

Lebanon

Opening address by Mr Jean-Yves Le Drian, Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, CEDRE Conference

Paris, 6 April 2018

Mr President of the Council of Ministers, dear Saad Hariri,

Ministers,

Heads and senior officials of international institutions,

Ambassadors,

Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends,

I am pleased to welcome you to the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs for this day of meetings to rally our support for Lebanon. President of the Council of Ministers, all of us here—international organizations, States, NGOs, businesses—have something that connects us with Lebanon. Whether it be because of your history, geography or the human ties forged by the diaspora, your country is not foreign to us. I am aware, as France's Foreign Minister, that I am part of a passionate history shared by our two countries. That is why we are closely affected by everything that affects Lebanon.

In a Middle East shaken by crises and wounded by civil wars, Lebanon remains a model of pluralism, tolerance and openness which we need. But Lebanon is not an island. It is bearing the full brunt of regional tensions and first and foremost of the Syria crisis. It is combating terrorism at its borders and within its own country. With more than a million refugees, it has taken on more than its share of the burden of those fleeing Syria. I would like to commend the exceptional generosity shown by the Lebanese people.

During this tumultuous time, the Lebanese people have acted in an outstanding spirit of responsibility over the past few months. The election of Michel Aoun as President of the Lebanese Republic, after two years of this office being vacant, then the

formation of a national union government under your authority, President of the Council of Ministers, and lastly, the adoption of a new election law have been positive steps towards stability. This winter, after a period of uncertainty, your Government was able to find a unifying political and reform-focused platform and reaffirm the principle of disassociation from regional crises. In exactly one month's time, the Lebanese people will elect a new Parliament for the first time in many years. The return to normal functioning of institutions will thus be achieved. One must make the most of this alignment of stars. This is what the friends of Lebanon have started to do at your side.

Last December, the meeting in Paris of the International Support Group provided the international community the opportunity to reaffirm its commitment to the stability, security and sovereignty of Lebanon. It reminded all of the Lebanese parties of their commitment to disassociate themselves from crises and not to get involved in regional conflicts. It reaffirmed the principle according to which only the Lebanese State may possess weapons, in compliance with Security Council Resolution 1701, which is still relevant today and which guides the action of UNIFIL in particular. It has also called upon all those who exert influence in Lebanon to respect the sovereignty of the State and not to weaken national institutions.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In international relations: "There are no friendships, just displays of friendship". That is why in the context I just mentioned, we collectively took action in support of Lebanon and its institutions in the key areas of security, humanitarian affairs and the economy.

First in Rome, on 15 March 2018 to strengthen the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Internal Security Forces. Because government institutions and particularly those responsible for security are the cornerstone of the country's unity and independence. I would also like to thank Italy and the United Nations again for organizing and chairing this conference. In Rome, France shouldered its responsibilities and opened a credit line of €400 million to the benefit of Lebanon to modernize its forces, in addition to shoring up its bilateral cooperation. This is an important step and we accomplished it together.

At the conference in London in 2016 and in Brussels in 2017, the international community provided its aid to respond to the humanitarian emergency that the massive presence of Syrian refugees in Lebanon generated. It will renew its commitment at the end of this month at the Brussels II Conference held thanks to the European Union. But to be effective, our aid cannot be limited to the humanitarian sector. It is clearly the entire economic fabric, and in particular infrastructures and public services, which are actually suffering and consequently require support. That is what has brought us together here today.

The name of the conference we are attending, the CEDRE Conference, is symbolic. It is also a programme of action: the economic development of Lebanon through reforms and with businesses. The work conducted ahead of this conference by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank enabled us to have a clear idea of Lebanon's economic situations and its outlooks. The starting point for our work, which was fuelled by our discussions with civil society and the private sector, was a very simple two-pronged observation that was agreed by a general consensus. First, Lebanon needs significant investments to update its basic infrastructures, which are no longer able to provide all its citizens basic public services in the proper conditions. Second, Lebanon's economy urgently needs far-reaching structural and sectoral reforms. Lebanon's stability from an economic point of view is therefore based on the combined action of Lebanese reform and international support.

With this in mind, today we are going to make tangible and substantial commitments. They are, I repeat, reciprocal commitments since international support must accompany the reforms that the President of the Council of Ministers will present to you. I would like to emphasize the Lebanese authorities' commitment in this process. Your presence, dear Saad Hariri, and that of the five ministers at your side, representing the diversity of your Government, fully reflect this.

I believe that in the two areas I just mentioned—investments and reforms—the Lebanese authorities have made efforts to map out clear and long-term outlooks. They have done so with an investment plan the Capital Investment Program (CIP), and a reform programme, that we will review together today. This is the outcome of credible, serious and ambitious work, which was conducted in close collaboration

with partner countries and international institutions. There will also be regular joint monitoring of the announcement and the commitments made today.

I would like to add that the momentum launched by CEDRE has already produced results. Lebanon adopted its 2018 budget last week. Last year's budget was not passed until last autumn and was the first budget to be passed in 12 years. Also, the Lebanese Parliament recently concluded its reform of the Water Code which is essential to a number of projects being considered in the Lebanese authorities' investment plan.

Mr President of the Council of Ministers, you are going to present projects that were identified and reforms that should be conducted.

We would like to say what our commitments will be, keeping in mind that alongside States and multilateral donors, the private sector, which is also represented here among us and which will also have the floor, should play a full role in this transformation. France will announce a substantial effort at the level of our ambitions in Lebanon of €400 million in concessional loans and €150 million in donations.

That is what I wanted to say to you to introduce our work. I now give the floor to the President of the Council of Ministers. Thank you.