

OVERCOMING DIVISIONS:

TOWARDS A NEW NATIONAL CONTRACT FOR LEBANON

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Executive Summary

On the occasion of its 50th anniversary, Maison du Futur, in partnership with the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, organized a strategic conference entitled “Overcoming Divisions: A Conference for Lebanon’s Future.”

At a pivotal moment in Lebanese history—marked by deepening communal rifts, growing public distrust, and institutional paralysis threatening the very foundations of the national pact—this gathering provided a platform to explore pathways for the country’s renewal.

Three key themes structured the discussions:

- Collective memory and reconciliation
- The search for non-violent solutions to internal conflicts
- Strengthening national resilience through state reform

This policy paper presents the findings, analyses, and recommendations that emerged from these discussions, aiming to outline the guiding principles of a new social contract for Lebanon.

General Introduction

Lebanon is undergoing an unprecedented existential crisis. The failure of the confessional system, the fragmentation of power, widespread distrust in institutions, constitutional deadlock, and mounting geopolitical pressures are undermining the very foundations of the state. This alarming reality calls for a collective awakening and a break from the communal reflexes that continue to paralyze public life.

In this context, Maison du Futur, in partnership with the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, organized a conference entitled “Overcoming Divisions: A Conference for Lebanon’s Future.” Held in Bickfaya on May 14, 2025, the event brought together Lebanese and international thinkers, political leaders, civil society representatives, experts, and young people. Their shared goal: to reflect on how to overcome Lebanon’s internal divisions and envision a viable, equitable, and peaceful future.

In his opening remarks, President Amine Gemayel emphasized that “national reconciliation cannot be decreed—it must be built, step by step, through truth,

justice, and mutual respect. Lebanon will only survive if it becomes a shared national project.” His words capture the core objective of the initiative: to rebuild trust—between citizens and institutions, and among the various components of Lebanese society.

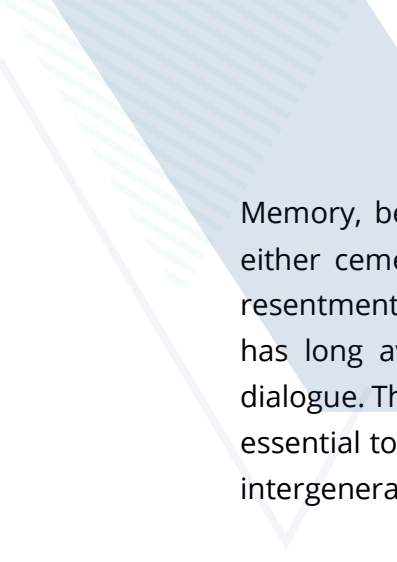
This document follows in the footsteps of the discussions held during the conference. It offers a synthesis of the key contributions, enhanced by a cross-cutting analysis of the challenges identified and the proposals put forward. It aims to enrich public debate and serve as a foundation for any political, institutional, or civic initiative seeking to renew Lebanon’s social contract. This policy paper is intended as both a tool for intellectual engagement and a practical roadmap for decision-makers, researchers, grassroots actors, and all those committed to a reconciled, sovereign, and democratic Lebanon.

The analysis unfolds across three interrelated dimensions: the need to restore a shared memory as a basis for reconciliation; the pursuit of peaceful approaches to resolving internal tensions; and the reconstruction of the state as the cornerstone of lasting resilience. At each step, concrete recommendations are presented, grounded in Lebanese realities and informed by international experience. This forward-looking approach offers realistic, inclusive solutions to help rebuild a sustainable sense of national cohesion.

I. Memory, Reconciliation, and Transitional Justice

Collective memory is both a battleground and a tool for reconstruction. In Lebanon, narratives of the past are numerous, often contradictory, and frequently manipulated for sectarian or political purposes. This fragmented memory fuels misunderstanding, fosters distrust, and hampers the formation of a shared national vision. The objective, therefore, is not merely to “turn the page,” but to engage in a lucid, inclusive, and constructive reading of the past.

Participants in the conference emphasized the need for a deliberate and structured approach to reconciliation—one grounded in the acknowledgment of wrongdoing, historical truth, and symbolic reparation. Many highlighted the potential of local initiatives, personal testimonies, artistic projects, and educational programs to help shape an inclusive national memory. They also drew on lessons from other post-conflict societies: in South Africa, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission enabled victims and perpetrators to speak openly, helping humanize the pain; in Rwanda, the Gacaca courts provided community-based justice embedded in the local fabric.



Memory, beyond its historical function, holds deep political significance. It can either cement a pluralistic national identity or entrench wounds in a cycle of resentment and retribution. In the absence of a consensus on its past, Lebanon has long avoided direct engagement with memory, opting for amnesty over dialogue. This approach has led to organized oblivion—but not to healing. It is now essential to reverse this dynamic by creating space for expression, listening, and intergenerational transmission.

In this context, there is an urgent need for a national memory strategy supported by appropriate tools: documentation centers, accessible public archives, pluralistic history education, and forums for intergenerational dialogue. Lebanon cannot move forward without confronting its past. Memory must not divide—it must unite around a shared narrative based on dignity, justice, and mutual recognition.

A. Understanding Lebanon's Divides

Lebanon has never truly come to terms with the legacy of its civil war (1975–1990). The adoption of the 1991 amnesty law, in the absence of any transitional justice process, left wounds unhealed, while narratives of the war remain fragmented, sectarian, and often in direct opposition.

The collective refusal to confront the past has hindered the development of a unified national memory and continues to obstruct reconciliation efforts. As a result, Lebanon lives in a state of fragile coexistence, where conflicting historical perceptions fuel mistrust among communities.

B. Inspiring International Experiences

Global experiences demonstrate that reconciliation is neither uniform nor automatic:

- In South Africa, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission prioritized forgiveness contingent upon public truth-telling.
- In Rwanda, the Gacaca courts enabled community-based justice—albeit not without criticism.
- In Northern Ireland, the Good Friday Agreement ended decades of violence by institutionalizing ongoing dialogue between former adversaries, bolstered by strong international support.

These examples highlight the need for a structured, transparent, and politically supported framework to help societies break free from cycles of violence.

C. Limitations of the Taif Agreement

Thirty-five years after its signing, the Taif Agreement has fallen short of its reform promises. As Professor Joseph Maïla notes, the agreement's conceptual pillars—sovereignty, institutional structure, national identity, and geopolitical orientation—remain incomplete or trapped in internal contradictions. The absence of a shared national project has deepened sectarian retreat and public distrust. Moreover, Taif failed to include any transitional justice mechanism, leaving wartime actors unaccountable and victims without recognition.

D. Strategic Recommendations

- Establish a **National Commission for Memory and Reconciliation** tasked with documenting past violence and proposing a collective narrative.
- Develop **common history textbooks** that reflect diverse memories, validated by a pluralistic national committee.
- Launch a **national education program on reconciliation**, in partnership with schools, universities, and media outlets.
- Integrate **transitional justice** into broader state reform and constitutional revision efforts.
- Support cultural initiatives—movies, theater, literature—that engage with collective memory and promote civic expression.
- Create a **National Memory Museum** as a space for dialogue, education, and intergenerational exchange.

II. Non-Violent Solutions to Internal Conflicts

Lebanon's internal conflicts cannot be reduced to occasional disputes among interest groups. They are rooted in a political culture where symbolic, institutional, and sometimes physical violence continues to be perceived as a legitimate means of expression. Transitioning to a culture of non-violence requires a profound shift in mindsets, practices, and institutional frameworks.

Experts at the conference stressed the importance of identifying and reinforcing existing mechanisms for managing tensions. This includes supporting local mediation initiatives, training community-based facilitators, developing school programs focused on active citizenship and peaceful conflict resolution, and promoting exemplary figures of reconciliation.

Particular emphasis was placed on the role of the media, which can be ambivalent in times of crisis. While partisan media narratives may deepen divisions, the media also has the potential to serve as a powerful force for peace—provided it adheres to ethical standards of dialogue and respect for diversity. Regulating public discourse and promoting journalistic norms grounded in impartiality and social responsibility is therefore a strategic priority.

Educational and academic institutions also play a critical role in fostering a democratic culture. Peace education, the teaching of negotiation skills, and emotional literacy are all essential components to be integrated into school curricula—especially in regions most exposed to intercommunal tensions.

Finally, the conference highlighted the urgent need to rethink political representation spaces to enable genuine democratic expression. Electoral reform, the creation of civic forums, and the active participation of youth and women in decision-making processes are key levers to embedding non-violence at the heart of Lebanon's institutional life.

A. Nature and Dynamics of Conflict

Internal conflicts in Lebanon extend beyond political disagreements—they are deeply embedded in identity, sectarian, economic, and geopolitical divides. The structural confessionalism of the Lebanese system often turns routine disputes into existential confrontations. Longstanding public distrust of state institutions—perceived as corrupt, biased, or inefficient—compounds the problem. Meanwhile, economic precarity intensifies tensions, fueling resentment and communal competition over resources and employment.

B. Limits of the Confessional Democratic System

While Lebanon possesses democratic institutions in form, its confessional framework distorts their function. In a deeply fragmented society, majoritarian voting does not necessarily ensure justice or equality. Coexistence frequently depends on fragile balances, precarious compromises, or even violent power dynamics. Lebanese democracy remains caught between confessional representation and the exclusion of broader citizenship. Many capable and educated young people are sidelined by clientelist structures that reward sectarian loyalty over merit.

C. Dialogue Actors and Levers

Several participants stressed that successful national dialogue depends on the active involvement of four key pillars:

- a vibrant, inclusive, and independent civil society,
- religious leaders committed to coexistence,
- a responsible and pluralistic media landscape,
- and youth educated in democratic values and respect for diversity.

Lebanon's past dialogues have often failed due to the absence of a clear framework, a lack of accountability, and insufficient political will. A genuine culture of compromise—rooted in the common good rather than sectarian bargaining—has yet to take hold.

D. Strategic Recommendations

- Establish a permanent national dialogue framework, supported by an independent and inclusive authority.
- Create community mediation spaces at the local level, in collaboration with municipalities, NGOs, and religious institutions.
- Confirm the mandatory inclusion of national civic education in school curricula, with revised content that emphasizes a culture of dialogue, pluralism, and non-violence.
- Encourage youth participation in public life through local and national engagement programs.
- Support the training of local mediators capable of addressing low-intensity conflicts before they escalate.
- Highlight and replicate successful local experiences of intercommunal coexistence and cooperation.

III. National Resilience and State Rebuilding

A state's resilience is not merely defined by its capacity to absorb shocks but by its ability to adapt, transform, and maintain continuity in serving all citizens. In Lebanon's case, resilience demands a fundamental reconstruction of the state's foundations, today weakened, fragmented, and largely delegitimized.

Discussions at the conference emphasized that resilience cannot be reduced to technocratic fixes. It must be underpinned by a clear, shared political vision.

Several participants advocated for a redefinition of the state's role, one centered on its essential missions: guaranteeing security, delivering justice, providing basic public services, regulating conflicts, and embodying the general interest.

This requires a profound reform of the institutional architecture: effective decentralization, independence of the judiciary, professionalization of the civil service, anti-corruption mechanisms, and budgetary transparency. The goal is not to restore the state as it was, but to build a new, civil, inclusive, and fully sovereign state.

Participants underscored the urgency of rebuilding trust between citizens and institutions. Such trust must be grounded in tangible outcomes: quality public services, equality before the law, accountability, and fair access to economic opportunities. It also requires greater transparency in the management of national resources and active participation by civil society in decision-making processes.

Special attention was given to education, seen as the foundation of active citizenship. Rethinking curricula, fostering debate skills, and strengthening ties between schools and local communities were identified as structural measures needed to shape a new political culture.

A. The Imperative of a New Social Contract

Lebanon cannot regain stability without a deep overhaul of its political system. Resilience, beyond mere survival, requires rebuilding on solid foundations: a sovereign state, legitimate institutions, and a citizenship pact that transcends sectarian allegiances. The current model, inherited from the Taif Agreement, has reached its limits: it entrenches communal power-sharing without paving the way for modern, efficient governance. Structural corruption, impunity, and foreign interference undermine any attempt at sustainable reform.

B. Toward a Civil, Inclusive, and Functional State

The interventions of Walid Joumblatt and Sami Gemayel expressed a shared willingness to break free from political stagnation—one calling for a modernization of the Taif Agreement, the other for building a state based on citizenship and transparency. Both acknowledged that Lebanese resilience must move from a defensive posture to a proactive project of

transformation. The notion of a civil state, distinct from a secular one, aims to guarantee equality among citizens while respecting cultural and religious identities. This state must be able to craft effective public policy, protect fundamental rights, and ensure equality before the law.

C. Strengthening the Pillars of Cohesion and Governance

The foundations of sustainable national resilience rest on:

- a unified and well-supported army, guarantor of territorial integrity;
- an independent and impartial judiciary;
- a national education system rooted in critical knowledge and civic values;
- a cross-communal civil service program for youth;
- balanced decentralization, granting local autonomy without fragmenting the nation.

Equally vital is the need to rebuild trust between citizens and the state. This requires a sustained effort to fight corruption, reform public administration, digitize government services, and ensure budgetary transparency.

For these pillars to generate lasting change, their impact must be supported by inclusive public policies, transparent funding mechanisms, and genuine political will at the highest levels.

D. Strategic Recommendations

- Launch a **National Constituent Dialogue** bringing together all political and social stakeholders.
- Develop a **roadmap for the progressive deconfessionalization** of the state and its institutions.
- Implement a **mandatory national civil service program** for youth from all confessions to foster shared experiences and solidarity.
- Promote **competence-based governance, transparency, and accountability.**
- Integrate the **Lebanese diaspora** into the national rebuilding process as an economic, cultural, and political partner.
- Establish an **Independent Observatory on State Reform**, mandated to monitor and evaluate the progress of institutional reforms

Strategic Conclusion

Lebanon's future hinges on a threefold commitment: reconciling with its history, embracing a culture of dialogue, and rebuilding its institutions on new foundations. The conference discussions sketched a path of transformation rooted in mutual recognition, inclusive participation, and social justice. This is not a utopian project, but a vital necessity.

The current crisis—despite its gravity—can become an opportunity, if it pushes the Lebanese people to break free from rentier dynamics, sectarian allegiances, and external dependencies. This collective awakening requires visionary leadership, but also the sustained engagement of civil society, youth, intellectuals, and ordinary citizens.

Lebanon now stands at a crossroads: it can either remain trapped in a rigid sectarian system that breeds paralysis, inequality, and latent violence, or dare to chart a new path grounded in citizenship, transparency, and solidarity. This policy paper, born from the shared insights of Lebanese and international experts, outlines a national reconstruction project that goes beyond technical reforms to propose a deep transformation of Lebanon's social contract.

Three cross-cutting priorities clearly emerge:

- **Memory as a foundation for reconciliation:** without acknowledging the past, there can be no trust in the future. A shared collective narrative is essential to overcome fear and retreat into identity-based divisions.
- **Dialogue as a method of governance:** in the face of growing polarization, spaces for mediation, listening, and co-construction must be institutionalized. This begins in schools and must infuse all aspects of public life.
- **Reform as a condition for resilience:** the Lebanese state must become functional, fair, and representative. This requires rebuilding institutions, progressively deconfessionalizing governance, and actively engaging youth and the diaspora.

This document is intended as a tool for mobilization, a call to collective awakening. It is now up to political leaders, social actors, and committed citizens to turn these recommendations into concrete action.

Biography

Salah Bouraad

Professor Salah Bouraad holds a doctorate in physical sciences (Paris) and is a civil engineer, with a distinguished career in telecommunications and international business. A former CEO of subsidiaries within the France Télécom / Orange group, he is currently the CEO of Segenius Group and a member of the committee of former senior executives of Orange. A Foreign Trade Advisor to the French government (Conseiller du commerce extérieur de la France) since 1992, he has also taught in engineering schools in both France and Lebanon. He is a “Chevalier de la Légion d’Honneur” and “Officier de l’Ordre National du Mérite” of the French Republic

Annexes

1. Conference Program (May 14, 2025)

- **11:00 AM – 11:30 AM:** Opening session
 - Amine Gemayel, President of Maison du Futur
 - Michael Bauer, Konrad Adenauer Foundation
- **11:30 AM – 12:50 PM:** Session 1 – Remembering the Past, Imagining the Future
 - Paul Carmichael, Joseph Maila, Jean-Paul Chagnollaoud
- **14h00 – 15h45 :** Session 2 : Nonviolent Solutions to Internal Conflicts
 - Ali Hamdane, Adel Nassar, Mohammad Sammak
- **4:00 PM – 5:30 PM:** Session 3 : Strengthening National Resilience
 - Walid Joumblatt, Sami Gemayel
- **5:30 PM:** Open Discussion and Closing Remarks

2. Key Quotes from Speakers

- "Peace comes through acknowledged memory, not through forgetting." - Joseph Maila
- "Interreligious dialogue is a national emergency." - Mohammad Sammak
- "Lebanon must become a collective project again, not just a sum of community-based protections." - Sami Gemayel

3. List of Participants

- President Amine Gemayel (Maison du Futur)
- Mr. Michael Bauer (KAS Lebanon)
- Speakers mentioned above
- Members of civil society, young researchers, international experts

4. Acknowledgements

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