

## Abstract

Civil society is identified as a key partner for the European Union (EU) and receiver of financial support in the European Neighbourhood Policy, as civil society is closest to the citizen's needs, for example in terms of human rights. However, the existing body of research questions whether such aspirations for human rights are compatible with the EU's main priority in neighbourhood, stabilization. To investigate how this alleged contradiction affects the de facto support for pro-democratic civil society organizations, this research focuses on the question "What are the means of the European Neighbourhood Policy to support Lebanese Human Rights Organizations in their advocacy for Human Rights and Democracy in Lebanon?" Interviews with local experts show that the EU Delegation is striving to cooperate closely with civil society actors to support their human rights advocacy but is limited in their capacity to provide funding to HROs due to a shift of priorities in the newest Single Support Framework (SSF). A comparison of the SSF from before and after stabilization became the main priority, confirms this finding.

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## Index of Abbreviations

AAP	Annual Action Programme
Alef	act for human rights
ANND	Arab NGO Network for Development
CLDH	Lebanese Center for Human Rights
CSA	Civil Society Actor
CSO	Civil Society Organization
EEAS	European External Action Service
ENI	European Neighbourhood Instrument
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
EU	European Union
HR	Human Rights
HRO	Human Rights Organization
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SSF	Single Support Framework

## 1. Introduction

*“The EU-Lebanon Agreement promotes **human rights**, political dialogue, free movement of goods, and economic, social and cultural cooperation. The EU is committed to supporting **democracy**, good governance, social inclusion, education and sustainable development in Lebanon.” (European External Action Service, 2016)*

In working towards the commitments of democracy and human rights, the European Union (EU) identified Lebanese civil society as “vital partner” in decision-making, since they are “well placed to know the population's real needs in terms of human rights, good governance and development” (EEAS, 2016). Hence, strengthening civil society organizations (CSOs) has been outlined as a major asset of the EU in its European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), the foreign relations instruments of the EU, in order for the CSOs “to play a full role in the democratisation process” (REGULATION (EU) No 232/2014).

In Lebanon, 10% of the total budget of 186.5 million - EUR 227.9 million are allocated for “Complementary support in favour of civil society” for the programming period 2017 to 2020. Even though Lebanon is known for its vibrant CSO scene with more than 8,000 registered CSOs according to the Ministry of Social Affairs (cf. Beyond 2015), these CSOs struggle with “legal, financial and political constraints” (EU Country Roadmap for Engagement with Civil Society 2014-2017) and have “limited dialogue” with its government (Assi, 2006: 10). The EU perceives its own role as the provider of “specific support to civil society to strengthen the capacities and create the conditions for civil society to contribute to the formulation, implementation and monitoring of policies and programmes, including for the promotion of human rights.” (European Commission, 2017b)

However, the sincerity of the EU's commitment to the support of CSOs and human rights has been questioned in the scholarly debate, especially after the 2015 Review for a new ENP, in which “stabilization” was set as the main priority (European Commission, 2015). When discussing the main motives of the EU in its neighborhood, it has been called into question whether this pursued stability aims to be built on the promotion of democracy and human rights, or whether it is equated with stagnation and the cooperation with autocratic regimes in order to combat terrorism and contain illegal migration (cf. Ayadi and Sessa, 2013).

Hence, this paper seeks to investigate the EU's support for CSOs in light of increased security and stability concerns. To narrow down the focus, human rights advocacy groups will be subject of this research, as both the promotion of human rights and the importance of civil society are explicitly highlighted as cross-cutting issues throughout the EU documents and since both are substantial for the strengthening of the other. Therefore, this paper aims to answer the question:

*What are the means of the European Neighbourhood Policy to support Lebanese human rights organizations in their advocacy for human rights and democracy in Lebanon?*

To answer the research question, three sub-questions will be guiding through this paper. Firstly, this paper aims to investigate the de facto support of the EU towards Lebanese human rights organizations by describing their role in the ENP as agenda-setters and implementers. By agenda-setters, the capabilities of HROs to influence the content of the EU's engagement in Lebanon and its dialogue with Lebanese authorities are meant. Implementation refers to the implementation of EU-funded projects addressing human rights. Secondly, the main limitations of EU support to HROs will be assessed. Following a multi-perspective approach, the limitations of HROs will be presented beforehand, by a short introduction of the terminology and fragmentation of civil society. Thirdly, to investigate the expectations by the Lebanese HROs towards the EU's involvement in their work, their opinion on having the EU facilitate a

dialogue with their government will be analyzed. Possibilities for improvement, as voiced by affected actors, will be incorporated when answering these questions.

## 2. The European Union's & Civil Society's Advocacy for Human Rights

### 2.1. The European Neighbourhood Policy in the South: Human Rights vs. Stabilization?

The ENP was launched in 2003 following the EU Enlargement and governs the EU relations with 16 Eastern and Southern neighboring states. It supports shared objectives and agendas of cooperation based on the agreements between the EU and the respective partner countries, such as Association Agreements. The main financial instrument for the implementation of the ENP is the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI), with a total budget of €15,4 billion for the period of 2014-2020 of which 315.0 million - EUR 385.0 is dedicated to Lebanon. Implementing partners for the EU cooperation are either governments, non-governmental organizations (NGO) or International Organizations via grants or loans. (cf. European Commission, 2016)

After the first review in 2011, greater differentiation between countries, as well as the "more-for-more" approach were introduced (EU Neighbours, n.d.). This approach offers financial incentives to countries performing well in the implementation of the agreed-upon priorities. A second Review was done in 2015. Its results are reflected in the multiannual 'Single Support Framework' (SSF) which outlines the objectives for the Union support (European Commission, 2017b):

"The priorities of the revised ENP, with stabilisation as the overarching objective, are reflected in this programming document for the period 2017-2020, through increased focus on economic growth and employment, local governance, and a stronger cooperation on security and the rule of law with Lebanon." (European Commission, 2017b:2)

"Overarching" throughout the priority sectors shall not only be stabilization, according to the SSF 2017-2020, but also human rights (European Commission, 2017b:4). The document states the same for civil society, whose "engagement shall be considered in all sectors and stages of support interventions and policy dialogue of this SSF" (European Commission, 2017b:4). The priorities of the EU cooperation with Lebanese CSOs for 2014-2017 are laid out in the 'EU Country Roadmap for Engagement with Civil Society'.

Consequently, the question arises to what extent the EU's prioritization of stabilization is compatible with its normative interests like the promotion of human rights and democracy. The EU is often called a 'normative power' (Manners, 2002) that exerts influence beyond its borders by long-term normative milieu-shaping (Schumacher, 2018). To do so, it uses a range of normative soft power tools and the provision of financial and economic incentives. Especially after the Arab uprisings, the EU had followed normative ambitions to actively support democratic processes through the support of CSOs (cf. Cavatorta, 2012). Especially Lebanon's civil society was, due to its geo-strategic location, targeted by an increase of foreign support in order "to create a stable and reliable 'partner' in the Middle East that can resist the influence of Iran and Syria, as well as of radical Islam" (Nagel & Staeheli, 2015: 231).

However, in regard to the so-called 'refugee crisis' in Europe and its neighborhood, and the accompanying emergence of right-wing parties in EU member states, the EU's normative interests as well as its willingness and possibility to exert leverage in favor of human rights in the region, have been called into question. Many civil society actors (CSAs) and academia (cf. Börzel & Van Hüllen, 2014) perceive a trade-off between stabilization and the EU's normative interests. Seeberg (2009) questions the EU's normative interests, suggesting that the EU is a "realist actor in normative clothes". Instead of pushing for human

rights and CS involvement, critics (cf. Ayadi & Sessa, 2013) proclaim that the EU prioritizes staying on good terms with the Lebanese government to jointly contain illegal migration to Europe and therefore see over human rights violations and breaches of their agreements.

According to the EU's definition, this is not the case. By the EU's understanding, stabilization is composed of normative interests, as stability can only be sustained if human rights are ensured: The EU defines its own stability to be "founded on good governance, democracy, rule of law and human rights" (European Commission, 2017a:11). According to the Report on the Implementation of the ENP Review, promotion of reforms in these areas are key to the objective of stabilization (European Commission, 2017a).

Even though a trade-off is difficult to detect within the scope of this paper, it can investigate how HROs, academia, and EU representatives perceive the support that is given to HROs, and how this has changed since the introduction of stabilization as the first priority. This leads to the following sub-question:

*To what extent does civil society act as an agenda-setter and implementer in the European Union's activities concerning human rights in Lebanon?*

## 2.2. Civil Society: Promoter of Democracy or Agents of the Status Quo?

As it was stated in the introduction, the EU attributes civil society, such as HROs, a leading role in the democratization process of a country. This attribution did not end up in the ENI Regulation by chance but is a reflection of the major role that has been ascribed to civil society as a promoter of democracy since the democratization processes in Latin American and Eastern European states. However, recent uprisings and state backlashes in the region counter the expectations of non-conflictual change by civil society as a "democratic miracle worker" (Altan-Olcay & Icduygu (2012:160). Aid giving international institutions play a role in curtailing CSOs' potential themselves by restrictive funding requirements and agendas that are not aligned with grassroots' priorities (cf. Amer et al., 2015).<sup>1</sup> Secondly, not every CSO fits the definition that CSOs are all forms of structures not belonging to the state or the market (cf. Samad, 2006). In reality, a great deal of NGO activity is directed by state and quasi-state agencies (cf. Nagel & Staeheli, 2015). On the one hand, politicians might enter the CSO sector by setting up patron-sponsored foundations, such as the Hariri Foundation in Lebanon. On the other hand, non-state actors, such as Islamist movements (e.g. Hezbollah), "enter the formal political system while retaining strong informal networks" (Härdig, 2014: 1133). Especially in Arab countries, where social relations are more important than citizen-state relations, the CSO sector is dominated by welfare and charitable work and receives payment to do so by the state (cf. Samad, 2006).

Thirdly, not every CSO is necessarily pro-democratic. Besides non-governmental organizations (NGOs), such as HROs, there is *al-mujtama' al-ahli* ("indigenous" civil society), such as faith-based organizations, which is empowered by the Lebanese sectarian political system and has an interest in retaining the status quo (Härdig, 2014). Therefore, a strong civil society does not necessarily mean strong support for HR advocacy and democratization processes, but a closer look at its composition is necessary.

Lastly, state pressure and limitations from within CSOs, such as corruption, a lack of networking and a lack of human, financial, and technical resources hinder civil society from reaching its full potential (cf. Samad, 2006).

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<sup>1</sup> The accusation of Western neo-colonialism will not be discussed at this point. However, to quote Nagel and Staeheli (2015), "[i]t is tempting but ultimately too simplistic to read the role of NGOs as the tools of Western or international interests. The people who work in these organizations bring their own experiences and values to bear on their work and are deeply aware of the contradictions produced by their activities".

We need to be aware of the complex environment in which HROs operate. Internal factors, other CSOs or external pressures such as the state or international organizations might interfere in their work. Hence, after looking at the de facto support by the EU, this paper seeks to answer the sub-question:

*To what extent is the EU counteracting its own ambitions of supporting HROs in their advocacy for human rights?*

### 2.3. Human Rights Organizations in Lebanon

Human rights organizations (HROs) are a form of NGOs, which are part of *al-mujtama' al-madani* (civic civil society) (Härdig, 2014). They are active in using advocacy among the public, promoting legislation, offering consultation and technical assistance to governments and investigating and exposing HR violations. (cf. Amer et al., 2015). In Lebanon, HROs focus particularly on state repressions such as police torture, trials of civilians in military courts, and attacks on the freedom of speech. According to Wadih Al-Asmar, President of the Lebanese Center for Human Rights (CLDH), there are less than 10 active HROs in Lebanon that focus on advocacy which are connected by many personal ties and small working groups.

Examples of latest successes in terms of human rights are the abolishment of the marriage loophole for rapists in 2017, and the law on enforced disappearances of 2018. In any case, this is a success for HROs who contributed to these changes via campaigns and advocacy work. Still, it remains difficult to measure to what extent CSOs directly or indirectly (via foreign pressure) influence national decision-making:

“[c]ivil society is alienated from the national budgeting process, and does not have any influence or detected impact. Some civil society initiatives have been successful in influencing public policy in the areas of human rights and social policy, yet it is assumed that the political moment, foreign pressures and international standards, rather than civil society's internal capacity, are the main stimuli for any successes.” (Assi, 2006: 10)

As foreign pressure is recognized as a tool for success in the area of human rights, it is interesting to investigate to what extent the EU's involvement is desired by the civil society, for example by pushing for more civil society involvement in Lebanese decision-making. This can be phrased in the sub-question:

*How do human rights defenders perceive the EU's potential as a facilitator of dialogue between the civil society and the Lebanese government in regard to human rights?<sup>2</sup>*

## 3. Methodology

As the existing research on the ENP in Lebanon and more precisely the civil society aspect of it is limited, this research chooses to follow an explorative qualitative research approach. Therefore, seven semi-structured interviews were carried out with local experts from different backgrounds, namely four representatives of Lebanese CSAs involved in HR advocacy, two employees of the European External Action Service (EEAS), and one academic. This allows investigating the perceived means of the ENP to support HROs as involved actors experience it. Some of the interviewees chose to stay anonymous or didn't allow recording, which is why paraphrases summarize their statements. Following a mixed-method approach, the results of the interview analysis are enhanced by a comparison of the SSF 2014-2016 and the SSF 2017-2020 in order to counteract the subjectivity of expert interviews.

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<sup>2</sup> The term 'Human Rights Defenders' is used as this is the established term in official EU documents such as the 'EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders'.

## 4. Analysis

Civil society, as well as human rights, are two horizontal aspects that can be found in all projects funded by the ENI, according to the interviewees from the EU Delegation. It seems to be not only the EU's self-perception to be known for prioritizing human rights; also interview partners from HROs, such as Ziad Abdel Samad, Executive Director of the Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND), perceives the "EU [as] one of the most important partners that we have in the region" due to its geopolitical situation, its shared value of HR as well as its support for activities in the HR field. However, as the following section will show, the EU's support has strengths and weaknesses.

### 4.1. EU support for HROs

The EU provides funding, does public diplomacy (advocacy and campaigns) and engages in political dialogue with Lebanese authorities. In Lebanon, the EU has employees in charge of human rights on a project as well as a political advocacy level and works according to the 'EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders' that guide the EU's contact with third countries. Hence, HROs can engage with the EU either as agenda-setters by influencing the content of the EU's engagement in Lebanon and its dialogue with Lebanese authorities, or as implementers of EU-funded projects promoting human rights. This section will evaluate to what extent this translates into reality.

#### 4.1.1. HROs as agenda-setter

##### *Formal and informal entry points for HROs*

Most interviewed HROs state that they work with the EU more on a political, advocacy level than on a project level. In other words, most HROs maintain a close contact with the EU Delegation to be able to press the Delegation to advocate for certain topics to the Lebanese government. The EU is described as responsive to HR Defenders' concerns and its staff as accessible and competent. "The delegation staff is following up on cases, they attend courts, they meet regularly with human rights defenders in the country", summarizes George Ghali, Executive Director of alef – Act for Human Rights, and "they regularly meet, share information on cases, progress on policy aspects".

A formal meeting on human rights takes place 2-3 per year in the shape of the so-called Structured Dialogue, and informal bilateral meetings can take place anytime on an ad hoc basis if there is a problem, explains Wadih Al-Asmar, President of the Lebanese Centre for Human Rights (CLDH). In this Structured Dialogue, the EEAS consults with HR Defenders before going to the subcommittee meetings between representatives of the EU Delegation and Lebanese authorities, who come together on an annual basis. There are subcommittee meetings on different topics, such as human rights. Afterward, the EEAS organizes a debrief for HR Defenders (Al-Asmar, CLDH).

George Ghali registers positive outcomes of EU advocacy, such as the abolishment of the rape-marriage law or the new anti-torture law. Since the EU's advocacy towards the government is mostly done on a bilateral individual level (up to the level of the president or prime minister) and via subcommittee meetings, accountability is difficult. He wants the EU to become "more vocal" by publicly denouncing human rights violations committed by the Lebanese government.

##### *Changes in the Single Support Framework*

Many interview partners are concerned about the absence of effective human rights measures in the Partnership and the Single Support Framework, leaving HROs to rely on the goodwill of the EEAS employees. In the first SSF, 2014-16, "strengthening of the framework for protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms beyond the priority objectives" was explicitly listed under the Component "Measures in Favour of civil society". This phrasing was however abandoned in the current SSF. Still, the

Delegation was described as very responsive to topics outside the Partnership Priorities. Also abandoned was using reports of HR NGOs as a means of verification of reaching the indicators of expected results. Even though subcommittee meetings took place, they were not formally mentioned in the SSF 2014-16. The SSF 2017-20, however, mentions the Subcommittees to be ongoing.

### *Room for Improvement*

The Structured Dialogue is highly appreciated by HRO interviewees but faces nevertheless a few points of criticism. As Interviewee 1 from the EEAS points out, the selectivity of participants is needed due to the high number of CSOs. However, Wadih Al-Asmar (CLDH) criticizes that EU partners are prioritized, warning that this exclusivity will make “you [the EU] hear what you want to hear.” Instead, more non-funded, critical CSOs, should be invited, since Al-Asmar (CLDH) finds CSOs funded by the EU to be less critical than those who are not. Also, the format of the meetings needs improvement, regarding the ratio of participants and topics (Al-Asmar, CLDH), as well as transparency regarding the prioritization of topics that the EU will bring forth in the subcommittee meetings (Ghali, ALEF). Anna Fleischer, Advocacy Manager at *Women Now For Development*, feels like she gets invited to EU meetings in order to fill the gender component, instead of having her voice heard. Other interviewees feel more confident that their opinion is desired. Still, it is often difficult to provide feedback to the EU's requests: “The EU asks to comment on some document, and then they send you like 200 pages. [...] If I wanted to work on this, I should have hired one person for one year full-time”, tells Wadih Al-Asmar (CLDH). More simplification is needed to facilitate communication between HROs and the EU.

On the other hand, causes for shortcomings of EU-HRO communication may not only be looked for on the side of the EU. Lack of effective networking and competition among CSOs have been pointed out as problems by EEAS and HRO representatives. Roula Abbas, Programme Manager at the EU Delegation, observes an increase in thematic cooperation in recent years, such as the campaign on nationality. She links this observed improvement to the EU's capacity building programs that have been addressing the need for networking since 2012. She concludes that CSOs in Lebanon have become more professional allowing a more constructive dialogue with the EU.

The overall evaluation of the capability of HROs to influence the EU's agenda is mixed. “We succeed to channel through the EU some of our demands to the Lebanese government, or to obtain from them some intervention on some cases of human rights violations”, says Wadih Al-Asmar (CLDH), “Most of the time they do it without officially announcing it, but [...] in the past we got some public position when it is related to deportation, [...] when human rights activists are attacked, [...] they intervene officially and publicly.” In terms of policy change, the interviewed CS representatives reflect Assi's (2006) concerns that the impact of CS pressure is difficult to measure, and that its impact on reaching policy change might be little compared to foreign pressure and political momentum. They don't feel like they can influence EU-Lebanese relation: “We can find places where we can express ourselves, but to what extent our voice has an impact on EU policies, that's the big question mark”, says Ziad Abdel Samad from ANND.

#### 4.1.2. HROs as implementer

##### *Funding availability for HROs*

HROs that receive funding usually do so indirectly via consortiums which benefit from EU funding to implement programs. According to Anna Fleischer, such consortiums are the only way for small NGOs to profit from EU funding. To cope with the bureaucracy of applying for a fund, and the requirements while being funded, a large administrative body is indispensable. For a small CSO, handling this pressure can have a harmful impact on their functioning and sustainability, she adds. Hence, international NGOs or (quasi-) governmental development agencies have a clear advantage in receiving funds. Also, the amount of funding available is following a “fewer and bigger” approach (European Commission, 2017b:4) which

leaves little support for small projects and organizations: Wadih Al-Asmar explains that CLDH, as a CSO with a comparably small budget, they shy away from this large EU funding for sustainability reasons - by the end of the funding period, more than 50% of the organization's budget would have to be substituted for. And for some HRO's specific issues, there's no funding available in the reviewed ENP according to Interviewee 2, Lebanese European Law Expert, and George Ghali from ALEF. Ghali says, "Now when we ask the EU about finance[ing] a project related to human rights [...], we will see that this is not in their priorities, that there is no fund." In that case, however, the EEAS was described as eager to help to find funding elsewhere, e.g. at the embassies (Interviewee 2). Plus, other instruments such as the European Endowment for Democracy (EED), and the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) are available, the latter providing "low-value grants to human rights defenders to finance urgent protection actions" (REGULATION (EU) No 236/2014, Art. 6 1 c.i). Roula Abbas from the EEAS often refers unregistered CSOs, such as those covering LGBTQ+ issues, to the EED, since they cannot receive funding within the scope of the ENI.

#### *Changes in the Single Support Framework*

In the SSF 2014-16, CS support was listed among the main priorities; in the SSF 2017-20, explicit CS support remains absent in the priorities. In the first SSF, "Measures in Favour of Civil Society" were allocated 15% of the budget, while in the second part the percentage decreased to 10% (however, the overall budget for this period is bigger). Human rights used to be found among several components in the SSF 2014-16, which accumulated 65% of the budget, 30% more than in the SSF 2017-20.

#### *Room for Improvement*

Strict funding requirements and bureaucracy can have a fostering as well as an impeding effect on corruption. On the one hand, Wadih Al-Asmar criticizes that it causes CSOs to hire people to write ambitious proposals that are not implementable. On the other hand, Roula Abbas (EEAS) points out that tight rules prevent corruption, and that they are helpful for the CSOs to better organize themselves. In her experience, the financial management of the funded CSOs improves, and the EU also provides management training.

George Ghali (ALEF) sees the requirements and deliveries that come with EU funding as obstacles to being flexible and responsive to changing dynamics and trends: "Supporting core funding, multi funding will help a lot because eventually, NGOs are less bound to projects components and more bound to strategic planning and response and real human rights work." This inflexibility might explain the observation of Interviewee 1 from the EU Delegation that the implementation of good concepts is sometimes "less than you expect". Here, one may wonder if this issue might be self-inflicted by not leaving enough space for implementation for civil society.

In order to increase flexibility and sustainability of HRO's work, George Ghali from ALEF would rather diversify the sources of funding and receive smaller funding but for a longer period of time: "Sometimes, funding might end, where the results start." He gives the example of torture prevention, for which the EU was one of the core funders in Lebanon from 2007 to 2014. In 2017, however, when the draft for the new anti-torture law was eventually discussed in Parliament, none of the organizations had enough resources to follow up the discussion of the legal reform, says Ghali. Hence, the advocacy work is most of the time done through volunteering, explains Wadih Al-Asmar (CLDH).

## 4.2. Limitations to effective EU support for HROs

Limitations regarding what the EU can do to support Lebanese HROs in their advocacy work for human rights and democracy have been highlighted so far through this paper. One issue that this chapter seeks to highlight specifically is policy incoherence. Policy incoherence sums up the dilemma that was

introduced in the beginning, the dilemma of whether stabilization and human rights can be pursued complementary or whether they are conflicting. In theory, EEAS interviewees and CSAs agree that, if you are “compromising human rights, you are more threatening peace and security. There is a direct relation between HR and peace and security” (Abdel Samad, ANND). However, they disagree on whether this linkage is reflected in the EU's activities in Lebanon.

The interviewed representatives of HROs, such as Ziad Abdel Samad from ANND, clearly see human rights compromised in the new ENP, in favor of stability and the prevention of migration flows. For him, an example of a situation in which good relations with the Lebanese government seemed to be more important than supporting civil society was after the Parliamentary elections in 2018:

“[the] EU Observation Mission [...] issue[d] a report in their press conference that the elections went very well. [...] [T]he domestic observers, they were criticizing [that] there were more than 370 violations. So you [the EU] are discrediting, harming, destroying the credibility of civil society. [...] On the one hand, you are helping, on the other hand, you are harming.”

Interviewee 2, European Law expert, doubts that the EU observer understood the political context and perceives this example rather as an illustration of the lack of understanding. This reflects the reoccurring criticism of the “insensitivity and obliviousness of Western aid workers and consultants” as commonly voiced in foreign aid research (Nagel & Staeheli, 2015:226).

The interviewed EEAS employees disagree with the CSA's perspective and perceive stability and human rights as connected by a “one-to-one link” (Interviewee 1, EEAS). Even though human rights violations occur among the EU's Lebanese partners such as the Lebanese Army or the Internal Security Forces (ISF) (cf. Human Rights Watch, 2018), the interviewees from the EEAS argue that cooperating with these agencies is a possibility to improve the human rights situation by raising awareness and working on training and implementing procedures. If funding was being reduced or requirements were too high, Lebanon might just turn to more generous sponsors with less (human rights) requirements. Thereby, the EU would lose the ability to exert influence and to push for reform from within whatsoever. George Ghali thinks the EU underestimates their power: “We think they do have leverage. They just have to use it. It's clear that whenever they put pressure, the government or the parliament or state agencies tend to fix their practices.”

The lack of policy coherence of the EU might actually translate directly into the work of HROs funded by the EU since the funding might force the HROs to fight a certain aspect of HR abuses without associating it with the broader political and cultural dimension (Abdel Samad, ANND). Instead of measuring the micro impact, Wadih Al-Asmar (CLDH) calls for the measurement of the global impact:

“You cannot come and tell me [...] we had a great year in 2015 because we taught 200 women how to use a computer. It's fine, but for me, this is not an achievement. This is a micro impact. [...] [T]he real impact is to say what we did for the access of women to the job market, what we did for the inequality between women and men in the salary in the private sector.”

The policy incoherence as it is perceived by CSAs is caused by diverse and partly conflicting interests of the EU in the region. This supports Seeberg's (2009) assumption that the EU is indeed not mainly guided by normative interests, but that realist interests counteract and currently tend to prevail.

### 4.3. What can and what should the EU do? Different expectations among actors

There seem to be different expectations within civil society about what the EU can and what the EU *should* do in regard to intervening in Lebanese politics and exerting leverage on the Lebanese government. According to EU representatives, the EU doesn't seek to impose like a colonial power, but seeks dialogue and offers incentives; the real change must be pushed for by civil society. Civil society actors, on the other hand, expect the EU to do more, to be active with Lebanese decision makers on policy change and to be more vocal by voicing concerns regarding certain policies and state behaviors publicly instead of on bilateral level only (Ghali, ALEF). Some demand the suspension or reduction of aid if human rights are violated. A practice which has been opposed by the EU. Wadih Al-Asmar (CLDH) demands,

“It should be very clear: Guys, we cannot support programs when you violate human rights. We will not give you material for surveillance if you don't have the laws to protect the privacy of people. We cannot give you weapons if you cannot ensure that they will not be used against civilians.”

However, this so-called conditionality (the attachment of conditions to the provision of benefits such as bilateral aid) singled itself out as the one issue that Lebanese HROs are divided on. Another question that received diverse answers was whether the EU should facilitate direct dialogue between HROs and the Lebanese government. The status quo of this dialogue is good according to Interviewee 1 from the EEAS (also due to EU advocacy), but one-sided and unconstructive according to CSAs.

Ziad Abdel Samad (ANND), who is generally against “referring to the foreign power in order to make pressure on my government” in respect to the state's sovereignty, believes that the EU should facilitate such a dialogue in order for them to voice their needs themselves: “The EU [...] cannot enter in direct struggle with the government, but at least tell them: ‘we cannot work like this, let's do consultations.’ Then bring the government to these consultations and have the government hear what the people are saying.”

George Ghali (ALEF), on the other hand, opposes the idea of the EU facilitating a dia- or ‘trialogue’ with his government: “As a Lebanese citizen I don't need to be invited by the EU to consult with the government, it's up to the government to do it on their own. [...] I don't want somebody to force them.” Interviewee 1 (EEAS) agrees with Ghali's opposition. The EU can encourage dialogue, but the real change needs to come from Lebanese actors.

In conclusion, while some CSAs wish the EU to exert more pressure on their government directly, others would prefer the EU to support the civil society to do this job themselves. The question remains – based on the experience of failed attempts by CS to engage in dialogue with the government- whether such a dialogue if facilitated by the EU, would help improve the situation. However, there seems to be a common understanding among all actors, that neither party is solely capable and responsible for introducing change and protecting human rights. As Abdel Samad (ANND) says, “I want to be very clear that this is not the only responsibility of the EU. We are all responsible.”

## 5. Conclusion

To sum up the findings of the EU's support for human rights organizations, one can say that human rights organizations are currently more engaged in the ENP in Lebanon as agenda-setters than as implementers. The EU Delegation is striving to cooperate closely with civil society actors but is limited in their capacity to provide funding to HROs due to a shift of priorities in the newest SSF.

Secondly, the effectiveness of the EU's role in supporting civil society in their advocacy for human rights is difficult to measure in objective terms. Indeed, statements by interviewees from HROs confirm the big role that the EU claims to play in human rights advocacy. Yet, it is difficult to measure to what extent the EEAS is causing a policy change, and to what extent due to other factors such as the political momentum or other foreign pressures. Secondly, it is difficult to measure to what extent the civil society, namely the HROs, causes the EEAS to push for this change. Future research might shed more light on this.

All in all, the possibilities to support HROs within the framework have decreased, as interviewees and a comparison of the Single Support Frameworks of 2014-16 and 2017-20 confirm. This downward-trend of the importance of HR and HROs can be explained by a shift of EU interests, as well as with a change of opportunities to influence. Many interviewees share the impression that the EU's leverage in the EU-Lebanese relation has decreased in comparison to earlier stages of the EU-Lebanese Partnership since its reliance on the Lebanese state has increased. Good relations with Lebanon are important to ensure it as a partner for stability and a host for 1,5 million Syrian refugees, that otherwise might continue their flight to Europe (Fleischer, Women Now). Hence, the EU is less vocal about the wrongdoings by the Lebanese state than it used to be (Ghali, ALEF). The interviews seem to confirm Schumacher's (2018) perception that the EU is taking off its normative clothes: "They are getting back to what they were doing before 2011", says Wadih Al-Asmar (CLDH), which is prioritizing stability concerns over the promotion of democracy and human rights. Representatives of HROs demand the EU to refocus on its role as a normative power by aligning its foreign politics and ENP priorities with the EU's self-appointed role as a promoter of human rights.

Even though this development limits the EU's means to support HROs, there are practical recommendations to improve the current practices of cooperation between the EU and HROs. Funding sources are wished to be diversified and being made available for a longer period of time, accepting or even calling for smaller amounts of funding. The existing dialogue between HROs and the EU, as well as the EU and Lebanese authorities, could be improved in regard to accessibility, visibility, transparency, and prioritization. Fleischer from Women Now also wishes to see more transparency in terms of project funding, as it is difficult to monitor what projects are currently funded by the EU. Interviewees were divided on the third sub-question whether they would like to have the EU facilitate a dialogue with their government. While some HROs representatives call for the facilitation of a direct dialogue between CSOs and Lebanese decision-makers, others call for stronger use of the EU's leverage in other ways, such as the reduction or suspension of funding to answer human rights offenses.

As of 2018, the recently published Annual Action Programme 2018 seems to have incorporated this demand, alongside civil society's concerns regarding the abuse of security actors who benefit from EU funding. Among the mitigating measures, this AAP is the first one to announce the possibility of suspending funding: "Should grave violations not be properly addressed, the EU might consider suspending or withdrawing support, even partially." (AAP, 2018) Whether this possibility will be used, and whether it is the initial step back towards a higher value of human rights in EU-Lebanese relations remains to be seen.

## 6. References

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## 7. Annex – Interviews

- Roula Abbas, Programme Manager at the EU Delegation (EEAS), interviewed on the 07.11.2018, in Beirut.
- Wadih Al-Asmar, President of the Lebanese Centre for Human Rights (CLDH), interviewed on 06.12.2018, in Beirut.
- Anna Fleischer, Advocacy and Communication Manager at Women Now for Development, interviewed on 07.12.2018.
- George Ghali, Executive Director at ALEF – act for human rights (ALEF), interviewed on 28.11.2018, in Beirut.
- Ziad Abdel Samad, Executive Director of the Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND), interviewed on 26.12.2018, in Beirut.
- Interviewee 1, EEAS, interviewed on the 26.10.2018, in Beirut.
- Interviewee 2, Lebanese European Law Expert, interviewed on the 03.12.2018, in Beirut.