

The Lebanese Emigration Research Center speaker at the MOIM cycle of workshops on the new Electoral Law

September-October 2010

Reported by Michele Fenianos, LERC Research Assistant

“The greatest feature of Lebanon is pluralism and the worst feature is the management of this pluralism, and maybe the best means to manage pluralism is the electoral law and the electoral system in particular”, stated Minister Ziad Baroud at the first session of a series of three workshops launched by the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities entitled “Together for an Electoral Law for all Citizens” at the Holiday Inn Hotel- Verdun, held respectively on the 15th of September, 12th and 13th of October 2010.



The first workshop focused on the structure of the electoral system and on electoral districts. It was divided into two sessions. The first one, led by Dr. Karam Karam Lecturer at the Lebanese University, tackled Lebanon’s need to a new electoral system. All three speakers - Dr. Ghaleb Mahmassani Member of the National Commission on Electoral Law), Mr. Ziad Abdel Samad Former Secretary General of the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections and pollster Kamal Feghali Director of the Beirut Center for Statistics and Documentation agreed on the adoption of the proportional system with closed-lists as the best possible system. Concerning districts, the experts favored dividing Lebanon into five electoral districts having no consensus yet on the one-district formula.

Dr. Randa Antoun, lecturer at the American University of Beirut, moderated the second session which studied the electoral districts issue from all its aspects. The speakers were: Dr. Mohammad al-Majzoub President of the Lebanese University and former member of the Constitutional Council, Mr. Oussama Safa Secretary General of the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections and Mr. Rabih al-Habr Managing Director of Statistics Lebanon.

The second workshop, with Dr. Makram Oueiss representing Minister Baroud, was structured as follows: a first session, chaired by Dr. Arda Ekmekji, Dean of Arts and Sciences at Haigazian University and member of the National Commission on Electoral Law, focusing on “Out-of-country” voting with Mr. Hatem Nasrallah representing the Director General of Emigrants, Mrs. Suzanne Al-Khoury Youhana Acting Director-General of Personal Status at the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities, Dr. Gibran Karam Coordinator of Lebanese Abroad and Dr. Elie el-Hindy on behalf of the Lebanese Emigration Research Center of Notre Dame University.

"We still have three years and it's still too early to surrender and declare the impossibility of including the expatriates in the voting process", stated Dr. el-Hindy. "Involving half or even a quarter of expatriates is much better than involving no one. Moreover," he said "the tale that expatriates are reluctant to vote is not accurate; the more important issue is to perceive a political will which is yet not tangible."

Then there was a second session, which had a more technical aspect, combining the experiences of Mrs. Chantal Sarkis and Mr. Abbas Abou Zeid and dealing with the development of electoral procedures, mainly the pre-printed ballots and the counting and transfer of results. Mr. Said Sanadiki led the discussions.

The third and last workshop of the cycle, entitled *Enhancing participation in the draft law* was chaired by Dr. Dima Dabbous-Sensenig, lecturer at the Lebanese American University for the first session and by President Khaldoun Naja, member of the National Commission on Electoral Law, for the second. Dr. Aman Al Chaarani, President of the Lebanese Women's Council, Dr. Fahmiya Sharafedine of the National Committee for the Follow-Up on Women's Issues, and Mrs. Yara Nassar discussed the means to enhance the participation of women through a women's quota. "In our Lebanese case, we shouldn't use the 'gender quotas' terminology since discrimination is made against women and not against men", corrected Mrs. Nassar. The second part of the workshop dealt with the eligibility of candidates and voters, mainly the military and special-needs persons.

Representatives of different blocs, parties, and political figures together with civil society organizations, legal experts, academics and media specialists participated actively in these workshops, which were given by the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities a consultative character enhancing the input of all different stakeholders.