



Lebanon

Last update:	2 June 2010
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Population:	4,125,247 (July 2010 est.)
Prime minister:	Fuad Siniora (since June 2005)
President:	Michel Sulayman (as of 25 May 2008)
Governemental type:	Republic
Ruling coalition:	-
Last election:	Subnational – legislative May 2010
Next election:	-
Sister parties:	Progressive Socialist Party, PSP (full member)



Lebanon is a country in transition. After the assassination of former prime-minister Rafik Hariri in February 2005, a few things have changed dramatically. After a presence of 29 years, Syria has withdrawn from Lebanon and for the first time in years, an anti-Syrian government is in power. On the other hand, some things haven't changed: sectarianism hasn't lost its significance in the Lebanese society and there is still a big difference between rich and poor and between the different religions. For these reasons, Lebanon is a complicated and intriguing country, with a history of sectarian wars and foreign intervention. These two factors for a great deal have shaped present-day Lebanon.

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INTRODUCTION

After Israeli and Lebanese Hezbollah provocations back and forth and the kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers, a heavy and violent crisis erupted on 12 July 2006 between Israel and Lebanon. Israeli air strikes on Beirut, the Bekaa valley and on Tyre, and ground incursions into southern Lebanon have killed and injured hundreds and have led to massive streams of people trying to escape the country. The Hezbollah attacks on Israel have also claimed casualties. The international community brokered between the Hezbollah armed forces and the Israeli army to establish a cease fire. On 14 August 2006, the fighting officially ended.

ELECTIONS AND POLITICAL SITUATION

Electoral and legal system

Lebanon is a Republic. The National Assembly indirectly elects the head of state, the president. Initially (since the constitution of 1926), the president was elected for a six years term. However in 2004, the National Assembly of Lebanon voted in favour of an amendment which allowed President Lahoud to stay in office for three more years. The president, upon a binding consultation with the National Assembly, appoints the prime minister. The prime minister chooses the cabinet, after consultation of the president and the National Assembly. The unicameral National Assembly of Lebanon is elected for a four years period. The 128 seats in the National Assembly are equally divided among Muslims and Christians. Each of the eleven confessional subgroups occupies a fixed number of seats in the National Assembly.

Due to this unusual division of seats in the National Assembly, the role of political parties in Lebanese politics is different from the role of political parties in normal parliamentary democracies. Many of the political parties are lists of candidates, supported by an important local figure. Political coalitions are therefore only formed because of electoral reasons, and easily fall apart once the seats in parliament are secured. This form of parliamentary politics sustains a form of politics, based on satisfying instantly the grassroots support, rather than it supports politics



based on ideology and long-term objectives.

Analysts say that Lebanese politics is both complicated and confusing. The combination of the fixed division of seats among the various religious groups, together with the many local candidates of different religions, makes it hard to get a clear view of the relative strength of political parties in the National Assembly.

The National Assembly is elected by a system of multi-member constituencies with each voter having one vote. The party winning most votes takes all the seats in the district, and its entire list of candidates is duly elected. Because of practical and safety reasons, the elections are held in four terms, which means that the National Assembly is elected in six different constituencies, on four different moments. Lebanon has no legal electoral threshold and no compulsory voting. Lebanon has universal suffrage for all men, with a minimum age of 21. Women should have an elementary education and the minimum age of 21 in order to be authorized to vote. Remarkably, voters do not vote according to their place of residence, but according to their “civil record”, usually the residence of their forefathers.

Another remarkable topic in Lebanese politics is the fact that there is a division of the most important positions among the three big religious groups in the Lebanese society. This means that the president is always a Maronite Christian, the prime minister is always a Sunni Muslim and the speaker of the National Assembly is always a Shi’a Muslim. This close connection of politics and religion is one of the bottlenecks for Lebanese politics.

Previous elections

From 1976 until 2005, Lebanese elections were more or less controlled by Syria. Analysts say that before the 2005 elections, most of the ruling Lebanese politicians were marionettes of the Syrian leader al-Assad and that the military presence of Syria, until spring 2005, has strengthened this situation. In the past, many changes in blocs and coalitions have taken place. This gives a relatively blurred view on the changes in relative electoral strength of the major religious groups in the National Assembly. At the 2000 elections, candidates of 18 different parties were elected in the National Assembly.

Elections 2005

In 2005 parliamentary elections were held. After the assassination of Rafik Hariri, anti-Syrian (organized by the supporters of Rafik Hariri) and pro-Syrian (organized by Hezbollah) protest were held. This led to a political crisis and the resignation of government. New elections were organized, which, according to analysts, were reasonably fair. The elections for the National Assembly had the following outcomes.

Party	Leader	Seats
Total for Hariri Bloc	–	72
Current of the Future	Sa'ad Hariri	36
Progressive Socialist Party	Walid Jumblatt	16
Lebanese Forces	Sethrida Geagea	6
Kornet Chewane	–	6
Tripoli Bloc	Mohammed Safadi	3
Democratic Renewal	–	1
Democratic Left	–	1
Independents	–	3
Total Aoun and allies	–	21
Aoun Bloc	Michel Aoun	14
Skaff Bloc	Elie Skaff	5
Murr Bloc	Michel Murr	2



Total other parties	–	35
Amal	Nabih Berri	15
Hezbollah	Mohammed Ra'ad	14
Nationalist Socialist Party	–	2
Others	–	4

Total number of seats: 128

The most important consequence of the 2005 elections is the fact that it brought a mainly anti-Syrian coalition into power. The Hariri Bloc, led by Rafik Hariri's son Sa'ad, won a majority (72) of the 128 available seats. For the first time in many years, a mainly anti-Syrian coalition has the majority in parliament. Still it should be noticed that Hezbollah is in number the fourth party in parliament, occupies two seats in the government and that the pro-Syrian bloc is still of reasonable size (35 seats).

After the 2005 elections a new cabinet was formed, with Fuad Siniora (Current for the Future) as prime minister. He formed a mainly anti-Syrian cabinet without, surprisingly, members of the anti-Syrian Aoun bloc. Even more surprising is the presence of Hezbollah in the government.

So currently, Lebanon has a pro-Syrian president (Lahoud) and an anti-Syrian prime minister (Siniora). Like in the National Assembly, the seats in the cabinet are equally divided among Muslims and Christians: 12 to 12.

Although the 2005 elections were the first free elections in 30 years, the voter turnout was not very high. The first round turnout was 28%. In the second, third and fourth round, the turnout was between 43% and 55%. Observers say that there's still a great amount of fear in the anti-Syrian camp to vote freely and unconditionally. This could explain the low turnout. Others claim that there's an enormous amount of indifference of politics among the citizens on Lebanon. Even though the 2005 elections were the first fair elections in 30 years, people still have little faith in politics as a whole. Low turnout rates are therefore not surprising.

Politics and gender

It can be stated that men are undoubtedly dominant in Lebanese politics. Only 6 out of 128 members (4,7%) of the National Assembly are women. This means that Lebanon in the ranking occupies the 122nd place out of 136. The low percentage of female members of the National Assembly could be partly be explained by the obligation for women to have an elementary education in order to vote. However, the low percentage and unusual low ranking of Lebanon could be even better be explained by the high levels of confessionalism in Lebanese politics. In the less developed regions of Lebanon, old religious values still define how politics is played. Because the participation of women in politics has not been the top priority for many religions during the past, this still could be the case in present-day Lebanese politics.

Presidential elections 2008

On 25 May 2008 a new President was elected in Lebanon after the vote was postponed since November 2007. While the term of President Lahoud expired that same day, the Lebanese MP's failed to convene to elect a new president. The reason was the political dispute between the anti-Syrian and pro-Syrian factions. Under the constitution Prime Minister Fouad Siniora and the cabinet were to assume temporary powers until a new President was elected. A compromise deal named the 'Doha Agreement' was finally reached on 21 May 2008. It dealt with issues such as a unity government, Hezbollah and a new electoral law. Giving Hezbollah more influence within the government while at the same addressing the issue of its weapons arsenal has been praised by all fractions in Lebanon. The United States called the agreement a 'welcome development'. The agreement was necessary as these issues had to be addressed before electing a new president. Disagreements before the Doha Agreement made it impossible to elect a new president. So, the agreement paved the way to Michel Sleiman's election on 25 May 2008, who is the current president of Lebanon. The situation in the country has been relatively stable since then. The next parliamentary elections are scheduled for 7 June 2009. It is expected that Hamas might win the elections, which could lead to new tensions in the country.

Political developments prior to the elections



The term of the ex-president Émile Lahoud was extended for three years in 2004, allegedly under pressure from the Syrian government. Lebanese politicians were not able to agree on a consensus candidate and a standoff between the government and the opposition, led by the Shia group Hezbollah, intensified after this period. The government was paralysed since the opposition, Hezbollah and the Amal movement, withdrew their ministers in November 2006 in an attempt to gain more political representation.

Consequently, in December 2006 a series of demonstrations by the opposition parties started. The opposition group was made up of pro-Syrian, Iranian-backed Hezbollah and the Amal movement, and the anti-Syrian Free Patriotic Movement (FPM). This group was seeking to create a national unity government, in which it demanded more than one third of the cabinet seats. This would give them veto power, as well as the ability to collapse the government. The government refused this. The opposition was also seeking to hold early parliamentary elections. On 8 April 2007, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, leader of the opposition, declared the situation deadlocked. However, he expressed an unwillingness to let the protests escalate into a civil war. Opinion polls suggested that the majority of Lebanese would look favourably at a consensual candidate. The Lebanese Air Force Chief Commander Michel Sleiman, the Governor of the Central Bank Riad Salame and the former Foreign Affairs Minister Jean Obeid were credited as possible "consensual" candidates. Sleiman turned out to be the eventual consensus candidate, but his election required constitutional amendments allowing military commanders to move directly into presidential office.

The vote was expected to be tense, especially since the end of 2006 and in 2007 there has been an increase in violence. In November 2006 leading Christian politician and government minister Pierre Gemayel was shot dead and in June 2007 anti-Syrian parliamentarian Walid Eido was killed in a bomb attack in Beirut. On 19 September 2007 Antoine Ghanem, a prominent parliamentarian, and at least six others were also killed in a car bomb attack in Beirut. No group has claimed responsibility for the series of attacks. On 14 March leaders, who blame the Syrian government for the assassination of Ghanem, vowed to hold the presidential election as scheduled and to possibly elect a March 14 candidate as president even by simple majority after the second round. The violence became worse in the beginning of May 2008, when street battles between armed supporters of the factions left at least 65 people dead. The clashes were triggered by government attempts to outlaw Hezbollah's private telephone network and reassign Beirut airport's security chief, who is close to the opposition.

Parliamentary elections 2009

On 7 June parliamentary elections were held in Lebanon. Saad Hariri, the leader of Lebanon's "March 14 coalition" claimed victory hours after the polls closed on polling day. Official results of the election were announced on 8 June. The pro-Western "March 14 coalition" won 71 seats and the Hezbollah dominated "March 8 alliance" won 57 seats. Independent candidates did not win any seats. This result almost replicates the situation that existed in the outgoing parliament, in which the pro-Western bloc had 70 seats and an alliance of Hezbollah and other Shiite and Christian factions had 58. The turnout of 52.3%, was high compared to the turnout of 45.8% in the elections of 2005. About 50,000 troops were on the streets, but the run-up to the balloting had been free of violence. The vote was seen as a proxy battle between the influence of the West and its Arab allies on one side, and Iran and Syria on the other.

Election results

March 14 alliance	Seats	March 8 alliance	Seats
Future Bloc	30	Reform and change Block – Aounist Bloc	25
Independence	13	Liberation	13



nts		and Developm ent Bloc	
Democrati c Movement Bloc	10	Resistance Bloc (Hezbollah)	11
Lebanse Forces Bloc	5	Baath Party	2
Kataeb Party – Phalangist Bloc	5	Syrian Social Nationalist Party	2
Tripoli Bloc	3	Lebanese Democrati c Party	1
Allied Independa nts	3	Islamic Action Bloc	1
National Liberal Party	1	Solidarity Party	1
Jamaa Islamiya Bloc	1	Independe nt	1
Total	71	Total	57

Saad Hariri said after the election: "The Lebanese people proved again that they are holding on to their freedom and the democratic system, so congratulations to Lebanon, congratulations to freedom and to every voter who participated in this election. In this election, there is no winner or loser, democracy won today and the biggest winner is Lebanon." He also extended his hand to the losing side: "[we have] to work together and seriously for the sake of Lebanon." He urged supporters to celebrate without provoking opponents. Hezbollah admitted it had lost the election and accepted the results. Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hassan Nesrallah congratulated the Lebanese people for the high turnout. He continued to defend Hezbollah's position, especially concerning its arms: "The elections were held under the threat of the arsenal of the Resistance and were held peacefully. The arms of the resistance are not up for discussion." Nasrallah further appealed for joint action in defending, developing and building the country together: "Solving the problems of this country, and preserving the freedom and sovereignty needs the solidarity and cooperation of all parties"

President Sleiman of Libanon said: "The elections proved that the Lebanese are able to preserve their democratic system in this important phase of our history". Prime Minister Fouad Siniora described the elections as an important phase in the country's history: "The Lebanese will remember that they managed to achieve democratic elections and reinforce our democratic institutions."

Election analysis

The election was crucial in determining whether the Arab nation, scarred by war and political instability, picked the coalition led by Hariri (and supported by the West) or an alliance backed by the militant group Hezbollah. The election was also an early test of President Barack Obama's efforts to forge Middle East peace. The United States signaled concerns over a possible win by Hezbollah months before the election. A win by Hezbollah would have boosted the influence of its backers Iran and Syria and risked pushing one of the region's most volatile nations into international isolation and possibly into deeper conflict with Israel. The prevalent expectations were that Hezbollah and its allies would win. These assessments were backed by opinion polls, which predicted a slim majority for the March 8 camp. Moreover, it seemed that the victory of these factions was a natural development given the spirit of



the times: the weakening of the status of the United States and its Arab allies, compared with the strengthened influence of Iran and its allies – Syria, Hezbollah, and Hamas. Still, the elections resulted in a victory for the pro-Western camp. How can this be understood?

It seems several factors are behind Hezbollah's weaker showing according to Middle-East security analyst Amir Kulick. One of the main sources for the surprise lies in the assessment that the success of the March 14 camp in the previous elections incorrectly reflected the true balance of power in the Lebanese political system, as they were held shortly after the assassination of Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri in 2005 and the ensuing public outrage at Syria's allies in Lebanon – Hezbollah and the March 8 camp. It was suggested that the balance of power between the vying blocs was actually even, perhaps slightly favoring the March 8 camp, and the 2009 elections were supposed to restore the political order to its correct alignment. A second factor may lie in the Lebanese system itself. At the center of this explanation stands Michel Aoun's failure to enlarge his power base in the Christian sector. Aoun, head of the Free Patriotic Movement, was the surprise of the previous elections. Different estimates, especially those within his own close circle, maintained that in the current elections his power would grow significantly because most of the Christian sector stood behind him. The changes in the voting districts made under Hezbollah pressure in the Doha Agreement of May 2008 were supposed to help Aoun attain this goal. In practice, Aoun failed to garner additional support, and his party even lost one mandate. In this sense, the gap between the expectations of the Free Patriotic Movement with Aoun at its head and the actual results is significant. A third factor behind Hezbollah's poor showing – at least compared to expectations – was its inability to reach beyond the borders of the Shiite community and become a national political establishment acceptable to large segments of the Lebanese public. It seems that the May 2008 violence significantly damaged the organisation's national image and demonstrated to the Lebanese public – the Sunnis and the Christians – that the Weapon of Resistance is no less dangerous to the Lebanese than to Israel.

International reactions

The election has been called generally fair and free by international observers. "While not without flaws, Lebanon's June 7 election was fundamentally peaceful and well administered and should provide the basis for confidence in the electoral process and by extension, the formation of a new government" former US Senator John Sununu said, presenting the preliminary findings of the National Democratic Institute's observation mission. Presenting the European Union's Election Observation Mission's preliminary findings, chief observer Jose Ignacio Salafranca lauded the participatory spirit of the Lebanese, while laying out a number of recommendations. "I would like to praise citizens who turned out to vote in significant numbers and I applaud their patience in the face of lengthy queues in many polling centers," the Spanish MEP said, adding that the elections "have been contested in a polarised but, so far, generally peaceful environment."

The Czech Republic said in a statement that the EU commends the Lebanese authorities for the organization of the elections in one day for the first time and acknowledges the important contribution of the Lebanese security apparatus to the calm and secure electoral process. Javier Solana, EU's foreign and security policy chief, said the elections in Lebanon were an important step in the democratic evolution of the Middle East. US President Barack Obama congratulated the Lebanese people for a peaceful national election held with courage and a commitment to democracy. Arch-enemy Israel appeared relieved by the March 14 victory but said it would hold Beirut accountable for any attacks on its territory launched from Lebanon. "Israel considers the Lebanese government responsible for any military or otherwise hostile activity that emanates from its territory, it is incumbent upon any government that is formed in Beirut to ensure that Lebanon will not be used as a base for violence against the state of Israel and Israelis " Israel's Foreign Ministry said in a statement, reiterating demands that Beirut strengthens security and halts arms smuggling to Hezbollah.

Aftermath

The smooth formation of a new government could be seen as an important test of March 14's political strength and more importantly it could contribute to the stability of the country. Saad Hariri, the son of killed Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and leader of the March 14 coalition, said he planned to invite the Hezbollah-led opposition into the next government. But he and his allies want to remove the veto power the opposition now wields over most government policy, Hezbollah is strongly against this. Hezbollah did express its willingness to cooperate in a new government, so it is expected the current unity government will be continued in a comparable form.



Local elections 2010

In May local elections were held in Lebanon. Elections were held on 2, 9, 23 and 30 May for local government bodies and for 25 new municipalities. Almost across the entire country many of the contests for the elections were between family and tribal loyalties instead of political parties or alliances.

According to experts the elections were largely free, but the country needs to amend its electoral legislation. The current electoral system that is applied when electing members of municipal councils is known as the 'bloc vote' system, the same as is used for parliamentary elections in Lebanon. No municipal council seats, however, are reserved for any different confessional groups. Political and public debate has now begun to focus on the possibility of introducing an alternative electoral system for municipal elections. Ziad Abdel-Samad, the secretary general of the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections (LADE), said that the race by political parties to promote consensus and uncontested lists had limited the freedom of choice among constituents.

Rabih Habr, managing director of Statistics Lebanon, stated that each political party had claimed its own victory in Mount Lebanon. The Free Patriotic Movement was the clear winner after securing 815 seats, while the Phalange Party won 321 seats, the Lebanese Forces 400 seats and the Progressive Socialist Party 200 seats, he said. Habr noted that a number of cases of bribery had been reported in several municipalities, which he said was because of indirect intervention by political parties in the financing of the elections. He urged the immediate drafting of new electoral legislation based on proportional representation. Habr also noted a decrease in voter turnout compared with previous elections. According to him the decrease was due to a number of factors, pointing to the chaotic situation leading up to the elections caused by discussions of a new electoral law, the date of the elections and speculation about postponing the polls. A number of reforms proposed ahead of the polls by Interior and Municipalities Minister Ziyad Baroud were not implemented because of time constraints..

According to election observers there were few reports of violence, yet there were some complaints of campaign advertisement violations and reports of bribery at various polling stations. Mainly in the south of Lebanon some outbreaks of violence were reported as voters for rival parties clashed in the second round of the elections. In these region voters were electing candidates of opposing Shi'ite groups Amal and Hezbollah. Thousands of security troops were deployed across Lebanon to prevent more serious outbreaks of violence.

Gender representation

The number of women candidates for the elections was very low. Out of the total number of 6,590 candidates for council seats in the 23 May election, only 3.8% (252) were women. The National Commission for Lebanese Women (NCLW) organised symposiums in each district to encourage wider participation of women, as very few women put themselves forward for municipal seats.

IMPORTANT POLITICAL ISSUES

Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990)

The Lebanese Civil War has had a major impact on present-day Lebanon. Besides the impact it had on internal affairs, it also shaped the present-day relations of Lebanon with neighbouring and other countries.

The Lebanese Civil War brought an end to a relatively prosperous era in Lebanese history. Before 1975, Beirut was seen as "Nice of the Middle East" and Lebanon was a country in which trade flourished and different religions could be professed. However, discontent about the unequal division of power and wealth between the Christians on the one side and the Druze, Sunni and Shi'a on the other side, was still present in Lebanese society. The tension was mainly under the surface and so not yet visible.

In 1948, the first Palestine refugees had arrived from Israel. After the Six-Day War between Israel and the Arab-World, even more refugees came to Lebanon and started to strive for equal rights. By 1975, more than 300.000 refugees were in refugee camps, mostly in South-Lebanon. The presence of so many Palestinians and their



struggle for more rights, divided the Christians and Muslims in Lebanon. The followers of these two big religions started to disagree more and more on the way the Palestine-refugees should be treated. During the war, more religious sub-groups established their own militias. This led to a great number of militias from different regions in Lebanon. Religion lost its binding force, which caused the increase of importance of different sects. The Palestinians for instance, were divided in at least five different sub-groups.

The dispute between the different sects was strengthened by the socio-economic differences between Christians and Muslims. The Christians have always been in a better socio-economic and political position than the Muslims. Even when Muslims were greater in number than the Christians, this unequal political situation remained unchanged. Several incidents in 1975 between different sects led to the definitive outbreak of the Civil War.

In 1976, Syria intervened in the Lebanese Civil War by request of the Christians. The Druze militias had occupied almost 60% of Lebanon, and for that reason Beirut asked Syria to help by interfering the domestic conflict. The Syrian participation in the Civil War ended in the occupation of Lebanon until 2005. During and after the Civil War, Syria has had an enormous amount of influence on Lebanese society and politics. By 1978, the Lebanese army, Lebanese militias, the PLO, Israel, Syria and the countries of the peacekeeping force of the UN were actors in the Lebanese Civil War.

The development of the war was chaotic and confusing. Fights between different religions, meant de facto fights between militias of different sects of different regions. During the course of the fighting, alliances shifted rapidly and unpredictably. The interference of all the different countries made the Lebanese Civil War much more than just a "normal" civil war: it had great impact on the stability and the division of power in the region. The Civil War was ended in 1989 by the so-called "Taif Agreement" (named after the city of Taif in Saudi-Arabia where the peace negotiations were held) with no clear winner of war. A new division of power was arranged, Syria kept its influence in Lebanon and agreements were made to end the great level of sectarianism in Lebanese society and politics. Even nowadays, these topics dominate the political agenda in Lebanon.

Lebanon and neighbouring countries

Syrian influence and the assassination of Rafik Hariri

From the interference in 1976 until the withdrawal in 2005, Syria has occupied Lebanon. The occupation started with the interference of Syria in the Lebanese Civil War. The Syrians started to intervene on behalf of the Christian right in Lebanon, but they started fighting each other once the Christian right shifted to the side of the Israelis.

After the Civil War, the Syrian army stayed in Lebanon because of "safety reasons". The Lebanese forces were weak and so there was an official request from Beirut to the Syrians to stay in Lebanon and bring stability. The Syrians promised that they would cooperate on implementing all of the different elements of the Taif Agreement, like the political reform, the end of sectarianism and the beginning of the complete withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon.

The 20.000 Syrian soldiers brought some stability in Lebanon. But, after the withdrawal of Israel from Lebanon in 2000, citizens within Lebanon started to criticize the Syrian presence and their great influence on Lebanese politics and society. In the years before, pro-Syrian politicians had increasingly become marionettes of Syrian president Assad. Analysts say that the constitutional amendment of 2004 (extension of term of office of pro-Syrian President Lahoud) was heavily influenced by Syria. After the amendment passed the National Assembly, Prime Minister Hariri resigned in protest against the extension.

The assassination of former Prime-Minister Rafik Hariri on 14 February 2005 caused great protest against the Syrian occupation of Lebanon and against the pro-Syrian government. Many suspected that the Syrian president Assad was behind the assassination. This idea, and the Syrian influence in general were the reasons for the so-called Cedar Revolution. Mass anti-Syrian protests were held and the pressure on Syria increased, also from the United Nations, France and the United States. On the other hand, Syria was supported by the mass rallies, organized by Hezbollah. In spring 2005 the pro-Syrian government resigned and Syrian troops finally withdrew from Lebanon after a presence of 29 years.

Even though there is now an anti-Syrian government in office and Syrian troops have withdrawn from Lebanon, this doesn't mean that the Syrian issue is out of the Lebanese society. Hezbollah and the Amal party see the withdrawal of



Syria as an open invitation for Israel to occupy the south of Lebanon again. The massive anti- and pro-Syrian rallies held show that the Syrian influence still divides Lebanon. The Syrian withdrawal didn't bring an end to the assassinations. After the murder of Hariri, journalist Samir Kassir was assassinated as well. In December 2005, the influential member of parliament and publisher Gibrand Tueni was murdered. Tueni was strongly anti-Syria and so Syria is again suspected to be the mastermind behind the murder. The fact that Syria is still very influential in Lebanon, increases the amount of fear among anti-Syrian citizens in Lebanon.

On 17 August 2007 the Dutch government accepted Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's proposition to host the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, which is being set up to prosecute those people responsible for the assassination of former Lebanese prime minister Rafiq Hariri.

The PLO and Israel

Lebanon got involved in the Israel/Palestine conflict after the war of 1948. At least a 100.000 Palestinian refugees arrived in South Lebanon. After the Israeli/Arab Six Day War of 1967 even more refugees arrived in Lebanon and by 1975, more than 300.000 Palestine's lived in refugee camps in Lebanon. Even more important, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) changed its strategy by attacking Israel from a weak neighbour country. Two attacks in 1968 on Israeli airplanes by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the retaliation of Israel, polarized Lebanon and deepened the divide between pro-Palestine and anti-Palestine factions.

The Cairo Agreement of 1969 between the PLO and Lebanon gave the PLO a certain amount of autonomy over the refugee camps, the right to form its own militia and access routes to Israel, in return for recognition of Lebanese sovereignty. In the eyes of the anti-Palestine Christian Maronites, these were excessive concessions to the Palestinians. The discontent among the Christians caused the foundation of several anti-Palestine militias. In response to that, the Palestinians formed their own militias to fight for equal rights in Lebanon and against Israel. By 1980, more than five different Palestinian militias were fighting in the civil war. The internal coherence was very little and only the presence of Yassar Arafat kept the PLO together.

In 1978, Israel invaded the South of Lebanon. This was the beginning of a more active and offensive role of Israel in the Lebanese Civil War. By 1982, a second invasion of Lebanon by the Israeli's was launched. The Israeli minister of defence, Ariel Sharon, aimed establish a security zone of 40 kilometres to protect Israel against PLO rocket attacks. This operation, named "Peace for Galilee", was the starting point of the Israeli occupation of South-Lebanon which ended in 2000.

However, it remains to be seen if the relative stability the operation brought about can be carried through. After the kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers by the armed forces of Hezbollah in early July 2006, the relations between Israel and Lebanon have escalated. The Israeli army had carried out air raids at targets in the border region and on Lebanon's capital Beirut and its port in Tyre, and has performed ground incursions in southern Lebanon. In return, Hezbollah forces have fired rockets at the northern Israeli cities of Haifa, Tiberias and Nazareth and others.

Hundreds of Lebanese civilians have died and even more were injured. Foreign citizens have been evacuated and thousands of Lebanese families from the southern regions left their houses to seek refuge in safer regions or in Syria. The UN has made aid available to facilitate the refugees. In Israel, the Hezbollah attacks have also claimed numerous casualties and injuries, and have caused many to seek refuge.

The international community brokered between the Hezbollah armed forces and the Israeli army to establish a cease fire. On Monday morning 14 August 2006, the fighting officially ended. The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) will now see to the enactment of the cease fire. However, the UNIFIL forces have experienced several attacks on their troops after the mandate started. On 24 June 2007 near the border with Israel, six UNIFIL soldiers were killed after their vehicle was hit by an explosive device. Radical groups had previously threatened the peacekeeping forces. A month later, on 16 July 2007, a roadside bomb hit a peacekeeping patrol in South Lebanon.

The UNIFIL mandate was extended to 31 August 2008 by the Security Council. The Council called upon the parties to cooperate with the UN to achieve a permanent ceasefire. In November 2007 the UN called on Israel to stop violating airspace and it stated that such flights undermine the credibility of UN peacekeepers stationed in southern Lebanon and compromise efforts to stabilize the region. Lebanon had send the UN a document in which it claimed that Israel had staged over 290 flyovers across the Lebanese border.



Western Countries

France, the United States and Britain enforced the withdrawal of Syria from Lebanon after heavy pressure. Because all three countries have a special relationship with Lebanon, an active role of these countries in the withdrawal of Syria is not surprising. France is former ruler of Lebanon, between 1922 and 1943. From the mid of nineteenth century until the independence of Lebanon, France heavily favoured the Christian Maronites above the Druze. The Druze on the other hand, were constantly backed by Britain. The military supplies of both countries for the Maronites and the Druze have worsened and intensified the sectarian conflict from the nineteenth century on until the Civil War.

The United States have a special relationship with Lebanon as well. They participated in two ways in the Lebanese internal conflict: in peacekeeping-missions and by supplying arms to the army of General Michel Aoun. After the 1978 invasion, American soldiers were part of the UN peacekeeping force, UNIFIL, which was established in order to ensure the withdrawal of Israel from Lebanon. They succeeded in making Israel withdraw from Lebanon, later in 1978. Besides UNIFIL, another multinational peacekeeping force was established in 1982. This peacekeeping force contained again American, French and Italian troops and had the task to ensure again the withdrawal of Israel. After this invasion, the PLO negotiated in order to try to evacuate the PLO-troops. The American, French and Italian troops ensured a relatively peaceful evacuation of the Palestinians from the trenches near Beirut. Besides peacekeeping military actions, the United States have equipped the Lebanese Army of General Michel Aoun since 1983.

The European Union

The first contractual relations between the European Community and Lebanon were established in 1977, by signing a cooperation-agreement. Lebanon is nowadays one of the EU's long-standing partners in the framework of Euro-Mediterranean partnership. In 1995, this partnership was established. The cooperation covers 35 countries: 25 EU-member states and 10 Mediterranean countries, of which Lebanon is one of them. The main field of activity for the partnership are: a) political and security partnership, b) economic and financial partnership, c) and social, cultural and human affairs. This partnership has the main objective to establish a common Euro-Mediterranean partnership of peace and stability.

In 2002, the EU-Lebanon Association Agreement was signed. It is expected that this agreement will be ratified in the spring of 2006. The main objective is to provide a framework for political dialogue, cooperation in economic policy and in the social field (promoting the role of women and understanding amongst cultures). Measures to counter terrorism are covered in a separate agreement.

In 2004, the EU adopted a "Wider Europe - Neighbourhood" policy. Different to earlier agreements, the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) sets ambitious objectives for partnership with neighbouring countries. The EU-Lebanon Association Agreement was entered into force on 1 April 2007. This document and the Action Plan, adopted on 19 January 2007 within the framework of the ENP, provide a framework for political dialogue, co-operation in economic policy as well as close co-operation in the social field and on a cultural level.

Religion

Unlike many other countries in the region, Lebanon is religiously extremely heterogeneous. The main religious groups are Muslims and Christians. The Muslims can be divided in Sunni, Shi'a and Druze. The Christians have much more subgroups, around seven. Of these subgroups, the Maronites is by far the largest. Initially, the state of Lebanon was in fact only the region of Mount Lebanon. The Druze and Maronites were the most important groups in that region and from the twelfth century on, the Druze and the Maronites have fought each other in order to rule Mt. Lebanon. In nineteenth century, France and Britain intervened in the domestic conflicts by supplying arms to the Maronites (France) and the Druze (Britain).

After the First World War, the present-day borders of Lebanon were shaped. Institutionally, some other things changed. Supported by France, it was decided that the division of seats in parliament would be 6:5 in favour of Christians to the Muslims. Besides this fixed ratio, the French also supported the fixed division of President (Maronite) and Prime-Minister (Sunni). By 1960, the Muslims had outnumbered the Christians, but the unequal division of power in Lebanese politics remained unchanged. This inequality caused a great amount of dissatisfaction among Muslims. After the Civil War (in the Taif Agreement), the constitution changed and it divided the seats in the



National Assembly equally among the two groups.

However, religion is still of great importance. Research shows that the Maronites and Druze still disagree the most of all the religious groups in Lebanon on national issues. The Maronites and the Druze disagree the most on the confidence in the state and its institutions and on the need for secularism in Lebanon.

The way religion is intervened in politics and societal issues is an indication on a great level of sectarianism. Sectarianism could be defined as a rigid adherence to a particular sect, party or denomination. In Lebanon is this strongly the case. Division of seats is, for example, a perfectly clear case of sectarianism. Before the elections even take place, it's already decided which religious subgroups get a fixed number of seats.

Another consequence of the importance religious sects (and the division of seats that is designed to please all the sects) is the fact that local leaders are more important than political parties. A local leader gathers support because of his wealth and influence in the region, not because his outstanding political program.

In the Taif Agreement of 1989, it was decided to divide the National Assembly into a senate and a parliament. The Senate should be freed of the fixed division of seats and is supposed to design and implement a plan that ends the great level of sectarianism in Lebanon. Although the Taif Agreement was signed in 1989, the senate has not yet been erected. Sectarianism remains thus extremely important in Lebanese society.

Socio-economic situation

Lebanon is a country that has a 130th (of 232) place on ranking of GDP per capita in the world. Compared to other countries in the region, like Syria and Jordan, Lebanon scores slightly better with an average of 00,- per capita per year. On economic growth, Lebanon scores slightly better than its neighbouring countries with an average of 6% per year. Despite this positive view of Lebanese economics as a whole, compared to other countries in the region, differences between the different religious groups within Lebanon are substantial.

Analyses show that overall, the Maronites are wealthier than Shi'i and the Sunni. In an article on poverty and social mobility in Lebanon by El Khoury and Panizza (2001) it is concluded that the Christians score better than Muslims on the constructed "wealth index". The Christians score an average of 35 (of 55) on wealth, while the Muslims score 29. The income distribution within the different groups is most equal among the Druze and least equal among the Sunni. This unequal division of wealth between the Christians and the Muslims was one of the reasons for the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war and thus has played an important role in the history of Lebanon.

Besides a difference in wealth between the religions, there's also a difference noticeable between the different regions in Lebanon. The regions of Beirut and Mount Lebanon (dominated by Christians) do relatively much better than the more rural areas, where mostly Sunni and Shi'i live.

The gap between rich and poor has widened in the 1990's. This development caused a shift in the government's policy. Instead of rebuilding the country after the Civil War, improving living conditions became an important goal. An even more important consequence of the widened gap between rich and poor is the growing dissatisfaction among grassroots support of political parties. The dissatisfaction leads to a certain form of indifference of politics and decline in political trust, which are typical for the lower-class Lebanese citizens.

Another consequence of the widened gap between rich and poor is the low social mobility in Lebanon. This means that it's hard for an ordinary Lebanese citizen to rise on the social ladder and to make socio-economic progress. So, for many lower-class citizens, there is no prospect of a wealthier future.

Lebanon's economy was painfully set back by the 34-day war between Hezbollah and Israel in July-August 2006. It cost Lebanon close to a billion in infrastructural damage alone. And Lebanon suffered a severe contraction of 5 per cent of GDP. While Lebanon's economy was expected to recover from the impact of this war, the ongoing political tensions in the country hamper the implementation of any serious reform programme and depress economic activity at large.

Human rights

The Lebanese constitution provides a variety of political rights to civilians and members of parliament. In this sense,



political and civil rights are well secured in Lebanon. However, the Syrian influence in Lebanon decreased the real political freedom to a great extent. For election of the president by the members of parliament, Syrian authorization of the candidate was indispensable. Another problem that declines political rights in Lebanon, is the great amount of corruption. Syrian influence and the great amount of sectarianism increase vote buying and gerrymandering and thus cause a decrease of the value of political rights. One of the groups that has been discriminated since their arrival, are the Palestine refugees. They face restrictions on working, purchasing property and building houses.

There has always been a respectful amount of freedom of press in Lebanon. Lebanon has five independent television broadcasters, over 30 independent radio-stations and dozens of print publications. This doesn't mean that there are no restrictions. For instance: for all foreign magazines and non-periodical media, the General Security Directorate (GSD) has the possibility to impose censorship upon them. The Da Vinci Code by Dan Brown was one of the books that was forbidden in Lebanon by the GSD. Internet access is free in Lebanon.

The amount of freedom of press is still much larger than in countries of the Arab world. The assassination of member of parliament and publisher Gibrand Tueni proves however that freedom of press is a relative amount of freedom. Anti-Syrian writers can still have a hard time doing their job.

The freedom of association and assembly is restricted in Lebanon. NGO's like human rights organizations, are permitted to do their work, though authorities can impose restrictions. To organize a public demonstration, permission is required by the interior ministry. In the past, peaceful demonstrations against the Syrian occupation were disturbed by governmental forces. Membership of labour unions is allowed and members have the right to strike, although in the past governmental forces have ended the strikes with great amounts of violence.

Religious freedom is secured by the constitution. The great level of sectarianism causes that religions are secured of their position in the Lebanese society, for instance by the fixed division of seats in parliament. However, it should be stressed that Maronites have always been in a better socio-economic and political position, compared to the Druze, Shi'i and Sunni.

Officially, women have the same rights as men under the Lebanese constitution. However, because of the level of sectarianism in Lebanon, religious authorities still have a great amount of influence in each religious group. For this reason, Muslim women still face discriminatory laws on marriage, divorce, work and inheritance. Women are also underrepresented in parliament and in government.

SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY

Progressive Socialist Party

Leader: Walid Jumblatt

Number of seats: 16

Website: www.psp.org.lb

The Progressive Socialist Party is founded on 5 January 1949. The founders comprised six individuals, all with a different background. Among the founders was Kamal Jumblatt. He was the most prominent of the founders and was party leader until 1977 when he was assassinated. His son Walid is the present-day leader of the PSP.

The great majority of the PSP members is of the Druze (Muslim) religion. At the 2005 elections, the PSP joined the Hariri bloc and gained 16 seats in the National Assembly. This makes the PSP the second party in the National Assembly.

As son of Fouad Jumblatt, a influential member of the Druze community, Kamal Jumblatt was in the right position to become very influential in Lebanese politics. He studied philosophy in Lebanon and Arts and Sociology at the Sorbonne University in Paris. Before the foundation of the PSP, Kamal Jumblatt was deputy and later minister of Economy, Agriculture and Social Affairs. His discontent about corruption and fraud of the parliamentary elections, made him resign from government. Later, he found the Nationalist Socialist Front, which overthrew president El Khoury, and found the PSP in 1949. In the mid-fifties, the PSP was in the opposition. The PSP revolted against the



President Camille Chamoun and supported Egypt in the Suez-crisis.

Willing to construct a new order, based on secularism, socialism, Arabism and the abolishment of the sectarian system, the PSP began an opposition movement, together with other dissatisfied groups: the Lebanese National Movement (LNM). The PSP (as part of the LNM) and Jumblatt supported the Palestinians for religious reasons, but strived against the Arab nationalists slogans of the Palestine movement.

At the moment of the outbreak of the Civil War, in 1975, Jumblatt became leader of the opposition militias, which soon occupied nearly 60% of Lebanon. This was the reason for the Lebanese government to ask Syria to intervene. In 1977, Kamal Jumblatt was assassinated. The most important suspect was the Lebanese Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP), even though it was never proved. The son of Kamal Jumblatt, Walid, became the new leader of the PSP.

After the restoration of the constitutional rule in 1989, the PSP participated in a number of governments. Later, the PSP joined the opposition to oppose against the Syrian occupation of Lebanon. Walid Jumblatt was not per se against the Syrian presence, but rather against the influence of the Syrian secret service in Lebanon.

A secular state is nowadays a top-priority of the PSP. They have proposed a new electoral law that doesn't reflect the high level of sectarianism like the current law, but frees Lebanon of its religious constraints. Another important issue for the PSP is the reorganisation of the administrative districts in Lebanon. According to the PSP, more autonomy should be given to regional councils to increase their level of independence. Other important issues are the introduction of a progressive tax principle, the assurance of the separation of powers and enhancing the right to public liberties.

OTHER POLITICAL PARTIES

Current of the Future

Leader: Sa'ad al Hariri

Number of seats: 36

After the assassination of his father, Sa'ad Hariri took over the leadership of the Current for the Future movement. Initially Current for the Future was just a movement, but before the 2005 elections, Sa'ad Hariri vowed to turn the movement into a political party. At the 2005 elections, the party was the most important faction of the Rafik Hariri Martyr list, a coalition of anti-Syrian parties like the PSP and the Lebanese Forces.

Lebanese Forces Leader: Sethrida Geagea

Number of seats: 6

Website: www.lebanese-forces.org

Like many other political parties in Lebanon, The Lebanese Forces was an important militia in Lebanon during the Civil War. The founder of the LF, Bashir Gemayel, started his organization in 1976. In the years that followed, Gemayel included many other Christian militias in the LF. By 1980, the LF was by far the biggest and best organized Christian militia in Lebanon. The party-members are mainly Christian Maronites, although the party claims to be secular. During the Civil War, the militant part of the LF was strong and influential. Gemayel however decided that the LF needed also a political section. In 1982, Gemayel was elected as president of Lebanon.

After the assassination of Gemayel in September 1982, Samir Geagea became the new leader. The years after, serious organizational problems occurred and internal succession struggles came about. Finally by 1987, Geagea was unmistakable the leader of LF. On 10

September 1992, the Lebanese Forces Party was officially formed. The party was based on three principles: 1) safeguarding Lebanese independence and sovereignty, 2) founding the Lebanese government on the basis of human rights and 3) establishing a democratic system with respect to human rights. Furthermore, the LF party embraced a hard-line, anti-Syrian opposition and revived ties with Israel. In 1994, Geagea was arrested and accused of undermining government authority during and after the Civil War. Geagea was released in 2005. For the 2005 elections, the LF was part of the Rafik Hariri Martyr list, which won the elections. The LF is still considered a very



well organized party with its own magazine and TV-station.

Hezbollah

Leader: Mohammed Ra'ad

Number of seats: 14

Website: www.moqawama.net/english/index.php

Hezbollah consists of two parts. The militant part of Hezbollah was found in 1982, as a combination of several small militant groups. During the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990), Hezbollah fought for the Shi'a community. Their main objectives were expelling Israeli and Western Forces from Lebanon. Parts of Hezbollah were involved in kidnapping, torture and detention of Western forces in Lebanon. After the Civil War, Hezbollah has often been accused of acts of terrorism and of bombings of Israeli forces in South Lebanon. On ongoing suspicion made the European Parliament entitle Hezbollah as a terrorist organization on 8 March 2005. On 24 September 2004, UN resolution 1559 stated that all Lebanese militias, including Hezbollah, should be disarmed and all foreign forces should be withdrawn from Lebanon. Hezbollah operates mainly in the south of Lebanon and the Beeka valley and is pro-Palestinian.

From 1992, the political part of Hezbollah takes part in the Lebanese general elections. In 1992, they won 12 out of 128 seat, in 1996 10 and in 2000 8 seats. In the 2005 elections, Hezbollah won 14 seats.

In their political program of 2003, Hezbollah says to strive for the introduction of a Islamic government by peaceful means. On the contrary, US sources say that Hezbollah's goal is to introduce a fundamentalist, Iranian-like, state with no secular influences at all.

It's widely assumed that the Syrian government and Hezbollah are closely linked. For this reason, Hezbollah was the driving forces behind the pro-Syria rallies during the Cedar Revolution.

Inside Lebanon, Hezbollah is criticized by the Christian Maronites. The PSP, with their Druze leader Walid Jumblatt, is not against disarming Hezbollah, but states that Hezbollah could become a part if the regular Lebanese Army.

In February 2006, Hezbollah leader Nasrallah and Michel Aoun (Free Patriotic Front) signed a "memorandum of understanding". In this agreement Hezbollah and Aoun agreed to cooperate on a great number of topics, like the reform of the electoral law, security, human rights and foreign relations. This agreement is unique and can be a breakthrough in the relationship between pro-Syrian (Hezbollah) and anti-Syrian (Aoun bloc en governmental parties) politicians.

Qornet Shewhan Gathering

Number of seats: 6

This reasonably small party was found in 2001 by 21 individuals, representing small political parties and civic organization. Qornet Shewhan emphasizes the independence of Lebanon. So, the Israeli and Syrian withdrawal has always been an important issue for Qornet. Qornet strives furthermore for the complete implementation of the constitutional changes, as they are written in the Taif Agreement of 1989. Qornet is, like the PSP, in favour of changing the electoral law to stop the gerrymandering. Finally, Qornet emphasizes the importance of a widely supported peace agreement with Israel to safeguard Arab right. However, Qornet is in favour of an independent Palestine state, with Jerusalem as its capitol.

Free Patriotic Movement (Aoun Bloc)

Leader: General Michel Aoun

Number of seats: 14 (Free Patriotic Movement) 21 total for Aoun Bloc

Website: www.tayyar.org/tayyar/index.php

For a long period of time, former prime-minister Aoun (1988–1990) lived in exile while leading the FPM. He returned to Lebanon in 2005 and contested in the 2005 elections, winning 21 seats in the National Assembly together with his allies in the Aoun Bloc.

The FPM claims to be the only party that isn't based on religion. For this reason, the party had not only Maronite-members, but also has many members with a Muslim background.

The most important issues for the FPM is reforming the Lebanese economy. In the past, disarming Hezbollah was another important issue, but this changed after signing the "memorandum of understanding" with Hezbollah in



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