

**Speech of Father Talal Hachem
USEK President
For the Student Empowerment, Engagement and Representation in Lebanese
Universities EU-funded Project
Ministry of Education and Higher Education
October 13, 2021**

- **Good morning!**
 - **Your Excellency, Dr. Abbas Halabi**
 - **Rev. Father Salim Daccache**
 - **Rev. Father Bechara Khoury**
 - **Mr. Fady Yarak**
 - **Ms. Alessia Squarcella (EU Deputy Head of Cooperation)**
 - **Dr. Aref Soufi**
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- It is a great pleasure for me to be here today for the closing of the EU-funded StEER-Leb project that is based on three important pillars as its name indicates: Empowerment, Engagement and Representation of students in Lebanese universities.
 - The importance of this project lies not only in the fact that it responds to a national priority, which is student engagement and representation in Lebanese universities, but also in its diversified activities that are prepared and implemented by the students themselves and for the students.
 - Throughout the last 3 years, with the collaboration of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, students, faculty members and staff from USEK, USJ and LAU, and from European universities and institutions, namely the University of Cadiz in Spain, the University of Rouen in France, the University of Bologna in Italy and the Union of

Mediterranean Universities (Unimed) also in Italy, those students, faculty and staff were coming together, in spite of all the challenges, to share ideas, experiences and most importantly problems, and come up with best practices and relevant solutions to have a consolidated student community not only in their respective universities but also at the national level.

- During the implementation of the project, we all know things were not quite easy. Many challenges and obstacles faced the project and slowed down its implementation; to start with the situation in Lebanon that emerged in October 2019, changed the course of the project activities, and imposed some adaptations and alterations. We all know it was followed by a pandemic that also impeded the progress of the project.
- However, the challenge was to continue, persist and reach the expected results.
- Now, at the end of the project, we realize that the will was greater than the challenge! And as a result, a whole set of tools that would promote student engagement, empowerment and representation has been put in place as an open source for universities to benefit from and extract best practices in Lebanese and European universities while preserving their own specificities.
- Thanks to the perseverance and determination of the people who are working on the project from Lebanon, Spain, Italy and France, the project reached its final stage with tangible deliverables and with a general framework that would be implemented through the Student National Structure that has been created under the umbrella of this project and that will be launched today.
- StEER Leb, as I said earlier, stems from a national priority or a national need among university students, especially in the current context. As a matter of fact, it is our

responsibility as higher education institutions to prepare them to be responsible themselves, non-biased and agents of change.

- This project, as well as other projects, were at the core of our discussion with His Excellency Dr. Abbas Halabi during our meeting with him last week. Your Excellency, thank you for your support and encouragement. Your presence with us today is a real proof of your interest and your willingness to move with higher education in Lebanon to further heights and to have a real impact in spite of the fact that it hasn't been long since you took office at the Ministry.
- StEER-Leb wouldn't have been possible had it not been for the generous support and funding of the European Union. And for that, I would like to thank the EU delegation in Lebanon represented today by Ms. Alessia Squarcella, Deputy Head of Cooperation.
- I would like also to thank the Director General Mr. Fady Yarak, at Directorate of Education and Higher Education. I remember when I first visited Mr. Yarak to discuss our collaboration on EU projects how enthusiastic he was about StEER-Leb and its activities. Thank you Mr. Yarak for all the support and for being part of this important initiative.
- I would like also to extend a word of thanks to Dr. Aref Al Soufi for his guidance and responsiveness at all times, your wisdom Dr. Aref, especially in difficult situations, is always a reference.
- And of course I will not forget all the people who worked on the Project from the Ministry, and from USJ, LAU, USEK, Rouen, Cadiz, Bologna and Unimed (I will not name you all because the list is quite long), thank you all for your dedication and commitment.

- The closing activities of the project as well as its national advocacy campaign were launched on Monday and will continue until this afternoon. I wish you all productive and fruitful meetings today, and I invite Lebanese universities who haven't been involved in the project from the beginning to benefit from its results so that we can all together move forward in consolidating the role of a major constituent of our society, which are our students.

Thank you!