



P9_TA(2023)0279

Situation in Lebanon

European Parliament resolution of 12 July 2023 on the situation in Lebanon (2023/2742(RSP))

(C/2024/4000)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on Lebanon, in particular its resolution of 16 September 2021 on the situation in Lebanon ⁽¹⁾,
- having regard to previous UN Security Council resolutions, in particular 1559(2004), 1701(2006), 2539 (2020), 2591 (2021) and 2650 (2022),
- having regard to the Euro-Mediterranean Agreement establishing an Association between the European Community and its Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of Lebanon, of the other part ⁽²⁾,
- having regard to Council Decision 2007/860/EC of 10 December 2007 providing Community macro-financial assistance to Lebanon ⁽³⁾,
- having regard to the press statement of the Delegation for relations with the Mashreq countries on an official visit to Lebanon from 19 to 23 June 2023,
- having regard to the commitments agreed in the framework of the EU-Lebanon Partnership Priorities in November 2016, the CEDRE (Conférence économique pour le développement, par les réformes et avec les entreprises) Conference on 6 April 2018, the Lebanon Reform, Recovery and Reconstruction Framework (3RF) in December 2020 and the International Support Group for Lebanon meetings on 11 December 2019, 23 September 2020 and 19 May 2021,
- having regard to the final report of the EU Election Observation Mission on the parliamentary elections held on 15 May 2022,
- having regard to the decision of the European Council of 26 July 2022 to extend the EU framework for targeted sanctions for one year,
- having regard to the statement of 1 November 2022 by Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (VP/HR) Josep Borrell on the political situation in Lebanon and that of 8 April 2023 on the escalation of violence,
- having regard to the statement of 13 November 2022 by the Delegation of the European Union on the Current Situation in Lebanon,
- having regard to the statement of 3 April 2023 by the UN Special Coordinator on the municipal elections in Lebanon,
- having regard to the statements of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and her spokesperson on the situation in Lebanon,
- having regard to the four Geneva conventions of 1949 relating to the status of refugees and their additional protocols, ratified by Lebanon,
- having regard to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948,
- having regard to Rule 132(2) and (4) of its Rules of Procedure,

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 117, 11.3.2022, p. 143.

⁽²⁾ OJ L 143, 30.5.2006, p. 2.

⁽³⁾ OJ L 337, 21.12.2007, p. 111.

- A. whereas the current situation in Lebanon is extremely alarming and deeply concerning owing to the political, economic, social, financial and health crises, and the state of institutional breakdown; whereas inflation of electricity, gas and water prices peaked at nearly 600 % in June 2022; whereas the majority of the Lebanese population live in poverty and the authorities are failing to ensure everyone's right to an adequate standard of living, including the right to food; whereas the deteriorating economic situation and the rise in poverty have led to difficulties in accessing basic rights, such as healthcare and housing, and to increased emigration;
- B. whereas Lebanon is a close and important partner of the European Union; whereas this partnership is based on common interests, long-standing historical and cultural ties, regular political and social dialogue and wide-ranging people-to-people contacts; whereas Lebanon has a vibrant civil society and political parties with numerous activists, community leaders, academics, artists and youth groups mobilising and calling for urgent reforms;
- C. whereas on 15 May 2022 parliamentary elections were held in Lebanon, after which Hezbollah and its allies lost their majority in the Parliament and Najib Mikati was designated once again by a majority to form a new government, but he failed to do so due to political blockade; whereas the situation persisted until President Michel Aoun's mandate expired leaving Mikati's caretaker government in charge of the country;
- D. whereas Hezbollah, Amal and their allies resorted to unconstitutional tactics to prevent the conclusion of the parliamentary vote, such as walking out after the first round or breaking quorums to block the election of the opposition candidate; whereas the Speaker of the Parliament of Lebanon Nabih Berri refuses to hold open voting rounds to elect a President contrary to the provisions of the Lebanese Constitution; whereas this has resulted in 10 months of blocking presidential elections in a time of dire need for a president to implement the necessary reforms, prevent total collapse and restore the state institutions and the democratic system; whereas this political deadlock is a consequence of a multi-layered political, economic and social crisis which affects all spheres of the Lebanese State;
- E. whereas Council Decision (CFSP) 2021/1277 of 30 July 2021 provides for the possibility of imposing sanctions against persons and entities who are responsible for undermining democracy or the rule of law in Lebanon;
- F. whereas Lebanon was due to hold municipal elections on 31 May 2023 and they were postponed for the second year in a row; whereas Lebanon's caretaker Interior Minister Bassam Mawlawi ensured that the country was ready to hold municipal elections; whereas the UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon fully supports these elections and considers them important for adhering to Lebanon's constitutional timelines and democratic practices, at a time when the country is already facing a presidential vacancy and widespread institutional paralysis; whereas the Lebanese Parliament, with the votes of Hezbollah, Amal, the Free Patriotic Movement and their allies' political groups, decided to postpone the country's municipal elections for a maximum of one year until 31 May 2024 amid funding shortages; whereas this postponement could further intensify the existing institutional paralysis and the Lebanese people's lack of confidence in democracy;
- G. whereas economic hardship, austerity policies and widespread corruption have sparked several waves of protests in recent years, the largest of which took place around the anniversary of the 17 October Revolution, which began in 2019; whereas protests and social unrest are still common for these reasons, and continue to take place throughout the country;
- H. whereas the Beirut port explosion on 4 August 2020, which is still the world's largest non-nuclear explosion, killed over 220 people including over 20 EU citizens, wounded 7 000, displaced 300 000 people and destroyed or damaged 74 000 homes;

- I. whereas three years after the Beirut port explosion, the domestic investigation into the causes that led to it has been actively obstructed, largely due to abuse of power exerted by political actors including Hezbollah, its allies, the Minister of Justice and the General Prosecutor; whereas longstanding corruption, mismanagement and negligence and the port's management structure allowed for a highly explosive compound (ammonium nitrate) to be haphazardly stored at the port for nearly six years despite warnings by local officials; whereas on 4 August 2021, a mass street protest took place in Beirut with protesters demanding accountability for the port explosion; whereas another massive protest on 14 October 2021 led by Hezbollah and Amal against Chief Investigator Judge Bitar turned into an organised attack by Hezbollah and Amal on the Ain El Remmeneh district and the Lebanese Forces party, which supports the investigation into the Beirut port explosion;
- J. whereas on 2 July 2021 Judge Tarek Bitar requested that the Lebanese Parliament lift the immunity of three of its members in order that they could be charged for criminal negligence and homicide with probable intent concerning the explosion of the port, due to their ministerial responsibility while the dangerous material was being stored; whereas two of the charged former ministers have since been reelected and are currently sitting members of parliament; whereas a majority of Lebanon's Parliament had not lifted their immunity as of June 2023;
- K. whereas Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Legal Action Worldwide, Legal Agenda and the International Commission of Jurists have documented a range of procedural and systemic flaws in the domestic investigation that render it incapable of credibly delivering justice, including flagrant political interference, immunity for high-level political officials and lack of respect for fair trial and due process standards; whereas in these circumstances the establishment of an international fact-finding mission authorised by the UN Human Rights Council is all the more imperative; whereas more than 162 Lebanese and international rights organisations, survivors and victims' families have urged the UN Human Rights Council members to a resolution to that effect;
- L. whereas whistle-blower Colonel Joseph Skaf, former director of the port's narcotics department, who had warned his hierarchy of the danger of storing the chemicals in 2014, was murdered in 2017; whereas Joe Bejjany, who photographed the hazardous hangar before and after the explosion, was murdered and his telephone was stolen in December 2020; whereas activist and publisher Lokman Slim was murdered in February 2021, 10 days after he accused Hezbollah of providing the Bashar al-Assad regime with ammonium nitrate;
- M. whereas since 22 September 2021, 21 legal cases have been filed against the Chief Investigator of the explosion, Judge Tarek Bitar, and other judges looking into the cases, mainly involving politicians from Hezbollah and their allies, the General Prosecutor and the Minister of Justice; whereas the domestic investigation into the explosion was suspended from 23 December 2021 until January 2023 after two of the politicians charged in the case filed another complaint against Judge Bitar, as well as Lebanon's highest court, the High Judicial Council, which had previously examined and refused their earlier request to remove Judge Bitar from his post; whereas the Lebanese Court of Cassation's General Assembly, which now has jurisdiction, is unable to rule on these cases as it currently does not have a quorum because one of its members retired in late 2021, and the case cannot resume until new judicial appointments are made; whereas caretaker Finance Minister Youssef Khalil refused to sign the decree on the judicial appointments, which forced Judge Bitar to halt the investigation again;
- N. whereas the presence of more than one and a half million Syrians in Lebanon, in addition to some 15 800 refugees of Ethiopian, Iraqi, Sudanese and other origins registered with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and approximately 207 700 Palestine refugees, has an impact on the Lebanese economy and has contributed to its multi-dimensional crisis; whereas Palestine refugees in Lebanon continue to face substantial challenges and restrictions, with the majority of them living in poverty and relying on the assistance of United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) as their main source of livelihood;

- O. whereas, following the Arab Spring and the popular uprising in Syria in 2011, the Assad regime launched a campaign of brutal repression against its own population, killing over half a million people and displacing almost half of its total population, leading to 6 million people becoming refugees and 7 million internally displaced; whereas Hezbollah has assisted and supported the Assad regime in the Syrian war, including by providing boots on the ground and accompanying Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps personnel in organising and training Syrian militias; whereas Hezbollah's military wing is on the EU's list of banned terrorist organisations;
- P. whereas according to Human Rights Watch reports, a number of refugees have been detained and deported to the Syrian-Lebanese border and handed over to the Syrian authorities;
- Q. whereas on 11 October 2022, Israel and Lebanon made a historic breakthrough, reaching an agreement to establish a permanent maritime border between them, which has the potential to contribute to the stability and prosperity of the two neighbours, as well as to that of the wider region;
- R. whereas on 31 August 2022, the UN Security Council adopted resolution 2650 (2022), which extended the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) to 31 August 2023; whereas it recalled the need for the Lebanese armed forces to be deployed in southern Lebanon and for all parties to respect the cessation of hostilities, prevent Blue Line violations and ensure UNIFIL's freedom of movement and access to the Blue Line;
- S. whereas Riad Salameh, Governor of Lebanon's Central Bank since 1993, is the subject of an international arrest warrant issued in May 2023 at the request of France and Germany on charges of money laundering, fraud, forgery, embezzlement and participation in a criminal association; whereas on 28 March 2022 Eurojust confirmed that authorities from France, Germany and Luxembourg had seized properties and frozen assets of Mr Salameh worth EUR 120 million; whereas Mr Salameh denies wrongdoing and refuses to resign; whereas Mr Salameh's mandate ends in July 2023;
- T. whereas Monaco's Prosecutor General is conducting a money laundering investigation against Prime Minister Mikati, who also features in the Pandora Papers;
1. Considers Lebanon's present situation to be caused by politicians across the ruling class and by illegally armed parties obstructing the democratic and constitutional process and calls for their disarmament; calls on Lebanon's political elite to take their share of the responsibility for the current situation in the country;
2. Urges the Lebanese Parliament to elect a president in the shortest possible timeframe in order to begin addressing the political, economic, social, financial and health crises, and the state of institutional breakdown; urges them all to finally endorse and defend the Lebanese people's claims; expresses grave concern about the obstacles to the implementation of the necessary reforms and calls on the Lebanese leaders to prioritise national interests; regrets that the Lebanese Parliament has yet to elect a president after 12 inconclusive presidential election sessions;
3. Regrets that the municipal elections scheduled for May 2022 were postponed for the second time in two years, leading to a further political stalemate and increasing the dysfunction of the state institutions; urges the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities to commit to holding the municipal elections within the next six months and proceed with the preparations accordingly; calls on the Lebanese authorities to request that the VP/HR deploy an election observation mission, or, alternatively, an election expert mission, months ahead of the municipal elections; urges the Commission and the Member States to provide all the technical and financial assistance to contribute to enabling the elections to be held on time and in the best conditions possible, and to strive to guarantee the fairness and transparency of the whole process, while insisting that it is the government's responsibility to set aside the necessary budget for holding municipal elections;
4. Calls for an international humanitarian task force under the auspices of the UN to support the implementation of humanitarian assistance and oversee the use of funds;

5. Calls for the EU to offer Lebanon the deployment of a comprehensive EU administrative advisory mission in order to address the urgent need to counter the accelerating breakdown of public administration and basic services by providing an action plan and related necessary support; commends the role of essential public sector workers who, despite having their salaries cut by more than half in recent years because of austerity measures, have continued to deliver key services to the population in areas such as health, education and care;

6. Calls on the Lebanese government to swiftly implement key governance, economic and financial reforms that will ensure political and economic recovery, including the credible regulation of key economic sectors such as the electricity sector; welcomes the adoption of amendments to the Lebanese banking secrecy law as a key step towards unlocking international macro-financial assistance, namely from the International Monetary Fund; invites the country to continue implementing reforms, including in the judiciary, to ensure independence and prevent political interference and institutionalised impunity in the justice system; recalls the urgent need to limit the exorbitant power of the military court and limit its competencies to only perform trials for military crimes committed by the military and never to try civilians; recalls that the EU, the World Bank and the UN have demanded the establishment of an independent and transparent judiciary, the adoption of a modern public procurement law and the enactment of an anticorruption strategy;

7. Calls on the Council to apply targeted sanctions under the framework adopted by the Council on 30 July 2021 against all of those who are infringing the democratic and electoral process in the Lebanese institutions, those involved in serious financial misconduct and those obstructing corruption investigations or the domestic investigation into the Beirut port explosion or an upcoming international fact-finding mission, and seize their assets in the EU; notes that the Council Framework is due to expire on 30 July 2023; calls on the Council to take immediate action to extend it and work toward its renewal;

8. Recalls that a transparent, independent, neutral and effective investigation into the Beirut port explosion is a priority and must be ensured; urges the Lebanese authorities to respect the judicial procedures and the independence of the judiciary and assist every effort that would allow those responsible for the decisions that led to the blast in the port of Beirut to be properly investigated and held to account; calls for an independent international fact-finding mission to Lebanon to investigate the Beirut explosion within the framework of the UN; insists that those found directly or indirectly responsible must be held accountable for the lives lost and the damage done to the Lebanese people; insists that the port of Beirut is key infrastructure for Lebanon and needs to be reconstructed; urges the authorities to fully cooperate with Judge Bitar, who is leading the investigation into the explosion of the port;

9. Encourages the EU Member States to assist families of the victims of the Beirut port blast in exploring the possibilities for presenting lawsuits in foreign national courts as well as explore the possibilities for prosecuting politicians accused of atrocities under universal jurisdiction; calls on the Human Rights Council to enact a resolution establishing and dispatching an independent and impartial fact-finding mission in order to determine the facts and circumstances of the Beirut explosion, including the root causes, to establish state and individual culpability and to promote justice and restitution for the victims;

10. Strongly condemns the culture of impunity that has flourished in Lebanon; is concerned about attempts to intimidate independent members of civil society through various means; notes that victims and families cannot wait any longer for justice to be done; calls for an immediate end to the culture of impunity that prevails in Lebanese institutions and urges the authorities to remove all obstacles to ongoing judicial investigations, particularly in cases of corruption;

11. Highlights the need to promote sustainable solutions to tackle the food insecurity and energy crises and the need to provide direct humanitarian support, in line with the recommendations of the Food and Agriculture Organization; calls for the EU's humanitarian support to be coupled with support for farmers and agricultural workers and other forms of support for local food production, as well as investment in infrastructure for generating renewable energy in the country;

12. Expresses its concern about numerous cases of mismanagement and fraud related to EU-funded projects due to the lack of transparency and oversight and poor selection and bidding criteria and record keeping; invites the Commission and the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO) to consider the case of the alleged misuse of EU funds for waste management facilities; underlines that the EU should keep oversight of the projects and deliver funding in instalments following independent verifications for each phase of the relevant projects in order to compensate for Lebanon's high risk of corruption; calls on the EU and its partners to publish all relevant documents allowing for independent scrutiny by civil society; underlines that such standards and best practices should be shared across all international donors who seek to help Lebanon, such as in the case of EU support for solid waste management in Lebanon; reiterates its call for the Commission to increase the accountability and monitoring of EU-funded projects in Lebanon; stresses that the EU funds should not reach Hezbollah;

13. Stresses that conditions are not met for the voluntary, dignified return of refugees in conflict-prone areas in Syria; recalls the vulnerability of the refugee population in Lebanon and stresses the need to provide adequate, predictable and multi-layered funding to agencies working with refugees in order to ensure the full provision of essential services to refugee communities in the country; calls on the Commission to work on improving the humanitarian situation in Syria in order to address the root causes of the refugee crisis; stresses that the return of refugees should be voluntary, dignified and safe, according to international criteria; calls for humanitarian aid to continue to be provided to the Lebanese population and refugees, with strict controls; calls on Lebanon to become a party to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and to its 1967 protocol; calls for the creation of an international task force with the participation of the EU, UN and Lebanese authorities to address the refugee question; expresses its concern about the escalation of anti-refugee rhetoric by Lebanese political parties and ministers; urges Lebanon, in the event of any action taken on migration, to refrain from deportation and imposing discriminatory measures and inciting hatred against Syrian refugees; calls, in this regard, for the EU and the Member States to continue to provide funding for UNRWA and Syrian refugees;

14. Expresses support for UNIFIL's work along the Lebanese-Israeli border and strongly condemns all attacks on UN peacekeepers; calls, as a matter of urgency, for those responsible to be held to account;

15. Calls for the EU to add Hezbollah in full and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps to its list of banned terrorist organisations;

16. Welcomes the signing of the agreement on the delineation of the maritime border between Lebanon and Israel and encourages the two countries to continue their constructive engagement;

17. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, the UN Secretary-General, the Secretary-General of the Arab League, the President of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly, and the Government and Parliament of Lebanon.