

Excellency Minister Diab,
Excellencies Ambassadors Eichhorst, Gafo and Pietton,
President Salem.
President Torbay,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a privilege for me to address such a distinguished audience on quality assurance and quality improvement in Higher Education.

Let me at the outset confirm that the relationship between Industry and a quality academic system is highly strategic.

I find no better way to share with you my convictions, other than reminding you of the key pillars and components of late minister of industry Pierre Gemayel's program "Industry for Lebanon's youth 2010" which was put forward in 2005. For the record, the program, hailed by officials and professionals alike, had the ambition of doubling Lebanon's per capita income in 2010, putting in motion a momentum building on Lebanon's key strategic pillars.

In a country often considered as lacking natural resources, the main pillars for economic development identified then were: Lebanon's Diaspora, as well as successful Lebanese professionals spanning the Globe; Lebanon's financial institutions and their abundant financial resources; Committed Entrepreneurs, resilient and successful despite all hardships, professionals, Resourceful Universities, and Lebanon's Youth.

Our aim to build solid drivers for economic development coincided with the strong presence of universities here, as well as the strategic role they have been playing in the most developed countries. The American experience is a case in point where major advanced technological industrial sectors are in total symbiosis with the universities for their research and development. It is no surprise that many major successful technological firms are even located in the proximity of dedicated universities.

Furthermore Lebanese industrialists have had to create for themselves areas of competitiveness building on their intrinsic core competencies. For sure we cannot succeed by competing on prices; this option requires a structure of low costs unavailable locally. In a country lacking natural resources and cheap energy, industrialists had to bank on quality, excellence and innovation not only to survive but also to succeed in ever more difficult world markets.

Lebanese successes in many products and markets are known the world over. Quality is a key driver for success at all levels. The slogan "Lebanese Quality" reminding that of "Swiss Quality" was and is believed to be a key component for economic development for Lebanon. Quality is a permanent commitment, not a slogan. Igniting the need for specialization and dedication we had called for the Lebanese quality seal.

We look at today's program: "Toward the Lebanese Quality Assurance" in this perspective. It is consolidating one of our main national assets: the Universities, at their source.

In a relate initiative we have, at SOPIL (The Lebanese Paper and Packaging Manufacturing Association), worked hard to create LibanPack, a center for packaging development helping SME's better package their products in line with demanding markets requirements.

The center has been financed by SECO and managed under the supervision of UNIDO. It is a successful cooperation between the private and public sectors with the help of international institutions.

We are shortly organizing Starpack 2012, the third competition that brings together university students from 10 universities from Lebanon, Jordan and this year Egypt.

The aim is to put together universities, students and the industrial community in a long term strategic partnership.

Confronted by the well established and pioneering presence of the paper industry in Lebanon we are hoping that the whole momentum will consolidate Lebanon's position as the "packaging Centre" of the region, and of the Mediterranean. In fact not only do our exports reach the world but many Lebanese industrial groups operate in Europe, Africa, Egypt, the Gulf, Iran and the USA.

In the framework of globalization, and the European programs around the Mediterranean, our industrialists are prepared to be key partners with European groups in their expansion around the region; and so are our Universities.

I conclude by addressing my sincere thanks to the University of Balamand, the EC, and the Tempus network.

Yes, Lebanon is a small country, but it is a world for big opportunities.

Dr. Fady Gemayel
Thursday, January 26th 2012
University of Balamand