

International peacebuilding in Lebanon

What role for the EU?

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Implementing a coherent approach to peacebuilding in Lebanon has proved challenging for the international community. First, efforts targeting civil peace have repeatedly been affected by, and mixed up with, broader regional dynamics. Second, cycles of violence in Lebanon have diverted international support away from longer-term needs aimed at dealing with the root causes of Lebanon's internal fragmentation, to more immediate post-conflict reconstruction and recovery.

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Today the European Union (EU), in conjunction with international and Lebanese partners, is focusing more on conflict prevention and peacebuilding tools geared towards conflict mitigation and analysis, and dialogue and reconciliation – specifically through the efforts of its Instrument for Stability.

EU Policy framework

The Barcelona Process, launched in 1995, provided the framework for the EU to manage relations with post-

war Lebanon, both bilateral and regional. It sought to promote a common area of peace and stability around the Mediterranean, underpinned by sustainable development, the rule of law, democracy and human rights. It was only with the adoption of the Goteborg Programme for the Prevention of Violent Conflicts in 2001 that the EU made a first step towards improving the effectiveness and coherence of its external action in the field of conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

The introduction of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in 2004 meant that EU relations with Mediterranean partners began to be managed through Association Agreements. The Lebanon Agreement was signed in 2007 with a strong emphasis on political, economic and social reform, but perhaps paying less attention to the legacy of the country's violent past and fragmented social fabric. Since 2006 the EU has become a major actor in spearheading the efforts of the international community to consolidate Lebanon's stability while reinforcing its sovereignty and to support the country along a much-needed path of reform.

The war with Israel in 2006 caused major disruption to international and European engagement, as it diverted large amounts of assistance to reconstruction and economic recovery needs. As well as the humanitarian assistance provided through the European Commission's Humanitarian Office (ECHO), the EC adopted several assistance packages worth more than €46 million. A similar amount was managed by the UN through the Lebanon Recovery Fund, which included donations from EU Member States.

At the time, the priority of the international community was to support a stable, sovereign and democratic Lebanon at peace with its neighbours. The rationale was that an unstable security situation would prevent the country from embarking on a path of reform that was, and still is, urgently needed to address its many political, economic and social cleavages. A number of international interventions can be seen in light of this, in particular UN Security Council Resolution 1701 (11 August 2006), and the assistance given to Lebanon's security sector – including projects to support the development of modern and accountable security institutions, to promote the integrated management of Lebanon's borders, and renewed backing for the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL).

It was hoped that more competent and legitimate state armed forces, capable of enforcing the rule of law, could act as a main driver for national cohesion and stabilisation. Similarly, the presence of UNIFIL as a buffer between Lebanon and Israel, and the revision of its mandate, was also important. Although the mission has not been aimed at brokering a peace deal between the two countries, it has provided neutral interlocution and channels for dialogue to address tensions arising at Lebanon's southern border.

Subsequently, the need to strengthen the Lebanese state and increase the population's trust in its governing institutions has been the basis for EU engagement. This has focused on economic, social and institutional reforms to which the Lebanese government committed itself in July 2005 after the Syrian withdrawal, and again at an international donor conference in Paris in January 2007 (Paris III). Among these, electoral reform remains a priority for the EU. This has involved multiple election observation missions in 2005 and 2009, and technical assistance teams deployed to review and recommend electoral reforms (including the introduction of pre-printed ballots, gender quotas, out of country voting, and an independent electoral commission, amongst others) and to facilitate their adoption and implementation. Smooth and transparent elections are a key factor for stability in any country. However, in Lebanon respect for international standards of free and fair elections is also essential for increasing the credibility, accountability and legitimacy of its governing institutions and its political class. And so, for the EU electoral reform is a vital element for tackling sectarian fragmentation.

Consensus building, dialogue and mediation

The EC Delegation in Lebanon organised three discussions as part of an Inter-Lebanese Forum on Economic and Social Development – in May 2007, and April and October 2008. These were intended to promote inclusive dialogue on the need for, and shape of, reforms for less controversial

subjects: economic and social development, social policy and stimulating enterprise and competition.

The forums included representatives from all major Lebanese political forces, as well as from professional associations, civil society and independent experts – demonstrating that such dialogue is feasible even under difficult political circumstances. The forums proved fairly successful in building trust and consensus, and facilitating the shaping of a greater shared vision on elements of reform in the education and health sectors, and on reforms aimed at making the economy more competitive for the benefit of all Lebanese.

Alongside this, a spectrum of Lebanese NGOs were supported by the international community to try and build grass roots capacity for conflict mediation and resolution. These civil society driven initiatives have adopted an implicit peacebuilding approach, primarily aimed at bringing together divided communities on developmental issues, and prioritising an apolitical approach rather than tackling core conflict-related issues more directly. However, lack of coordination prevented the development of significant momentum, or the establishment of links between changes at the individual or local community level, and the macro-social and – political level.

Promoting stability through major long-term reform has so far failed to produce many dividends, either in terms of peacebuilding or impact on social, political or economic drivers of conflict. Deep seated sectarian animosities persist, increasing the potential for political instability and civil strife if left unaddressed, and leaving Lebanon still vulnerable to violence – with periods of stability masking underlying inter-communal tensions that can easily fracture the fragile political balance. Lebanon's recent past has highlighted a series of conflict dynamics with potential for larger violent conflict: the proliferation of arms; increasing demonstration of violence; emerging 'front lines' in divided urban public spaces that increase the likelihood of violent street clashes (such as those that broke out in Beirut in May 2008, and in both Tripoli and Beirut more recently), and other sectarian confrontations that have occurred in mixed neighbourhoods.

The EU Instrument for Stability: focus on peacebuilding and reconciliation

If Lebanon is to overcome its political fragility and social fragmentation, longer-term efforts and processes, aimed specifically at building sustainable peace and fostering reconciliation, are needed.

Lebanon is vulnerable to fluctuating regional and international developments, which bear a direct impact on

domestic security both in border areas and more centrally. However, the country's fragmented societal and political fabric, combined with weak state institutions, is not able to buffer these fluctuations. Against a domestic background of intra-Lebanese sectarian animosities and their instrumentalisation by political elites, the EU has joined efforts with UN agencies and national and international NGOs to promote activities aimed more explicitly at strengthening civil peace and reconciliation, based on participatory conflict analysis, and strengthening citizens' sense of national identity and state capacity for managing social diversity.

To date international engagement has largely prioritised 'post-conflict recovery' activities: humanitarian aid, local development, security sector reform and the rule of law, the reconstruction of infrastructure, public administration reform, political stabilisation, and human rights and gender issues. But to be effective, these need to be supplemented with post-conflict prevention and peacebuilding tools geared towards conflict mitigation and analysis, and dialogue and reconciliation. The international community needs to, not only mainstream these throughout the spectrum of development cooperation with Lebanon, but also to deploy them as part of a more explicit approach to peacebuilding. This has been the aim, as outlined below, of the new approach adopted by the EU – the Instrument for Stability (IfS).

Expanding local capacity for civil peace and dialogue: The challenge is to build on existing capacities and foster greater national awareness and momentum for the consolidation of a domestic peace supported by all Lebanese. Efforts to achieve this include: improving participatory conflict-analysis skills; supporting development and implementation of locally-tailored, multi-stakeholder peacebuilding strategies to mitigate tensions in a few pre-selected conflict-prone parts of the country (focusing on youth and providing alternatives to mobilisation along sectarian lines); supporting the establishment of a coherent civil society platform and mechanism for advocacy, agenda-setting and coalition-building on issues related to civil peace, dialogue and reconciliation; and supporting civil society in 'Track II' initiatives to complement the National Dialogue, and to broaden the basis for consensus-building on key reform agenda items and peace and reconciliation efforts. This work is implemented in partnership with the UN Development Programme (UNDP) through the 'Strengthening Civil Peace in Lebanon' project, and involves several national NGOs and relevant ministries, including the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities.

Reducing sectarian and confessional divides: Existing intra-Lebanese cleavages coupled with intolerant attitudes

and mistrust of the 'other' can quickly trigger increased instability, and even develop into violent conflict. To tackle these challenges, IfS is currently promoting initiatives in collaboration with UNDP, the Lebanese NGO UMAM D&R and the international NGO Search for Common Ground, in collaboration with relevant ministries such as the Ministry of Education and Higher Education and the Ministry of Social Affairs.

These initiatives include: supporting the development of a collective memory, so as to provide a common reference and stimulate reflection on shared experiences – although not necessarily leading to shared interpretations; integrating peacebuilding into formal and non-formal educational channels; and the use of alternative media, such as children's TV series, and university magazines and blogs, in order to reduce stereotypes, as well as training for journalists to promote unbiased and conflict-sensitive reporting.

Building consensus among key stakeholders on appropriate mechanisms for addressing the legacy of a violent past: Peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts that have taken place in Lebanon in the past twenty years have largely ignored the legacies of abuse and violence left by various conflicts. The legacy of the 15-year civil war is an important factor in the country's path to stability, and needs to be openly addressed.

This approach would facilitate a process of healthy self-criticism by all parties involved, and help rebuild trust amongst communities, and between people and state institutions. This includes activities geared towards assessing citizens' expectations, supporting the formulation of options to 'deal with the past', and facilitating consensus building among key parties: eg victims and other NGOs, government and political parties. This work is being promoted along with national and international NGO partners such as the International Centre for Transitional Justice, the *Centre Libanais des Droits Humains*, the Permanent Peace Movement and *L'Association Libanaise pour l'Éducation et la Formation*.

There is greater engagement with areas or groups at greater risk, such as marginalised regions and poorer neighbourhoods, where potential factors for instability, tension and grievance are more difficult to address and could quickly escalate. Furthermore, EU humanitarian assistance and relief work in Palestinian refugee camps is now being complemented by greater attention to governance dynamics in the camps, as well as improving the effectiveness of existing mechanisms for Lebanese-Palestinian dialogue – which focus on promoting fundamental socio-economic rights as essential conditions

for refugees to live with dignity. The EU is also supporting outreach efforts for the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) to facilitate greater public understanding of its function and work.

Conclusions

International support for government efforts aimed at political, social and economic reform is maintained through traditional cooperation channels, as a way to assist the country in its path to stabilisation, and as an indirect approach to deal with root causes of tension and conflict. Nevertheless, experience shows that the EU and the international community need to deal more explicitly with conflict-related issues for these efforts to be effective.

There are several areas for improvement. Increased use of participatory conflict-analysis can be more actively promoted in order to better identify and understand key actors, conflict drivers and dynamics, and how they interact. This would facilitate more targeted actions to address reforms relevant to peacebuilding and reconciliation, and to improve their linkages with, and effect upon, macro-social and political levels. It would also allow better assessment of the impact of donor policies and programmes on both actual and potential conflicts, and the extent to which national policies are conflict-sensitive and actively contribute to peacebuilding. Finally, international assistance to peacebuilding should ensure that implementation time frames allow continued support, in order to build trust and establish more beneficial dialogue.

Questions remain over whether there should be greater emphasis on the autonomy and accountability of the state:

which state administration should be encouraged and which needs to be consolidated or reformed first? And should external support be made more conditional on local responsibility and the involvement of non-state actors in policy dialogue?

Recent approaches adopted by the EU and its partners show greater coherence in interventions, and they are more closely aligned with EU policy priorities and overall support to Lebanon. The EU also promotes the prioritisation of an independent civil society throughout the different phases of support to state-building, in order to counter the marginalisation of less dominant groups and as part of an inclusive process to rebuild trust and peace.

It is hoped that this approach also represents an opportunity to ensure that broader lessons learned so far from the Arab Spring movements and their associated demands are incorporated into international responses to both crises and transitions from war to peace, incorporating peacebuilding and reconciliation tools as essential ingredients to support democratic transformation and institution-building processes.

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