March 14 movement of former Prime

minister Saad Hariri finds itself again completely isolated on the political scene after having refused to join Mikati's new government.

The recently formed governmental coalition has brought two new developments to Lebanese politics. The first one is an interruption of the tradition prescribing the allocation of six chairs to each of the Sunni and Shiite communities. In contrast to this, in the new government, Sunnis are represented by seven ministers and the Shiite community by five, which was brought through in order to facilitate the government formation process. Whereas, Amal and Hezbollah collected four seats, the 5th seat went to the Syrian Social Nationalist Party. The second political change was initiated by the Druze Minister's of State's, Talal Arslan's, announcement of his immediate resignation from the

¹ Khaddaj, A., "Lebanon announces formation of new government", *Al-Shorfa*, 14.06.2011.

government after diverse differences between him and the Premier regarding the fact that Arslan was not being given a portfolio².

International reactions

While Iran and Syria welcomed the composition of the new government that distanced itself from western influences, political leaders in Europe, the US and Israel showed themselves seriously concerned about the new political evolutions in Lebanon and their impact on the political atmosphere of the whole region. The most important foreign newspapers described the new Lebanese government as victory of the “radical Islamic movement” Hezbollah³. One major concern of the international community consists of Hezbollah’s attempt of undermining the work of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, referring to the accusation of several high ranking members of Hezbollah were of being responsible for the 2005 attack against former Prime minister, Rafik Hariri. The Islamic party already called upon the Lebanese

government to cut its ties with the international court in Dan Haag⁴. These circumstances underline the audacity of the chef of the cabinet mission, who has to find an equilibrium between internal and external political forces by taking into consideration Hezbollah’s stand towards the TSL on the one hand and the concerns of the international community and the 14th of March movement over Hezbollah’s new role in Lebanese politics on the other hand.

² Ibidem.

³ Gehlen, M., „Hisbollah regiert den Libanon“. In: *Die Zeit*, 15.06.2011.

⁴ Mroueh, W., and Lakkis, H., “Optimism running high on policy statement”. In: *The Daily Star*, 29.06.2011.

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