

# EuroArab Forum

PROMOTING INNOVATIVE AND INVENTIVE IDEAS

## Event report

### Exchange between the EuroArab Forum and a Lebanese youth group, July 2008



Youth Group led by Mr. Badreddine, mayor of the city of Nabatieh in South Lebanon and Vice-President of the Middle East region of the Arab Federation of UNESCO Clubs.

On the occasion of their 5-day visit to Brussels – upon invitation by the European Parliament – a group of young Lebanese high school pupils and students was invited to a reception by the EuroArab Forum. The Lebanese group was led by Mr. Badreddine, mayor of the city of Nabatieh in South Lebanon and Vice-President of the Middle East region of the

Arab Federation of UNESCO Clubs. After a short presentation of the background and activities of the EAF, discussion was opened for an exchange of ideas as to what were the most pressing and interesting topics regarding Lebanon as well as Euro-Arab relations. Starting with quite general problems like unemployment in Lebanon, the effect of globalization on young people and the importance of civil

society, the group participants quickly went on to a more and more specific analysis of the current political crisis in their country. Among others, the following points were raised:

- young people cannot express themselves and their visions freely because of a repressive environment
- civil society needs to be better organized and more efficient and women to become more relevant; the age for voting has to be lowered
- effective fight of corruption
- discrimination and institutionalized employment quotas for government jobs: priority should be put on capacity and quality rather than on religious affiliation
- no one is following the constitution: there is no commonly shared concept of the state
- according to the small size of the country (and the population), it has the one of the highest numbers of political parties in the world
- US, Iran and Syria and Israel intervene in the country's domestic affairs
- too much weight is put on religion

### **Position of the EuroArab Forum**

The EuroArab Forum was pleased to welcome the young and enthusiast group of adolescents and young adults from southern Lebanon. It was immediately clear that the visitors had profited from several high profile encounters within the European institutions in Brussels and that they were eager to share their ideas about Europe and its possible role in assisting Lebanon to regain political stability and accomplish further progress. The members and friends of the EuroArab Forum were delighted to see the young people's political awareness, the insight in their country's political functioning but also the deadlock of the political process, and their aspiration to formulate working alternatives and sensible demands. It taught us many things about the realities Lebanese live in their every day lives and the remarkable potential the country has.

For the EuroArab Forum it was a further proof that exchange, dialogue and sharing

experiences and expertise are the sole way to create a stable and peaceful Mediterranean space where European and (Arab) Middle Eastern countries live at peace and in extensive cooperation.

We, the EuroArab Forum, are also stimulated by the group's visit to broaden our scope and to further include actual encounters between youngsters from communities and countries in the (Arab) Middle East and in Europe. This will further deepen our own process of reflection on topics related to Arab and European affairs and the regular public debates which we organize.

As a rather new Forum in Brussels we therefore chose to concentrate on a wider variety of activities all of them to concentrate on improving the understanding of European and Arab realities in our world of today.

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