

Speech of Professor Hassan Diab
Minister of Education and Higher Education

Launching the project entitled
“Towards the Lebanese Quality Assurance Agency”
Balamand University – Koura
January 26, 2012

Excellencies Ambassadors:

Ms Angelina Eichhorst,
Mr Denis Pietton,
Mr. Juan Carlos Gafo,
Your Excellency President Elie Salem,

Representative of the LU President,
Presidents of the different Lebanese Universities,
President of the Association of Banks in Lebanon,
President of Liban Pack,
Representative of UNESCO,
Representatives of professional orders,
Distinguished guests,
Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Lebanese university system, one of the oldest in our region, is characterized by diversity, autonomy, openness and competitiveness. These qualities have enabled our graduates to be accepted in prestigious institutions worldwide and have encouraged students and professors from the whole region to join our tertiary institutions, thus propagating Lebanon’s fame as a renowned centre for learning.

This reputation, however, was hard to attain.

In the past few decades, the Lebanese higher education system faced many problems on the political, financial, and security levels; and worked hard to confront them. More recently, new challenges have materialized. Some are global; others are local.

On the global level, the establishment of knowledge-based societies and the fast technological and scientific evolution forced our educational institutions to take on new roles and responsibilities and urged them to constantly update and adjust their programs, often at a fast pace.

On the local front, the growth in population, the increasing demand for higher education, in addition to economic issues and employment concerns have exerted significant pressure on the Lebanese higher education system. In an effort to respond to these challenges, old as well as newly established universities introduced new programs and activities at different levels and with different scopes. Unfortunately, the mediocre

quality control system that monitored these educational developments demanded minimum quality requirements. As a result, these programs survived and mushroomed, propelled by the competitive nature of the Lebanese education system.

Given these challenges, higher education institutions and the Lebanese society at large felt the need for a new mechanism to assure quality education. Several national, regional and international projects were conducted to respond to this need. Moreover, some of our prestigious universities sought external evaluation and accreditation by international quality assurance agencies. Recognizing the need for monitoring and regulating the new educational programs, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education worked with few experts- in the context of different projects- to develop a draft law for the establishment of a Lebanese quality assurance agency. This law, which respects international standards of quality assurance agencies in terms of independence and autonomy, has been submitted to the Council of Ministers and is currently being studied. We hope to have it ratified soon.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Tempus programme has supported the reform, modernization and development of the Lebanese Higher Education, its programs and structures, since 2002. Moreover, it has recently granted Lebanon a project titled “Towards the Lebanese Quality Assurance Agency (TLQAA)” which we are launching in Balamand University, and which enjoys the support of the Ministry and its Directorate General of Higher Education. Indeed, one only needs to look at the distinguished audience attending this event to realize that the support for quality assurance encompasses different Lebanese stakeholders, and not just the Ministry of Education and Higher Education. We are all looking forward for the outcomes and deliverables of the TLQAA project which includes 1) the definition of a Lebanese quality assurance system, 2) a customized set of standards and guidelines, 3) the selection and training of Lebanese experts, and 4) some pilot evaluations. We believe that the large consortium representing the different components of the Lebanese higher education system will achieve these project goals while carefully respecting the following declared principles:

- protecting the interests of students and society,
- preserving the institutions’ autonomy and diversity, and
- limiting the burden of external evaluation on the institutions

We also call the consortium to consider the international standards and to remember that our institutions are always welcome to undergo evaluation by international agencies.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We would like at this stage to thank Tempus Programme for its support for the different projects in Lebanon, particularly the TLQAA project, and to thank the European partners who have provided their valuable expertise. We also encourage and support the indelible efforts of the Lebanese partners in the project.

Best of luck for the TLQAA project
Thank you.