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LEBANON-EU RELATIONS
AND WAYS FORWARD:
QUALITATIVE RESEARCH FINDINGS
WITH KEY STAKEHOLDERS IN LEBANON

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LEBANON-EU RELATIONS AND WAYS FORWARD: QUALITATIVE RESEARCH FINDINGS WITH KEY STAKEHOLDERS IN LEBANON

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ABSTRACT

This report provides qualitative findings from interviews conducted with key stakeholders in Lebanon within the categories of labour, women's rights, youth, Islamic organizations, rural development, policy-making and new social movements. The report includes background data on the political and economic context in Lebanon, provides an overview of EU policies in Lebanon and presents the research findings from qualitative interviews. The findings include detailed information on interlocutors' perceptions regarding promotion of democracy and human rights in Lebanon, effectiveness of EU policies in the Mediterranean regarding democracy and human rights, and recommendations on the EU's future involvement in these fields.

INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings of MEDRESET's recursive multi-stakeholder consultations conducted in Lebanon. Our data is derived from interviews we conducted with different stakeholders who reflected upon the role of the EU in the country and in the region as a whole. In the first and second sections of this report, we provide an overview of Lebanon's political economy, as well as EU policies in the country. In the third section, we discuss our data pertaining to:

1. Which ideas grassroots actors promote with regard to democracy and human rights domestically, and if these views are conflicting, competing or converging with EU policies.
2. How they perceive and assess the effectiveness of European policies in the Mediterranean area in the field of democracy promotion, with regard to the actors involved, the methods and the issues the EU has focused on.
3. What the EU's policies should be in the field of human rights and democracy promotion, in terms of actors, methods and relevant issues.

In our conclusion we summarize the perspectives of bottom-up actors on EU policies in terms of stakeholders the EU should include, the methods that would be most suitable and the policy issues the EU should focus on.

The methodology of the research – as further elaborated in the MEDRESET Work Package 4 concept paper (Huber et al. 2017) – included two sets of interviews. First, a total of 21

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interviews were performed; second, follow-up interviews were conducted with seven of the 21 interlocutors. Interviewees were approached by the researchers explaining the MEDRESET research and providing a consent form. If accepted, an interview was scheduled with the interlocutor. Interviews took place across Lebanon; one interview was held over the phone as the interlocutor was located in the southern city of Tyre and had a limited schedule. The interviews were conducted in English and were not recorded but notes were taken during the interview. Of the first round of interviews, 14 were held from September to October 2017 across Lebanon, and seven from February to March 2018 in Beirut. The second round of seven follow-up interviews was conducted in May 2018 in Beirut. The interlocutors were primarily representatives from the following sectors: youth organizations, women's rights organizations, rural development organizations, new social movements, Islamic organizations (non-political), democracy promotion and labour organizations (see Annex 2 for the list of interviewees).

1. LEBANON: POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CONTEXT

Following the country's successful claim to independence from France in 1943, the Lebanese Republic was officially established. The founders of the Republic, a consortium of entrepreneurial elites, were strong proponents of a liberalized market economy – an endeavour that actually began to take shape much earlier, following the integration of the region into the world economy during the 17th century (e.g., Traboulsi 2007, Gates 1998). The legacy of this "Merchant Republic" continues to persevere and can be found most especially in the minimal amount of investment in industrial development, and thus consequently the types of work-related opportunities that are available in the country's service-based economy (e.g., Gaspard 2004). The longstanding vision of an open market that predates the establishment of the Lebanese Republic has clearly had strong ramifications upon contemporary education and employment opportunities in the country. Indeed studies have suggested interconnectedness between the instability of the patron–client political and economic networks and the country's legacy of a *laissez-faire* political economy (Leenders 2012, c.f. Johnson 1986).

In the following two subsections we focus on two significant features shaping Lebanese society: conflict and migration. Conflict at local, national and regional levels has impacted Lebanese society in profound ways. War and violence have shaped collective memory, socio-economic relations and more generally how many communities perceive the world. At the same time, mass emigration from Lebanon since at least the mid-19th century has been shaped by national and international policies as much as by interpersonal networks extending across the globe (e.g., Owen 1992, Hashimoto 1992, Klich 1992). Perhaps a most significant aspect of Lebanese emigration is the continuous (re)forging of social ties to emigrants' original villages and regions. Migration into the country is also an important aspect, and most recently in connection to the Syrian conflict. Conflict and migration have deeply affected young people, education and access to employment. Disillusionment manifests not only in sentiments of cynicism towards the Lebanese state but also in a sense of neglect in relation to the broader world, including the EU.

1.1 CONFLICT

The recent history of the region that constitutes modern-day Lebanon is characterized by sectarian, intra-sectarian and non-sectarian conflict which has had significant consequences upon the country's population (Traboulsi 2007, Salibi 1988). Narratives of, for instance, residents of a rural Akkar village in northern Lebanon during the 1970s, shed light upon the extent to which experiences of violence had already become etched into everyday life – even before the start of the civil war (Gilsenan 1996). More recent narratives of Beirut residents are suggestive of how an "anticipation of violence" shapes daily life (Hermez 2012). The renegotiation of Beirut by post-war generations demonstrates practices of "dislocation and liberation, spectacle and participant, pluralism and fracture" as a result of political and economic precariousness in the region (Larkin 2010: 426). Such contradictory experiences are especially highlighted through attempts by pro- and anti-Syrian political alliances to (re)appropriate public spaces such as Martyrs Square in Downtown Beirut during the period in 2005 known as the Cedar Revolution – but also following the 2006 Israeli July War (e.g., Young 2010, Knudsen and Kerr 2014).

Ongoing political and civil unrest continues and is recently highlighted by (a) tensions arising due to the effects of the Syrian conflict and (b) the absence of a president for nearly 12 months, until October 2016. Given the fractured political landscape, there is little to suggest that political unity prevails – or will, anytime soon. Similarly, due to regional alliances of the different political parties such as those who looked somewhat favourably on the idea of Greater Syria, it is even difficult to suggest that there is any sense of national unity. Likewise, with the increasing disparities between the different socio-economic classes, augmented by a rapidly growing population (especially since the arrival of Syrian refugees post-2011) and limited access to resources, there is strong evidence to indicate that further polarization will emerge.

Despite of this ongoing instability, Lebanon might not necessarily be on the brink of collapse. Some scholars have suggested that instability has in fact become the country's status quo. The point here is that there is a *normalization* process of a shared sense of insecurity and instability within everyday life of the Precarious Republic (e.g., Hudson 1985, Hermez 2012). Such complexities of Lebanese society have been documented by some of our stakeholders who have drawn attention to the country's fragile truce. In an article written by one of our stakeholders, the fragmentation of Beirut is in part attributed to government centralization coupled with polycentric administration (Hariri et al. 2013).

1.2 MIGRATION FLOWS

Since at least the mid-19th century, mass emigration from Lebanon has been shaped by national and international policies as much as by interpersonal networks extending across the globe (e.g., Owen 1992, Hashimoto 1992, Klich 1992, Peleikis 2003). Perhaps a most significant aspect of Lebanese emigration is the continuous (re)forging of social ties to emigrants' original villages and regions. Historical studies into the consequences of such links suggest that the return of members of the peasant populations over the late 19th and early 20th centuries has contributed towards the emergence of the country's middle class (Khater 2001). Similarly, an ethnographic account of emigration from a southern Lebanese village to Cote d'Ivoire demonstrates that the importance of return has a lot to do with the accumulation of capital abroad so as to augment one's social and cultural capital at home (Peleikis 2003).

Nabti's study of migration from the Bishmizzine village in North Lebanon to over 40 countries shows how marriage and education factored into the movement of the village's residents abroad (Nabti 1992). For example, emigration to the United States was often secured through marriage to earlier emigrants from Bishmizzine. At the same time, such alliances also ensured that those who left continued to maintain strong ties with the village. Formal education became an especially important factor during the 1980s for those immigrating to the United States; and this is in contrast to those who immigrated to Latin America (1992). Notably, a large number of those migrants to America were medically trained. Nabti draws attention to how formal education simultaneously contributed towards different forms of alienation and social exclusion as well as facilitating empowerment and inclusion. Such observations inevitably raise crucial questions we seek to examine, concerned with the possible relationship between patterns of emigration and the access to education and employment. Indeed, the relationship between youth opportunities and the continued mass emigration of Lebanese people is highly significant not least because of the potential labour vacuum such population movements generate. At the same time, remittances received by non-émigrés have a role in shaping access to education and employment in Lebanon.

Whereas the Lebanese diaspora is expanding abroad, the country continues to act as a host to displaced communities from Palestine, Syria, Iraq and beyond. The Syrian conflict is the most recent war to create new migratory trends. According to Antonio Guterres, the UN's High Commissioner for Refugees, the country's population has reached the figures previously estimated for 2050 (Wood 2014). The dramatic increase is largely due to the millions of people seeking refuge from the conflict in neighbouring Syria. Refugees from Syria are not the first forced migrants to enter Lebanon. However, the situation of many of the Syrians scattered across the entire region is recognized as the potentially largest displacement of people in modern times. In Lebanon alone, there are currently 1.5 million Syrian refugees now constituting a quarter of the country's population. Yet there has long been Syrian migration to Lebanon. The emergence of a new border regime thus also marks significant transformations in pre-existing disparate and unequal social boundaries – transformations that are not for the better.

2. OVERVIEW OF EU POLICIES IN LEBANON

EU collaboration with Lebanon is implemented through the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). The ENP is based around the main themes of political, economic and human rights reforms, aiming to promote further collaboration with neighbouring countries of the EU. The EU thereby offers financial as well as technical assistance to local municipalities, public or private actors in exchange for commitments and reforms. The ENP was originally launched in 2003, and reviewed in 2011 following the "Arab Spring". The new European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) is the main financial instrument for implementing the ENP, and has a worth of 15.4 billion euros for the period 2014–2020 (EU Neighbours Portal 2017).

The reworked ENP is mainly implemented through bilateral cooperation between the EU and each neighbourhood partner, to better adapt to individual challenges and requirements. The mutually agreed upon Action Plan, formulating the agenda for any further cooperation efforts, is contingent upon the same goals and priorities. These are divided into four sectors: 1) political and economic reform, 2) security, 3) migration and mobility and 4) education and development

of job opportunities.

According to the ENI Regulation, external action partners, including civil society organizations and local authorities, are involved in preparing, implementing and monitoring EU support, given the importance of their roles. Furthermore, civil society organizations are called upon to participate in the development of the three financial programmes – the bilateral, the multi-country and the cross-border cooperation – and will be, together with local and regional authorities, their main beneficiaries (EU Neighbours Portal 2017).

In the case of Lebanon, research projects undertaken in collaboration with the EU and ENP centre on promoting Lebanese citizenship and furthering participation in democratic processes. Research is especially aimed at gaining further knowledge on the relation between political figures, politicians and processes of voting. A further aim is to display dynamics of political clientelism as a significant factor in elections. EU collaboration seeks to fund projects that seem to empower Lebanese citizens to contribute to and engage in the process of policy-making. Many of these research projects focus on single municipalities; others draw on a broader context, including all the country's political parties or the Lebanese state as situated in a broader "Arab world".

One of the focuses of ENP economic reformation projects is the environmental issue and so-called "green economy" projects. These projects are intended to help individual municipalities to upgrade their infrastructure for services like water supply, sanitation and waste disposal. Most recently, these projects have had the aim of increasing the resilience of Syrian refugee communities as well as their Lebanese hosts. Other projects around the country support communities via financial and technical assistance to small-scale agriculture. Yet other ENP projects focus on start-ups and private businesses. These projects are meant to promote entrepreneurship and self-employment as part of a grander strategy to help soften the impact of the Syrian refugee crisis.

The security policy of the ENP focuses on strengthening the military–civil cooperation of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and the population, especially in the south. These projects materialize in the development and support of civil services and infrastructure like water supply, education and cultural events. On the other hand, ENP support of the LAF focuses on border security management via Lebanon's integrated border management programme. The aim of the programme is to better the cooperation between various law enforcement and ministerial actors involved in matters of border security (European Commission 2016).

ENP projects on migration and mobility aim to intensify cooperation between Europe and Lebanon pertaining to regular and irregular patterns of migration. This is accomplished by increased financial and technical support for Lebanon during this era of increased influx of refugees as well as cooperatively addressing the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement (European Commission 2016). The objective of programmes such as EUROMED Migration IV is to implement a comprehensive and shared approach to strengthen effective dialogue and cooperation on migration, mobility and international protection issues between the ENI South Partner Countries and EU member states, as well as among the South Partner Countries themselves. EUROMED Migration IV also works on promoting a better identification

of skills gaps in the EU to facilitate mutually beneficial legal migration and launch dialogues on academic mobility (European Commission 2016).

The ENP education policy sets out to influence the very early stages of childhood education by stabilizing the public education system with financial aid. These interventions are meant to support all children in public schools but especially vulnerable communities (European Commission 2016). Recent education projects funded by the EU have focused on issues of food security along with agricultural and rural development by promoting the ongoing improvement of graduate and post-graduate programmes in that area. Furthermore, the ENP offers support for young entrepreneurs to form a sustainable cross-border landscape for start-ups and youth businesses.

3. RESEARCH FINDINGS RESULTING FROM THE STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATIONS

3.1 THE REPRESENTATION OF THE MEDITERRANEAN AND KEY POLICY ISSUES IN IT

When discussing the Mediterranean, most interlocutors addressed it as a divided space. A primary division of the north Mediterranean versus the south was also reflected in power, trade, funds and movement. Interlocutors discussed the north Mediterranean as holding power and funds, with most of the trade coming from the north into the south, whereas movement of people is primarily from south to north. Especially since the start of the refugee crisis, interviewees said, they have begun to see the Mediterranean differently, as a border. They mentioned their disappointment in Europe's failure to provide safe passage to refugees and migrants. The interlocutors blatantly stated that they saw the EU as culpable of and responsible for deaths at sea of refugees and migrants. They were critical of the EU's agreement with Turkey.

The interlocutors also stated that they feel Lebanon to be separated from Europe and much of the Mediterranean by the sea itself; especially with ongoing border issues and closures, the country is effectively an island at times. Additionally, Lebanese citizens require the awarding of a visa prior to travel to almost all Mediterranean countries (with the exception of Turkey); they did not view the region as a space that is open for easy travel and exchange.

A labour representative described the region in this way:

First, a macro perspective, the north and south Mediterranean are very different. There were the revolutions in Egypt and Tunis in the southern Mediterranean. This region has a very young population and many of these try to work in Europe in general, including Mediterranean European countries. There is a relationship where the north of the Mediterranean are providing employment opportunities. But they also do not want too much of this, so aid agencies help south Mediterranean countries. But people from the Arab Mediterranean countries work in southern Europe in jobs that the Europeans do not want. This is also a very securitized issue as well as an issue that is close to the idea of aid. Both security and aid are used to keep refugees from seeking employment in

Europe. (Interviewee 19)

3.2 GENERAL EVALUATION OF EU POLICIES IN LEBANON

The issues analyzed below evaluate the role of the EU. For the most part, the interlocutors were not sure of exact EU policies, but did have some notions or information. In general, the EU was seen as “invisible” within Lebanon, with any EU projects that do occur in the country being unknown to the larger public. Only a very small cohort were able to provide a detailed account on how these policies materialized into their everyday life and work. Policy goals and aims were frequently associated with economic and cultural exchange as well as the strengthening of human rights in the neighbourhood countries.

Interviewees perceived that, rather than following the local needs in Lebanon, EU programmes respond to international trends. For example, a youth organization representative stated that the EU

does not take into consideration what people want but what EU leaders think they want. People in Lebanon do not tend to be asked their views. [...] There are policy trends or programme trends that, for example, once was livelihood, and then it is capacity building. This pumps money in a certain direction but it does not take nuance of a situation or possible harm. In some areas things work differently and aren't the most needed everywhere. If people can eat or send their children to school, this is more important than becoming a hairdresser, for example. EU policy becomes imposed on local NGOs. Some embassies have told us what they are working on and we have to design our response on their approach or we don't get the money. The money becomes self-filtered. (Interviewee 20)

Similarly, a representative from a new social movement stated that “[a]ll of the initiatives are very surface level. There needs to be more of a focus on real skills, on how to give power. There needs to be more than food, more than documentaries, etc.” (Interviewee 15bis). In general, interlocutors felt that policies should be taken from a bottom-up approach, and with the intentions for the real benefit of the country and the people living in Lebanon. Interlocutors did not want policies that stemmed from a desire to strengthen Lebanon for the purpose of ensuring that refugees do not seek resettlement in Europe.

There was widespread perception that EU policy is failing to achieve its goals. Most of those interviewed were disillusioned with the influence EU policy has on economic and civil development in Lebanon. The main reasons are perceived to be twofold: (1) timescales of projects have been shortened. (2) decreased funding for individual projects. There was some complaint about the timeframes in which EU-funded development projects were put into action. This meant that beneficiaries as well as cooperating actors or organizations would be unable to plan past a very short time.

Economic and cultural exchanges with the EU were seen by some interviewees as hostile or at least not helpful towards Lebanon's civil society. Others however saw this as a necessity and something positive. Many stated that the policies were discriminatory towards certain people in the region and were generally engineered to be more beneficial towards the EU and its

individual member states. The latter assessment pertained specifically to the Syrian refugee crises and the EU migration policy:

I think, cynically, that they think to keep migrants in this country, and [so that they do] not go to the EU, they need to pump money here. [...] [This policy] is trying to more deeply entrench global inequality. Keep refugees in Lebanon but in liveable yet bad conditions but not in a way that they will leave. Their response has been to raise the standard of living but not tackle the reasons why the standard of living is so low. This is through education, network with local actors. (Youth organization representative, Interviewee 20bis)

Most of the interviewed actors identified the difference between the policy aims of the EU and those of individual member states. Many of those interviewed pointed to a difference between communication with individual member states and with the EU, whereby it was much easier to coordinate bilateral projects with individual member states than with the EU entities. At the same time, EU policy was viewed to be broader in scope than policy of individual state members. Individual EU states were perceived as operating with less diverse goals and with greater self-interest. In this context, there were frequent references to the historical colonial influence of France and the UK. Many interviewees saw a special relationship and interest coming from that history that would inform policy in a way that it would not for the EU as an entity. For example, one interviewee stated:

First of all, let's start from a political perspective. I do not think that the EU is one EU, there are a lot of EUs. There is a socialist EU, a capitalist EU. [...] If the EU will follow its own interest, it has to detach from the American policies. The American policies do not create a prosperous region in [the] Arab [world] that benefits the people that live here. The EU should detach from American policies and from their own colonialist pasts. The EU says that they are no longer colonial but the need to control the ex-colonies is there. The Americans support this. Destroying the former colonial areas has now led to waves of refugees and waves of migrants that they cannot handle. They have to unify their vision and to detach from the colonial past. They need to arrange their house first and then come and work in our region. The ways they are dealing with refugees are inefficient. (Labour organization representative, Interviewee 19)

3.3 SUBSTANCE: PERCEIVED POLICY PRIORITIES IN LEBANON

Interlocutors found that class plays a large part in people attaining human rights in Lebanon, in that wealth and corruption allow for some to have human rights, but not all. The interlocutors were acutely aware that certain groups within the country, for economic, religious and/or racial and ethnic reasons are more excluded from receiving their human rights. Refugee communities, and particularly Syrian refugees, were highlighted by many interlocutors. Most stated an opinion that Syrian refugees in Lebanon lack human rights almost entirely. Food and shelter were mentioned as rights that are withheld from Syrian refugees. Migrant worker communities were frequently mentioned. The long-term status of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon was also mentioned, and their lack of historical access to human rights. Prisoners were also included in this group, and the poor standards of prisons were highlighted.

Furthermore, women were mentioned as another group that is largely denied its human rights in Lebanon. Various interlocutors mentioned laws that limit women's human rights, such as: preventing women from passing on their Lebanese nationality to their children and spouse, lack of an adequate domestic violence law, allowing a rapist to marry his victim of rape in order to avoid punishment, lack of sexual harassment laws, lack of women's representation in politics, and unequal pay. Slightly over half of the interlocutors were women, and they strongly focused on women's rights in particular. This was seen as an extremely complex problem to solve, and one interlocutor showed little enthusiasm towards possible solutions in the near future. She stated:

The problem is the intersectionality between patriarchy and confessionalism. It makes it hard to address the root cause of the problem. It is highly entrenched in the mentalities of both men and women. This is in legal framework like the personal status code. In Lebanon there are 15 personal status laws, and this also exists in other Arab countries. Women don't have access to a civil code, but [must go] through Islamic courts. Patriarchy and its manifestations sexual harassment, abuse – women become second-class citizens. There is systemic discrimination. (Interviewee 18)

She further explained that women do not have a direct vertical relationship between state and citizenship, arguing that there exist

[t]wo levels of mediation [for women], male guardianship and the confessional system. Accessing rights for women is compromised through these two mediators. . . . This is compromising women's direct relationship with the state in terms of political and social rights, access to health, education and social welfare. [...] It compromises women's access in having equal wage, in accessing a set of rights or set of benefits. Lack of protection framework, sexual harassment in work and in social life, abuse in domestic life. (Women's rights organization representative, Interviewee 18)

As a whole, through the first and second set of interviews, our interlocutors were strongly aware of gender as a key factor in Lebanon. All expressed a strong concern in regard to women's rights in Lebanon and what they consider to be discriminatory laws against women. It is important to mention, however, that interlocutors stated they felt the situation of women was improving in some ways, as women are much more visible in the work force, a visibility that also applies to their social issues: issues related to harassment and assault, rights within marriage and the right to pass on citizenship.

In Lebanon, year after year there is an implementation and rules and regulations to support women. To support women against violence, to support working women. In religion it is a basic right that women have their rights first and foremost. Today, you can see women in higher places in organizations, before you could not see this, like a CFO or General Manager. (Islamic organization representative, Interviewee 16)

It is interesting to note that many interlocutors felt that the situation in Lebanon was incredibly difficult for everyone, to a degree that for some interlocutors the issue of gender per se was not as relevant. When speaking about women's right, some interlocutors also mentioned LGBT rights.

When we talk about religious authorities and politicians, this interferes directly with women's rights. Any rights in Lebanon are needed, not just women's rights. There is discrimination against women, but also against LGBT and some religions. The actions of the politicians are violating all human rights, children's rights are also violated as well. Elderly are heavily affected. (New social movement representative, Interviewee 15)

Lebanon is a fragmented country, ruled by an elite capitalist class. There is a retrograde capitalist system based on deep exploitation. There is a weakening of the labour movement, syndicates. This is for the benefit of the ruling class which is very close to the elite economic class and it intersects. This irregularity is feeding back into this system. The Syrian crisis brought with it more labour and thus more exploitation. It brought dynamics which give more power to the employer than the employee. We are also seeing this in Egypt and Tunisia due to liberalization, the World Bank and IMF reforms. (Labour organization representative, Interviewee 19)

Women's rights issues were directly linked to sectarianism and religious authorities in the country. The interlocutors, for the most part, understood that women's rights in the country could not be fully realized without a civil code being implemented.

Wealth redistribution. Alternative political movements. We have to identify that this system is backed by huge media and political power that is basing itself on nationalism and sectarianism. We have to identify that this political class is not only creating racism and sectarianism but also, in the name of the nation state, huge exploitation. The alternative political movement should target this political failure in creating a common civil identity and at the same time answering the issues of exploitation. It is not only one front. You have to tackle not only exploitation or gender, but everything. You cannot fight exploitation without given women's rights, you cannot fight to give the right of the women without fighting sectarianism. The solution is complicated because the system is complicated. The system this strong and powerful should, in order to change, needs someone who is equality strong, but not by money or media. Labour unions, awareness, freedom of speech are all tools. (Labour organization representative, Interviewee 19bis)

In regard to LGBT rights, most interlocutors, as previously mentioned, discussed this issue when speaking about women's rights. However, not all interviewees shared the same views, as one interviewee openly stated that they did not wish for gay marriage to take place in Lebanon, the way it has in many Western countries.

Overall, the interlocutors saw many barriers in relation to gender issues, primarily concerning laws on harassment, domestic abuse and the right for a Lebanese woman to pass on her nationality to a spouse and children. As stated, the interlocutors saw the larger sectarian and strongly religious system in the country as the main barrier to providing women with more rights. Regarding the EU, interlocutors felt that it was helping break down these barriers by often being a main donor for women's rights organizations or women's rights work in general in the country. However, they felt that barriers could be broken at a faster pace, if the EU placed greater pressure on the Lebanese government.

It is important to note that it is likely that the interlocutors did not represent the majority Lebanese opinion in regard to women's rights. Local discourse shows that the conversation on women's rights in the country is still limited to somewhat higher socio-economic circles, and elites who have travelled abroad.

3.4 SUGGESTIONS FOR EU POLICIES IN LEBANON

All of those interviewed expressed pessimistic notions of the function of democracy in Lebanon. A representative of an Islamic organization for example stated that "politically, Lebanon is called a democracy, but this is not the reality. There is no democracy" (Interviewee 16). This was contextualized in the current political sphere within the country. Many related the lack of progress on democracy in Lebanon to the Civil War and the reality that the ruling elites of the war are still in power. Corruption was mentioned as perhaps the number one complaint by most of the interviewees. The sectarianism that was solidified during the war was, for many, the main obstacle to the progress of democracy in Lebanon. A representative of a campaign to promote democracy stated, "The main cause is corruption and corrupted leaders and the lack of education at the public level when it comes to people knowing their rights and the duties of their representatives in Parliament. Mostly, the absence of reconciliation after the war" (Interviewee 21bis).

When discussing how the EU could assist Lebanon in the area of democracy in terms of instruments, many interlocutors expressed hesitation but stated that they did want assistance from the EU. As the follow-up interviews were held after the 2018 Parliamentary elections, several of the interlocutors mentioned the fragile state of democracy in Lebanon and were of the opinion that it needs to be strengthened. Generally, the interviewees did not ask for the EU to directly help with promoting democracy, but stated that they wanted to see the EU acknowledge the (alleged) election fraud that took place.

The Lebanese government can be better in this by putting an end to the corruption that is happening. They have the means to resolve all of the issues mentioned. The EU can help by not siding with the corrupted government and pointing out the corruption when it is happening. Our government, in the example of the recent elections, was proud and retweeted a report by the EU that the elections were decent, well represented and clean, according to the EU. But this depresses the people who know the elections were fraud and had more than 7,000 violations that were reported. When the EU puts out a statement like this, people will lose their trust. And people will label the EU as being on the side of the government. (Campaign to promote democracy representative, Interviewee 21bis)

This point was also raised by another interlocutor, who openly expressed that the EU needs to make a statement about the 7,000 violations that were reported:

They can give us the true results about the recent elections. Something huge happened right now, which is the elections. We are waiting for an official statement from the EU about the 7,000 corruptions and frauds that happened. If the EU does not address this, we will not have faith in them. This is one practical way. (New social movement representative, Interviewee 15bis)

As seen in the two quotes above, the interviewees were very much engaged in the recent elections and very much concerned about the alleged violations that took place. For them, this moment represents a particular situation when the EU can express its support for democracy in Lebanon, and can acknowledge that many in the country feel that corruption is evident.

In terms of actors, most of the interlocutors believed the EU should work directly with grassroots organizations and actors for human rights and democracy promotion. If the EU engaged with the government, then the interlocutors expressed a desire for it to engage with municipalities. All in all, it was the central government that most interlocutors saw as the main source of corruption, and violations of human rights. In the latter field, many felt that issues were too large to tackle and that much of the work was "band-aids" – to use the word of one particular interlocutor. The notion of rights was also understood to be deeply political, as interlocutors felt that nothing would change, including in regard to human rights, until the political class in Lebanon had shifted. The interlocutors felt that the politicians who have been in power for a long time are also directly responsible for the situation of human rights in the country.

No solutions exist. There are band-aids. Women's rights organizations and civil society organizations, all of our work is band-aid work as the root cause is so deep. Addressing a political quota is one of these band-aids, the solution could come from something deeper. (Women's rights organization representative, Interviewee 18)

Interviewees stated that if the EU works mostly with the Lebanese government, then grassroots actors will doubt the motives of the EU. However, they were also pragmatic in realizing that the EU does have to work with the government at times.

We do have to engage with this government. We should find a way to engage with these people. Try to elevate the political discourse. But this does not mean that if this government is so corrupt [as] to fake elections, they cannot say anything. This is case by case. They should not have social relations with politicians or be friends, they should be harsh in some places, but if those parties are trying to do some environmental project and the EU is helping, we should not criticize this. If work is being done, then we should accept this. The country is on the edge and we do need compromise a bit. (New social movement representative, Interviewee 15bis)

One interviewee specifically stated that their organization wished the EU would work more with local governments such as municipalities rather than the central government.

There have been some programmes that were supported by the EU, European Commission, for the Lebanese government to intervene. But many ministries don't have a strategic plan for rural areas, no continuity. Every time the governance of a ministry changes, this changes the plan. A lot of sectors are in an unfinished business situation. Usually local organizations do the best job in working with people. Municipalities are also more effective and that is why we work with them. Policies coming from the central government are less effective than the local government. Unless we were to have one national plan. (rural development organization representative, Interviewee 17bis)

CONCLUSION

Our interlocutors spoke with knowledge about Lebanon in regard to democracy, politics, corruption, gender and more. They had at least surface-level knowledge of EU policies and works within the country. However, they were weary of the EU and in general, outside participation in the country. Although the interlocutors were not categorically against outside assistance or aid, their judgements were made based on a history of foreign interventions in Lebanon, both by Western and non-Western countries. They did however see the EU as a less involved partner than most, with this position having benefits and drawbacks. It was beneficial in that the EU was seen as less culpable than other foreign powers, but was a drawback in that the EU was seen as a benign body. Our interlocutors did not fault the EU for any direct actions in Lebanon, but they did often call for it to do more in the country, preferably not through the central government. They did however fault the EU for its role in the Mediterranean refugee crisis and largely believed that the EU handled this situation incorrectly.

Regarding policy, the findings reveal that the EU should focus on working with grassroots actors and municipalities, and less with the central government, which is seen as the main source of corruption in the country. Interlocutors did state that the EU could use the weight of its global power and influence to put pressure on the government regarding policies and laws in order to support civil society. For example, if civil society has united behind a particular policy it seeks to have implemented in the country, the EU can support civil society by placing pressure on the central government, and using leverage in regard to funding and trade. Such measures were suggested by several of the interlocutors. Further, the EU should work with grassroots organizations and create an equal dialogue, instead of a top-down dialogue that is perceived to exist by many of the interlocutors. Interlocutors stated that funds coming from the EU should be based on grassroots actors' decisions to create particular projects and programmes, and not based on focus areas decided upon in the EU, by the EU. Regarding democracy within Lebanon, since the most recent Parliamentary elections in 2018, the interlocutors asked that the EU acknowledge the 7,000 cases of reported election violations that took place in the country.

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APPENDIX 1. FINAL NOTE ON ETHICS

All researchers who were involved in the project ensured that research activities they engaged in would not bring harm to themselves or their research interlocutors. Researchers sought permission from all those involved in the study and respected all those who requested confidentiality and anonymity. To this end, researchers were aware that not all participants might be willing to become involved in the usage of different mediums of documentation – including audio and visual recording. Due to the collaborative and participatory dimensions of the project, we continue to work with transparency and attempt not to give any false impressions of the aims and objectives of the study. We will also give due credit to all those involved in obtaining and analysis of data.

APPENDIX 2. LIST OF INTERVIEWS

FIRST ROUND OF INTERVIEWS

Interviewee 1. Labour representative, watch group, September–October 2017

Interviewee 2. Youth organization, director of organization, September–October 2017

Interviewee 3. Islamic group, charity, September–October 2017

Interviewee 4. Rural group, development organization, September–October 2017

Interviewee 5. Women's group, founder and director of organization, September–October 2017

Interviewee 6. Social movement, working with religious differences and hate speech, September–October 2017

Interviewee 7. Campaign to promote democracy: political advocacy organization, September–October 2017

Interviewee 8. Labour representative, resource centre, chairman, September–October 2017

Interviewee 9. Islamic organization, communications director, September–October 2017

Interviewee 10. Rural organization, general director, September–October 2017

Interviewee 11. Women's rights organization, director, September–October 2017

Interviewee 12. Youth organization, working with rural youth, director, September–October 2017

Interviewee 13. Social movement, awareness and educational organization, September–October 2017

Interviewee 14. Campaign to promote democracy, awareness organization, September–October 2017

Interviewee 15. Representative of social movement (new social movement involved in organizing and politics. Not involved in upcoming elections. Individual is a founding member of the group), Female, 2 March 2018

Interviewee 16. Representative of Islamic organization (non-profit organization focused on religious education for children. Individual is a general volunteer with the group), Male, 1 March 2018

Interviewee 17. Representative of rural organization (rural development organization working primarily in the south of Lebanon. Individual is the head of the organization), Male, 1 March 2018

Interviewee 18. Representative of women's rights organization (organization working on women's protection and advancement of women-focused legislation. Individual is the head of the organization), Female, 27 February 2018

Interviewee 19. Representative of labour organization (NGO that works to create labour opportunities for Lebanese and Syrian individuals. It was later found out that the organization is also affiliated with Christian churches. Individual is employed by the organization), Male, 15 March 2018

Interviewee 20. Representative of youth organization (organization that works with primarily Syrian youth in regard to providing education. Individual is employed by the organization in a lead position), Female, 24 February 2018

Interviewee 21. Representative from campaign to promote democracy (campaign is not affiliated with a political party but encourages people to vote in the upcoming elections. It is a very widespread campaign. Individual was involved in the brainstorming and visual creation of the campaign), Male, 15 March 2018

SECOND ROUND OF INTERVIEWS

Interviewee 15bis. Representative of social movement (new social movement involved in organizing and politics. Not involved in upcoming elections. Individual is a founding member of the group), Female, 15 May 2018

Interviewee 16bis. Representative of Islamic organization (non-profit organization focused on religious education for children. Individual is a general volunteer with the group), Male, 18 May 2018

Interviewee 17bis. Representative of rural organization (rural development organization working primarily in the south of Lebanon. Individual is the head of the organization), Male, 9 May 2018

Interviewee 18bis. Representative of women's rights organization (organization working on women's protection and advancement of women-focused legislation. Individual is the head of the organization), Female, 19 May 2018

Interviewee 19bis. Representative of labour organization (NGO that works to create labour opportunities for Lebanese and Syrian individuals. It was later found out that the organization

is also affiliated with Christian churches. Individual is employed by the organization), Male, 18 May 2018

Interviewee 20bis. Representative of youth organization (organization that works with primarily Syrian youth in regard to providing education. Individual is employed by the organization in a lead position), Female, 14 May 2018

Interviewee 21bis. Representative from campaign to promote democracy (campaign is not affiliated with a political party but encourages people to vote in the upcoming elections. It is a very widespread campaign. Individual was involved in the brainstorming and visual creation of the campaign), Male, 13 May 2018

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