

## **“Fifty Years of Reflection... and a Future to Build”**

Maison du Futur, in cooperation with the Konrad Adenauer Foundation

Bikfaya, December 5, 2025

General Report

This conference comes as part of the activities organized by **Maison du Futur** in celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of its founding — a half-century during which it has solidified its standing as a national platform for dialogue, debate, and knowledge production, and as a research space that provides decision-makers with scientific approaches and analytical tools necessary to understand public challenges and propose pathways to solutions. Since its establishment, Maison du Futur has served as a meeting point between academic expertise and political vision, contributing to the development of institutional thinking in Lebanon and the region.

For this event, Maison du Futur chose to dedicate its central theme to the issue of **corruption in Lebanon**, given the existential threat it poses to the structure of the state, its ability to regain domestic and international trust, attract investment, modernize its institutions, and strengthen good governance. Corruption is no longer a circumstantial phenomenon or an individual behavior; it has become an interconnected system that impacts administrative and economic performance and shapes the relationship between citizens and the state. Addressing it has therefore become a prerequisite for the sustainability of public order, not merely an improvement of its mechanisms.

The conference was held in partnership with the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, as part of a collaborative effort designed to create a research-driven and professional forum for examining the deep drivers of corruption, exploring comparative experiences, and identifying practical instruments to contain its spread. This joint approach is particularly significant, as it moves the debate beyond mere diagnosis toward building institutional solutions anchored in transparency, accountability, and the rule of law.

The conference focuses on four integrated approaches: analyzing the sources of structural corruption and its impact on the political and administrative system; discussing the legal and practical challenges facing the implementation of governance; studying successful international reform models and proposing ways to adapt them to the Lebanese context; and formulating actionable, implementable recommendations.

The conference does not stop at discussion; it serves as an entry point to subsequent institutional work. A policy paper will be prepared following the event, incorporating the outcomes of the sessions and submitted to the relevant official bodies, thus transforming dialogue into an effective tool for influencing the reform process.

This event brought together a distinguished group of politicians, decision-makers, academics, experts, civil society institutions, and youth, reflecting the conviction that combating corruption is a shared national responsibility and a cross-generational reform path.

## Opening Session

Former President **Amine Gemayel** inaugurated the conference, stressing that the chosen title is not merely a celebratory slogan but encapsulates the very essence of Maison du Futur's mission since its founding half a century ago. He noted that this institution has withstood wars and crises while remaining committed to its intellectual role, driven by a firm conviction that thinking about the future is a national duty, not an intellectual luxury.

Gemayel highlighted the importance of the broad Lebanese and international participation, noting that the presence of speakers from across and beyond Lebanon reflects Maison du Futur's stature as an intellectual reference point and demonstrates that global engagement with Lebanon endures despite its political and economic difficulties. He also offered particular appreciation to the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung and its Lebanon Director, Ms. Christina Baade, for their sustained support of this partnership, which he described as a model of effective and constructive cooperation between Lebanese institutions and their international counterparts.

He noted that this gathering serves as a moment of reflection on the past to draw lessons for the future, emphasizing that fifty years of experience have proven that nation-building is not achieved through slogans but through strong institutions, sound governance, and genuine political will. Gemayel added that corruption and mismanagement are not an inevitable fate but obstacles that can be overcome when national resolve and institutional environments capable of protecting and empowering Lebanese talent are present.

The former president lamented the extent to which regional turmoil has undermined the Lebanese state, but firmly dismissed the notion of waiting for outside remedies,

stressing that such reliance is a losing bet that cannot produce a functioning nation. He urged the initiation of a reform trajectory grounded in transparency and accountability, emphasizing that Lebanon's challenge is not a shortage of highly trained human capital, but rather the absence of institutional frameworks that protect their potential and enable it to be deployed

The conference was marked by a distinctly practical orientation. Gemayel noted that each participant had been invited to put forward a single, essential recommendation, all of which will be consolidated into a joint policy paper compiled into a joint policy paper by Maison du Futur and the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung. This document is intended to provide a basis for concrete national initiatives, shifting the conversation from conventional discourse to tangible, actionable reform.

President Gemayel concluded by affirming that Lebanon stands today at a critical crossroads, and that the approach adopted by Maison du Futur is grounded not in resignation but in vision, action, and responsibility. "We think in order to propose; we collaborate in order to achieve; and we build a future worthy of our country," he said before officially announcing the opening of the conference under the title: *"Fifty Years of Reflection... and a Future to Build."*

**Ms. Christina Baade**, Director of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung in Lebanon, then took the floor and noted that the longstanding cooperation between Maison du Futur and the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung has yielded studies and research that have made a significant contribution to public dialogue in Lebanon. She described Maison du Futur as a "unique reference point" in addressing national issues within their regional and international dimensions.

Baade stressed that, amid a critical juncture characterized by political fragmentation and deep economic and institutional breakdown, Lebanon urgently needs a common, constructive form of dialogue. She further praised the resilience of Lebanese civil society and its ability to withstand pressures and continue pushing forward despite the profound challenges it confronts.

Kataeb Party leader, **MP Sami Gemayel**, took the podium to affirm that his contribution to the event was not a mere protocol gesture, but an ethical and intellectual commitment to the *"human dimension and the vision"* that have defined the experience of President Amine Gemayel and Maison du Futur since its inception. He argued that the delicate phase Lebanon is currently undergoing requires revisiting the journey of this institution, which did not limit itself to documenting events but

transformed thought, action, and research methodology into practical tools for generating solutions.

MP Gemayel noted that President Amine Gemayel, amid wars and regional transformations, succeeded in bringing together a group of thinkers and experts who believed that knowledge is the foundation of responsible politics, and that thinking about the future is not a luxury but a national duty. He emphasized that the fiftieth anniversary of Maison du Futur does not mark the end of a chapter, but rather the beginning of a renewed commitment to further projects and initiatives that lay the groundwork for a modern state.

He explained that national experiences demonstrate that countries are not built on slogans but on systematic knowledge that can be translated into evidence-based public policies. Knowledge, he said, is not an abstract cultural value, but a governing tool that enables the state to understand its problems and craft sustainable solutions, rather than relying on ad-hoc reactions. He added that the economic and political collapses Lebanon faces today are not the result of a single crisis, but of the accumulation of improvised policies lacking evidence and standards, ultimately leaving governance vulnerable to shifting political whims instead of being guided by the imperatives of the public interest.

MP Gemayel highlighted that what distinguishes Maison du Futur is its ability to turn ideas into practice and research into a tool for policymaking, positioning it as a platform where expertise and knowledge converge in service of the state. Knowledge thus becomes an essential condition for responsible politics and a key prerequisite for any reform project aimed at restoring the state and its institutions.

Turning to present developments, MP Gemayel addressed the appointment of Ambassador Simon Karam to lead the indirect negotiations with Israel, considering this step reminiscent of the decision taken by President Amine Gemayel 43 years ago to engage in direct negotiations to liberate the land, under circumstances no less complex than those Lebanon faces today.

MP Gemayel underscored that the May 17 Agreement—commonly referred to by this media label—was not a normalization accord, but an arrangement aimed at securing the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanon. He noted that President Amine Gemayel and his team, through the mediation of U.S. envoy Philip Habib, succeeded at the time in establishing frameworks for border demarcation and the preservation of sovereignty, going beyond what the current negotiations have so far achieved. He argued that the political campaigns waged against President Gemayel

at the time, and the attempts to tarnish his image and that of the state, prevented Lebanon from benefiting from the agreement, resulting, in his view, in a strategic loss for the country.

He added: *“Had all parties agreed in 1982 to the accord, Lebanon today would be part of the Arab renaissance we are witnessing, instead of remaining behind and trapped in a cycle of wars since 1967.”* Gemayel stressed that the opportunity still exists to restore state authority, achieve a full monopoly of arms by the State, and build peace, provided that courageous decisions are taken to halt the cycle of conflict and prevent young people from contemplating emigration.

He reiterated that Lebanon possesses all the human and natural assets needed to become a major economic force in the region, on the condition that political and security stability is restored and international confidence regained. He emphasized that Maison du Futur will play an even more urgent role in the coming period, as Lebanon needs strategic thinking that charts the next twenty years rather than reactive politics or dependence on external actors.

MP Gemayel concluded by saluting President Amine Gemayel, describing him as a thinker, a fighter, and a persevering statesman who never fought for his own vindication but rather defended Lebanon, its values and its role. He expressed hope that history will do him justice and place his legacy in its rightful place within the broader path of state-building.

Sessions’ coordinator **Mr. Abboud Bejjani** opened the discussion by emphasizing that this conference brings together a distinguished group of thinkers and experts, each offering a window onto one of the most pressing challenges Lebanon faces today: the deeply entrenched corruption at the heart of its political and economic system, and the networks that allow it to persist. Bejjani noted that corruption cannot be reduced to a merely moral issue; it is a structural phenomenon, deeply rooted in institutional dysfunction, clientelism, and the dangerous interplay between political power and economic influence, so much so that corruption has become a defining feature of public life in Lebanon for decades.

Bejjani explained that the conference’s two sessions will address a series of thematic pillars presented by specialists in their respective fields, as follows:

- **Mr. Karim Daher:** The historical entrenchment of corruption in Lebanese institutions

- **Mr. Badri El Meouchi:** The impact of corruption on the private sector
- **Ambassador Jean-Paul Laborde:** The relationship between corruption, organized crime, and money laundering
- **Ms. Lamia Moubayed:** Institutional weakness and its role in reinforcing and spreading corruption
- **Prosecutor Luis Rodríguez Sol:** The Spanish experience in combating corruption

Bejjani concluded by stressing that these diverse approaches form a necessary entry point for rethinking the structure of the state and its institutions, and for designing realistic strategies capable of guiding Lebanon out of systemic corruption toward a state truly able to safeguard the public good.

## **First Session**

The first session, titled “**Origins and Entrenchment of Corruption in Lebanon,**” opened with an intervention by **Mr. Karim Daher**, a Lebanese lawyer and legal expert who co-founded the Taxpayers Rights Association and the Depositors Rights Association, and was appointed chair of the committee tasked with removing Lebanon from the grey list. He is a professor at Saint Joseph University and has published extensively in the fields of law, finance, and governance.

In his comprehensive presentation, Daher explained that any discussion of corruption in Lebanon must begin by defining the concept before examining its history, manifestations, and consequences. Although no single, universally recognized definition of corruption exists, international references, particularly those of the World Bank and the European Union, converge on identifying corruption as the abuse of office or power for private gain. Lebanon gradually adopted this concept in its legislation, beginning with Law No. 83 of 2018, which defined corruption narrowly as abuse of public office, and later with Law No. 175 of 2020, which expanded the definition to include indirect misuse of authority and placed certain non-public actors under accountability when involved in public works and procurement contracts, aligning domestic law with international conventions and the Lebanese Penal Code. As a result, the national legal framework now mirrors international standards, though implementation remains hostage to political will.

As for the roots of corruption in Lebanon, Daher argued that they run deep and are historically ingrained. He traced them back to the Phoenician era, when virtually everything was subject to buying and selling; then to the Mutasarrifate period, which witnessed the purchase of administrative posts; and later to the aftermath of World

War I, when monopolies over essential goods and blockades preventing supplies from reaching Mount Lebanon reached their peak. Although many believed the post-independence era was largely free of corruption, official reports, such as Sami El Solh's 1945 report, revealed illicit enrichment and a shadow economy, with the crucial distinction that the judiciary at the time was more capable of confronting violations.

The major turning point, however, came after the 1990 Taif Agreement, when warlords transitioned into formal political power, transforming the state into a network of clientelist and sectarian interests grounded in patronage and quotas rather than reform and accountability, without any genuine national reconciliation to address the root causes of the crisis.

The ramifications of this institutional transformation were manifested in the widespread expansion of corruption across Lebanese public administration. This included systemic violations in public procurement within the water, telecommunications, and electricity sectors, where tendering regulations were routinely bypassed through the deliberate fragmentation of contracts, thereby facilitating pre-determined rent extraction. The post-crisis environment further enabled significant inflows of illicit capital that were subsequently laundered through real-estate acquisitions and the opening of banking accounts, thus embedding money-laundering practices within the financial system.

Moreover, the Court of Audit's Report No. 5600 documented the unlawful recruitment of approximately 15,000 civil servants, explicitly attributing responsibility to ministers who exceeded legally authorized staffing ceilings. The report underscored that misappropriated public funds remain recoverable through established legal mechanisms. In parallel, legislative amendments to holding and offshore company laws introduced substantial tax-avoidance loopholes, historically associated with the period surrounding the establishment of "Solidere," and contributed to consolidating an opaque financial and economic architecture.

The entanglement of political and banking elites further entrenched this opacity, particularly through the presence of political actors on the boards of commercial banks—effectively neutralizing accountability structures, as the agents of oversight and the beneficiaries of malpractice became institutionally indistinguishable.

Corruption also permeated routine administrative processes, including influence-peddling related to weapons permits, tinted-glass authorizations, and irregular hiring practices. Cases of illicit enrichment revealed public officials possessing assets

vastly disproportionate to their lawful income, yet judicial proceedings largely failed due to statutes of limitations, procedural vulnerabilities, and systemic interference undermining prosecutorial independence. Consequently, citizens operate within a circular corruption economy: the state's inability to deliver public goods drives reliance on clientelist networks, which in turn erodes tax compliance and strengthens parallel systems of service provision.

Although Lebanon is a signatory to the United Nations Convention against Corruption, domestic compliance has remained episodic and predominantly driven by external conditionalities. As a result, modern and technically sound legislative frameworks have accumulated without substantive implementation, owing to the absence of political commitment. In this context, anti-corruption is not a normative or moral preference but a structural, economic, and sovereignty-related imperative necessary for revenue mobilization, investment attraction, and institutional resilience. The indispensable precondition for operationalizing existing legislation is the presence of political will capable of enabling judicial activation, safeguarding prosecutorial independence, and reconstituting public trust in state institutions.

Thus, it becomes clear that corruption in Lebanon is neither an incidental occurrence nor a technical flaw susceptible to simple correction, but rather a comprehensive system that emerged historically, became entrenched politically, and expanded administratively and economically until it evolved into a mode of governance. Any attempt to confront it will remain incomplete unless it begins with reclaiming the state itself, freeing institutions from the grip of private interests, and transforming the law from a written text into an operative authority. Ultimately, corruption cannot be combated within a system that produces it, nor can a modern state be built through governance mechanisms whose very legitimacy is derived from corruption.

**Mr. Badri Meouchi**, Director of the Institute of Finance and Governance at ESA Business School, opened his intervention by thanking the organizers and stressing that combating corruption cannot be reduced to legislation alone, even if laws constitute an essential part of the equation. He explained that Lebanon's legislative trajectory in the field of anti-corruption has been slow and arduous: the Access to Information Law, for instance, required eight years to be passed in 2018, despite having been drafted through the collaboration of a broad coalition of local and international civil society organizations and lacking only ten parliamentary signatures to be formally submitted as a bill. The paradox, he noted, is that eight years after its adoption, the law remains largely unimplemented due to the absence



of even minimal resources necessary to operationalize it, such as funding for an electronic platform or training for specialized staff. A similar pattern emerged with the Whistleblower Protection Law, first conceptualized in 2010 through private-sector efforts but not enacted until eight years later.

Meouchi emphasized that it was civil society that pushed this agenda forward, and that Lebanon is fortunate to have such civic momentum acting as a watchdog over state performance. However, he argued that combating corruption cannot remain the responsibility of civil society alone, as the private sector is a key actor, not only as a victim of corruption, but also, at times, as an implicit participant in its reproduction. The problem, he insisted, is not limited to politicians, though they bear a significant portion of responsibility; it extends to citizens and private institutions that benefit from and perpetuate clientelist systems, and therefore cannot deny their role in reinforcing them.

Drawing on a survey conducted by Transparency International in partnership with a U.S.-funded center and a specialized firm, covering 800 companies across various sectors, Meouchi presented alarming findings: 65% of companies acknowledged paying bribes to conduct their business operations and three-quarters admitted to paying money to expedite administrative procedures that are legally required to be free and timely. Even more striking was the fact that 11.9% of companies confirmed that lawyers were paying bribes on their behalf, revealing a high degree of normalization of corruption and its acceptance as a routine operational practice. The danger lies in the fact that many companies have come to view these practices as normal, to the point of allocating specific budget lines in their annual accounts for bribes and gifts, indicating that corruption has become structured and institutionalized rather than incidental or individual.

Notwithstanding the private sector's understanding of the seriousness of the problem, the survey showed that most private-sector leaders do not challenge corrupt public officials because they perceive confrontation as futile or risky in the absence of the rule of law, suggesting that corruption has become embedded in administrative and social culture. Meouchi also highlighted the National Anti-Corruption Commission, which, despite its importance, continues to suffer from severe shortages in financial and human resources, even as citizens expect it to deliver effective oversight without the necessary operational tools.

When companies were asked to evaluate the quality of public services, 72% described them as extremely poor and emphasized that improvement is impossible without addressing corruption. Yet the survey revealed a noteworthy positive

finding: corruption rates decline significantly when the private sector participates in service delivery, though they do not disappear entirely, evident in the experience of *Liban Post*, which demonstrated that public–private partnerships can enhance service quality, albeit insufficient to dismantle corruption in a bankrupt and incapacitated state.

Meouchi argued that Lebanon's judicial system constitutes a structural barrier to any meaningful anti-corruption effort: no government can claim seriousness in reform as long as weapons remain outside state authority, the judiciary lacks independence, and accountability is selective. In his view, the starting point of any solution must therefore lie here: without a sovereign state capable of enforcing the law, there can be no security, investment, or trust.

In outlining the role of the private sector, he identified three parallel tracks:

1. **Internal reform**, through institutional cleansing and the adoption of good governance as a binding management principle rather than a symbolic slogan, since a corrupt company cannot credibly contribute to national reform.
2. **Collective action**, which has proven effective within civil society in advocating for legislative reforms, as structural change cannot be achieved individually.
3. **Engagement in research and data production**, because combating corruption requires accurate information, and the private sector cannot demand reform while concealing facts or refusing to disclose relevant data.

The discussion that followed the first session featured a series of questions posed by session coordinator **Mr. Bejjani**, along with interventions from the audience, all of which centered on the role of citizens and the private sector in entrenching corruption and the prospects for overcoming it.

Bejjani opened the discussion with a question addressed to **Mr. Daher**: “*Given the deep-rooted nature of corruption in our system, do people truly want to abandon it—especially considering that some citizens benefit from it even more than political leaders themselves?*”

Daher responded by stressing that the issue is not technical but societal in nature. He explained that Lebanese citizens face a clear binary: Do we want to think only about our present, or about our future as well? Any real change, he argued, requires both collective decision-making and individual courage. He added that Lebanon reproduces the same crisis every thirty years because citizens have yet to take a definitive stance against the culture of exploiting corruption.

Bejjani then directed a question to **Mr. Meouchi** regarding citizens' willingness to relinquish personal privileges: *"Does the Lebanese citizen really want to give up preferential treatment?"*

Meouchi replied that the problem does not lie in the principle of preferential service itself, but in restricting it to a narrow segment of society. He explained that high-quality services can indeed be offered, provided that the fees are transparent and equally accessible to everyone. He cited the earlier experience of the General Security Directorate, where proceeds were redistributed transparently among employees before the practice was later deemed unconstitutional. He concluded: "Those who protect a corrupt system tend to be intelligent and innovative; to dismantle it, we must be even more intelligent and creative."

In another question to Meouchi, Bejjani inquired about governance in the private sector and the ability of companies to demonstrate their commitment to anti-corruption when negotiating with public authorities. Meouchi replied that Lebanese legislation in this domain is weak and that financial disclosure is almost nonexistent: No information is available on salaries, board members, or audit findings, which significantly undermines investor confidence. He added that the absence of transparency standards prevents Lebanese companies from integrating into international trade and investment platforms.

Daher intervened to note that Lebanon still lacks a dedicated law combating corruption in the private sector, while countries like France have adopted stringent legislation aimed at uprooting corruption from economic institutions. He cautioned against treating corruption as exclusively a public-sector issue.

Audience questions followed. One participant raised the matter of Lebanon's economic competitiveness, citing 2017 reports that ranked Lebanon highly in academic performance despite its limited resources. The question posed was: *"How can these human capacities be harnessed? And why has the participation of certain sects in sensitive financial ministries not helped curb corruption?"*

While the political dimension of the question was not addressed directly, the discussion shifted toward the critical role of institutions in preventing the formation of clientelist networks.

The final question concerned gender differences in approaches to corruption and whether empowering women and youth could form part of the solution. Meouchi replied that he did not have precise data on the public sector, but he referenced studies showing that increasing the share of women on corporate boards in Egypt

and Lebanon leads to higher investment levels and improved performance. He suggested that similar results would likely apply to the public sector as well, emphasizing that bringing new groups into decision-making processes is essential for transforming entrenched cultural norms.

## Second Session

Session coordinator **Mr. Bejjani** opened the second session, held under the title “*The Consequences of Corruption and Possible Pathways for Reform*,” noting that the session brings together national and international figures with hands-on experience in combating corruption and designing reform frameworks. Bejjani explained that exchanging expertise with countries that have succeeded in addressing this phenomenon offers an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the repercussions of corruption in Lebanon and to explore reform trajectories that are realistically implementable.

He introduced the session’s speakers: **Ambassador Jean-Paul Laborde**, former United Nations Assistant Secretary-General, former Executive Director for Counter-Terrorism, and Ambassador of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean; **Ms. Lamia Moubayed**, President of the Basil Fuleihan Institute of Finance and Economics and Vice-Chair of the UN Committee of Experts on Public Administration; and **Mr. Luis Rodríguez Sol**, Prosecutor at Spain’s Special Anti-Corruption and Organized Crime Office, renowned for his expertise in fighting corruption and organized crime.

Bejjani emphasized that this session does not merely describe the problem but seeks to offer a practical approach that can outline an institutional reform agenda capable of restoring trust in the state and placing Lebanon on the path toward sound governance.

Ambassador **Jean-Paul Laborde** opened his intervention by thanking the organizers and noting that corruption in Lebanon cannot be understood simply as an administrative or ethical failure. Rather, it must be examined within its broader context, namely, the rise of transnational organized crime in the region and globally, which makes confronting it far more complex than it appears on the surface. He explained that discussions on corruption in Lebanon often fall into the trap of detaching it from its natural environment, whereas corruption is not an isolated phenomenon but a key instrument within the machinery of organized crime: a

functional component that allows these networks to secure resources, protect their operations, and facilitate their activities.

Laborde noted that despite fifty years of international efforts to combat corruption and organized crime, the world remains far from achieving a decisive breakthrough. Lebanon provides a clear example of this failure: It ranks very high on organized crime indices, not in terms of its ability to combat it, but in terms of its prevalence and impact. He added that the issue does not concern Lebanon alone but a broader Middle Eastern environment conducive to organized crime, with smuggling and money-laundering networks stretching from the Mediterranean coastline through Syria and onward to Iraq's open border markets. Such conditions make any attempt to build systems of oversight and accountability in Lebanon a battle that extends far beyond the country's political geography.

He stressed that discussions on corruption lose much of their meaning if not situated within this broader criminal ecosystem. Today, organized crime has become a massive economic force that often surpasses the capacities of states themselves, as seen in France, Italy, and elsewhere. In Lebanon, where smuggling networks and arms and drug trafficking are widespread, corruption becomes a necessary condition for these networks to function and a mechanism that facilitates their operations.

Laborde highlighted that the global value of organized crime is estimated at approximately USD 10.5 trillion, a figure expected to rise to USD 13 trillion, placing it on par with the economies of major powers. Drawing from his personal experience, he noted that when he spoke about organized crime in France, many initially dismissed the subject as "an Italian problem," only for it to become evident over time that the phenomenon was deeply embedded in Western democracies themselves, let alone in a country with structural fragilities such as Lebanon.

The speaker then moved to a central point in his presentation: the organic relationship between corruption and money laundering, the latter constituting the backbone of the organized crime economy. Corruption, he explained, is not an end in itself but a means of generating illicit financial gains, while money laundering is the mechanism through which these proceeds are recycled, domestically and internationally, into the formal economy, thereby enabling their use. He noted that the volume of laundered money worldwide is enormous, while the amount actually recovered represents only a negligible fraction. This makes money laundering one of the most destructive crimes for national economies, and combating it a prerequisite for fighting corruption, not a parallel or secondary measure.

Against this backdrop, he underlined the seriousness of Lebanon's placement on the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) grey list, a designation that imposes severe restrictions on international financial transactions and subjects the country to enhanced monitoring. It significantly weakens global confidence in Lebanon and limits its ability to integrate into the international banking system, resulting in compounded economic penalties borne by the state, its institutions, and its citizens alike. He nevertheless noted that some technical progress has been made in Lebanon's efforts to exit the list, although the road ahead remains long.

He went on to explain that the troubling aspect of the Lebanese case is not simply the presence of corruption but the absence of parallel financial-investigation strategies. Relevant agencies continue to focus on the "predicate offense," while neglecting independent financial investigations that expose the networks connected to perpetrators, whether in terrorism, smuggling, human trafficking, or narcotics. He illustrated this through examples: in France's Nice attack, financial tracing of family allowances helped pinpoint the perpetrator's location; similarly, in Iraq, financial-investigation approaches enabled authorities to identify funding networks linked to ISIS operatives. He stressed that had Lebanon adopted such an approach, its returns would have been far greater than those of fragmented prosecutions that fail to address the financial roots of corruption and crime.

Laborde reminded the audience that when organized crime is deprived of the protective umbrella of corruption, it turns to violence, citing Italy's experience following the 1992 assassination of Judge Giovanni Falcone, which prompted the United Nations to adopt the Palermo Convention in 2000. In his view, Lebanon is in a comparable position: building an anti-corruption architecture not only protects public funds but also prevents crime from escalating into more violent and dangerous forms.

In the concluding part of his intervention, Laborde adopted a warning tone with civilizational overtones. Drawing on Paul Valéry's reflection on the fall of civilizations, he cautioned that nations and societies are not immortal. Addressing the Lebanese, he observed that they are heirs to an ancient civilization endowed with intelligence, adaptability, and creativity—qualities that should enable it to endure. Yet the greatest threat to this civilization is not war, poverty, or emigration, but corruption, which infiltrates what remains of state institutions and transforms the governance system into a protected space for organized crime. He ended with a silent question intended to linger in the minds of the audience: **"Do you wish to see your civilization—with all its heritage and values—erased simply because you accepted the normalization of corruption?"**

**Ms. Lamia Moubayed** offered a distinct approach to the issue of corruption in Lebanon, drawing on personal experience and a research-based perspective that examines the phenomenon through cultural and institutional lenses rather than relying solely on numerical analysis. She began her intervention by noting that her presence in Bikfaya today, as someone whose life has been shaped by the civil war, holds symbolic meaning for her: Dialogue is no longer a choice but an unavoidable destiny, as former President Amine Gemayel has said.

According to Moubayed, corruption in Lebanon is neither a purely legal matter nor a strictly moral issue; rather, it is the result of a complex socio-cultural-political environment formed over decades of monopolization and absence of accountability. This environment has eroded the balance of powers and blurred the line between leadership and authority, producing dysfunction in public service and normalizing the use of public office for private gain.

Moubayed explained that corruption in Lebanon resembles a social epidemic fueled by clientelism, the fragmentation of public institutions, and the absence of unified standards in state administration. The public sector, particularly the public procurement system, constitutes the largest arena for corrupt practices. Studies show that 77% of corruption-related violations originate in this sector, which has become a channel for distributing influence and private interests rather than a transparent mechanism for managing public funds. As a result, Lebanon has lost twenty-five years of progress on transparency indicators, and its state crisis has deepened to the point where public institutions are no longer capable of performing their core functions or sustaining their effectiveness.

She noted that traditional anti-corruption approaches, ranging from education to strengthening oversight to upgrading administrative systems, remain necessary but insufficient unless situated within a cultural framework capable of explaining the roots of corrupt behavior and dismantling the mechanisms that reproduce it. Cultural factors, she argued, play a decisive role: traditional societies built around family and localized ties tend to protect privileges and reinforce clientelist relationships, making corruption an extension of longstanding social habits rather than an individual deviation. Additionally, the fragility of the economy and the inability of large segments of the population to sustain their livelihoods lead many to overlook or tolerate corruption as a perceived survival necessity.

Moubayed argued that combating corruption cannot succeed unless the risk associated with engaging in it becomes greater than the benefit—meaning that the “cost” of corruption must be recalibrated for those who perpetrate it by disrupting

the equilibrium that currently makes corruption a profitable and low-risk choice. Here, she introduced the critical question of the relationship between leadership and power, noting that an imbalance between the two fuels corruption and enables those with influence to monopolize wealth. In Lebanon, she observed, only 25% of society controls the vast majority of the country's wealth; with resources concentrated in the hands of this minority, political power becomes a closed domain that reproduces exclusion, diminishes opportunities for social mobility, erodes public trust, and perpetuates an endless cycle of corruption.

On this basis, Moubayed called for rebuilding this balance through bold public policies that strengthen electoral competitiveness, enhance market competition, reinforce judicial independence, and restore the role of oversight institutions. She did not, however, conceal the magnitude of the challenge in a "part-time state," where public employees are paid salaries eroded by the collapse of the Lebanese pound, creating additional vulnerability that has itself become a fertile environment for corruption. She emphasized that technology can play a transformative role by enabling digital government systems that reduce human discretion, interrupt patronage chains, and limit the concentration of wealth and influence.

Moubayed noted that Prime Minister Nawaf Salam's government has already taken concrete steps in this direction, whether through digital-transformation initiatives or efforts to bolster judicial independence and strengthen oversight mechanisms. She also highlighted recent rulings issued by the Court of Audit censuring the conduct of former telecommunications ministers, describing them as a hopeful indication that accountability can begin to move from rhetoric to practice. Yet, she cautioned that these steps, significant as they are, will not suffice unless they are translated into a collective ethical, cultural, and political commitment capable of placing Lebanon on a different trajectory.

She concluded by stressing that numbers alone do not produce reform, and that combating corruption in Lebanon must begin with redefining leadership and rebuilding trust between citizens and the state. Governance, she argued, is not merely an administrative procedure but a culture, a process, and a balance between the authority that governs and the values that restrain it. Unless this equation is restored, the country will remain captive to a corrupt equilibrium, one that will collapse only through a conscious decision to prioritize the future over the immediate privileges that have devastated the state and stripped Lebanese citizens of their confidence in their institutions and in themselves.



Spanish Prosecutor **Luis Rodríguez Sol** opened his intervention by thanking the organizers, noting that the geographic distance between Spain and Lebanon does not diminish the profound affinity between them. Both countries belong to the Mediterranean sphere and share cultural backgrounds and deeply rooted social values shaped within the same civilizational space. He explained that the establishment of Spain's Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office in 1995 came at a critical moment in the country's history, following a series of political scandals that had shaken public trust in state institutions and made anti-corruption an urgent national demand and a structural necessity for rebuilding public confidence.

Rodríguez Sol noted that from its inception, the office was granted broad national jurisdiction, enabling it to investigate corruption cases wherever they occurred within Spain. Its multidisciplinary structure—bringing together public prosecutors, judicial police, and financial and economic experts—allowed it to address not only public-sector corruption but also the economic crimes connected to it, including tax evasion, fraud, and money laundering. This integrated approach led to the office's renaming in 2007 as the Special Prosecutor's Office for Combating Corruption and Organized Crime.

He stressed that corruption cannot be understood in isolation from the broader criminal context in which it operates. Today, organized crime represents a global economic force whose resources exceed those of many states. Criminal networks rely on corruption to secure protection, gain access to information, and control interest-based networks. Conversely, money laundering constitutes the financial engine that sustains these networks, transforming illegal proceeds into ostensibly legitimate assets within the economy. For this reason, combating money laundering is inseparable from combating corruption itself. He emphasized that the fight against corruption and organized crime must be accompanied by specialized judicial and financial tools, as well as rigorous analysis of financial flows, to ensure accountability and the restoration of public assets. Spain's experience, he argued, demonstrates that the supposed distinction between administrative corruption and organized crime is illusory, they are two sides of the same coin and require a unified, coherent response.

In this context, Rodríguez Sol highlighted several achievements of the Spanish office, acknowledging that the path was not without obstacles but nevertheless yielded major breakthroughs that reshaped the relationship between citizens and the state. Among the most notable were landmark cases such as the "Brugal" and "Púnica" cases, which resulted in the arrest of dozens of officials implicated in

awarding public contracts in exchange for bribes; the “Gürtel” case, which led to the conviction of prominent political figures after the uncovering of a vast network of corruption and tax evasion; and the Palau de la Música scandal, which brought down key cultural administrators after investigations revealed embezzlement and money laundering.

He also cited the “Malaya” case in Marbella, which demonstrated that local corruption can reach staggering proportions requiring decisive action and the confiscation of large sums of illicit assets. The office furthermore pursued cases involving illegal political financing, such as the “Nóos” case, in which officials were convicted for exploiting nonprofit organizations to obtain public funds through fraudulent schemes.

Rodríguez Sol stressed that the office’s successes extended beyond exposing corruption to conducting parallel financial investigations that enabled authorities to trace bank accounts, uncover suspicious transfers, and recover assets tied to money laundering and criminal activities. Its broad national mandate has allowed it to operate across Spain, positioning the office as a key actor in institutionalizing accountability and confronting organized financial crime.

Rodríguez Sol noted that the office does not limit itself to prosecution but plays a central role in international legal cooperation, both by requesting assistance from other countries in cases involving financial smuggling and money laundering, and by responding to investigative requests concerning officials and politicians under scrutiny in their own jurisdictions, given that Spain is often a potential destination for illicit funds. This has positioned the office at the forefront of collaboration with international financial-governance and anti-corruption bodies, from the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) to specialized European institutions.

While acknowledging that the work has not yielded a definitive victory, Rodríguez Sol emphasized that the Spanish experience demonstrates that cutting off financial flows is the cornerstone of the fight against organized crime, and that parallel financial investigations are the most effective tool in this domain. He concluded by saying that the achievements of Spain’s Anti-Corruption Prosecutor’s Office derive their significance from having proven that combating corruption is neither a political slogan nor a moral prescription, but a comprehensive judicial and institutional process, one that translates into investigations, prosecutions, asset seizures, and the enforcement of judicial rulings, thereby affirming the state’s ability to hold corrupt actors accountable regardless of their positions.

He added that shifting the effort from addressing administrative corruption alone to dismantling networks of organized crime and money laundering reflects a deeper understanding of the structure of corruption and its entanglement with the economy and political power. As such, the Spanish experience has become a practical model emulated by many countries—particularly in the Middle East—that seek to build independent, effective institutions capable of confronting corruption and organized crime through serious action rather than mere diagnosis.

### **Closing Session: Open Discussion**

The conference’s closing discussion session was attended by a group of students from Lycée Montaigne, an initiative reflecting Maison du Futur’s commitment to engaging youth in understanding anti-corruption mechanisms and envisioning their role in building a state governed by the rule of law. Student **Maya Majdalani** opened the floor with a question drawn directly from the concerns of her generation, asking about the impact of corruption on young people’s perception of their country and their future.

Ms. **Moubayed** responded by affirming that this question reflects a widespread concern among youth today. She noted that persistent corruption undermines fair competition in the job market and pushes society back toward clientelism rather than merit—causing many young people to lose confidence in the country and consider emigration. She added that young people are “too valuable to be absorbed into a corruption network,” emphasizing that they represent an energy that must be preserved by creating a different model of governance.

Student **Gaelle Abou Jaoude** posed another question regarding whether decentralization could contribute to reducing corruption, and the conditions required for its success. Ambassador **Laborde** replied that Lebanon’s decentralization experience has not produced the expected outcomes; instead, it increased corruption due to the absence of a solid institutional foundation. He pointed out that countries that have succeeded in implementing decentralization, such as Germany, have long traditions of good governance that make decentralization a deliberate policy choice—not a political slogan.

MP **Sami Gemayel** then offered a striking intervention, sharing two experiences that illustrate the extent of corruption within the Lebanese state. In the waste-management sector, he noted that a previous company had been paid USD 160 per ton, whereas the current company charges no more than USD 60 per ton, revealing a USD 100 “corruption surplus” distributed among political actors.

His second example concerned the 2016 proposal to lease power-generating ships at an estimated cost of USD 1.38 billion to produce roughly 800 megawatts over five years. The plan triggered substantial political and parliamentary objections once it became clear that its cost far exceeded that of constructing permanent power plants, solutions that would have placed Lebanon on a sustainable track rather than relying on temporary fixes.

Gemayel explained that during parliamentary deliberations, it became evident that the tender specifications had been crafted in a way that matched only one company, raising suspicions that the bidding process had been tailored for a predetermined party. He presented copies of documents delivered to MPs at the time, which included the name of that company. The ministry later denied this, claiming the document was unofficial. However, further examination showed that the company's name had been removed from the main file but remained in one of the appendices—an indication of irregularities in transparency, or at minimum, weaknesses in the management of the tender.

He noted that he held a press conference exposing these alleged violations and argued that such cases require judicial intervention and accountability for those involved. Nonetheless, no competent judicial authority initiated a substantive investigation at the time, allowing the plan to move forward without meaningful review. Gemayel argued that this example goes beyond the electricity file; it reflects a broader systemic problem, namely, the absence of an independent public financial prosecution authority capable of acting autonomously from political and sectarian pressures.

He concluded by stating that the large portion of Lebanon's economy that operates outside the formal framework enables tax evasion and money laundering and prevents the emergence of a fair state capable of enforcing the law. Establishing an independent judicial body, he argued, is therefore an essential step in any serious reform agenda.

In the second part of the session, a pivotal question was raised: **“Who should initiate the confrontation in a country where corruption has reached this level—the President of the Republic? the government? or the financial public prosecutor?”**

Spanish Prosecutor **Rodríguez Sol** responded that any of these actors could trigger the needed transformation, provided there is genuine political will. He cited Spain's experience, where the Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office was established through

a clear legal framework. **Mr. Daher** emphasized the role of the courageous individual who can “turn the table” from within the system, arguing that no reform succeeds without a personal decision to assume responsibility.

When asked whether anti-corruption efforts are compatible with democracy, Sol explained that in France, for example, the public prosecutor launched investigations involving ministers without their knowledge, relying on information supplied by specialized and protected units. This eventually led to the creation of an independent financial investigative office capable of freezing and confiscating illicit assets.

**Ms. Moubayed** noted that Lebanon’s sectarian system obstructs accountability, stressing that hope begins when verdicts are issued against high-ranking officials—thereby turning justice into a model for society, especially for younger generations. **Mr. Meouchi** added that although real progress has been made in recent years, genuine success requires prosecuting major offenders, because *“the public interest in upholding the law outweighs the interest in preserving corruption.”*

The discussion then shifted when **Ms. Moubayed** referenced a recent incident in which a culturally significant public artwork weighing 11 tons disappeared from Beirut without any official reaction—an event she described as a perfect illustration of the core problem: total impunity.

The role of digitalization in curbing corruption was then examined. Meouchi affirmed that technology can eliminate the “intermediary,” often the weakest link in administrative corruption. Sol stressed the importance of tracking financial transfers and employing tools such as artificial intelligence to identify the real beneficiaries of financial crimes. Daher highlighted the example of the “Integrity Pact,” developed in partnership with Saint Joseph University, through which a number of lawyers committed to refusing bribes even when such payments would facilitate their work.

In response to a final question from the audience regarding whether politicians or civil servants bear greater responsibility for corruption, Daher explained that responsibility is shared: corruption involves both those who commit it and those who enable it. Reform, he argued, begins with placing the right person in the right position, improving salaries and oversight mechanisms, and adopting ethical codes of conduct in both the public and private sectors.

The session concluded with the screening of a short documentary on *Maison du Futur*, after which session coordinator **Mr. Bejjani** formally closed a conference that raised many questions, and offered just enough answers to spark a national dialogue that can no longer be postponed.

## **A Set of Recommendations Derived from the Presentations and Discussions**

### **I. At the Level of the State and Constitutional & Judicial Institutions**

#### **1. Establish a Special Public Prosecutor's Office for Combating Corruption and Financial Crime**

Modeled after the Spanish experience, with an independent structure insulated from political and sectarian appointments, and endowed with broad national authority to investigate, prosecute, freeze, and confiscate illicit assets.

#### **2. Strengthen Judicial Independence and Activate Accountability Mechanisms**

By ensuring independent judicial appointments, protecting judges handling sensitive cases, and transforming oversight bodies, including the Court of Audit, from merely “advisory entities” into effective institutions with referral and accountability powers.

#### **3. Implement Existing Laws Rather Than Merely Enacting Them**

Particularly:

- The Access to Information Law
- The Whistleblower Protection Law
- Anti-corruption, governance, and public procurement legislation  
Alongside providing the necessary human, financial, and digital resources for their enforcement.

#### **4. Ensure Adequate Resources for the National Anti-Corruption Authority**

By allocating an independent budget, investigation teams, and technical and legal support so that the authority does not remain an institution without tools.

### **II. At the Financial and Economic System Level**

## **5. Strengthen Anti–Money Laundering Measures and Link Them Directly to Anti-Corruption Efforts**

Through:

- Adopting parallel financial investigations in all corruption and organized-crime cases
- Creating interconnected databases across the Ministry of Justice, the Central Bank, and regulatory bodies
- Developing a beneficial ownership registry to curb the use of shell companies.

## **6. Develop a National Plan to Exit the FATF Grey List**

Based on a clear timeline that links financial and banking reforms to the country's economic interests, including investment flows, remittance costs, and credit ratings.

## **7. Reduce the Size of the Informal Economy**

By expanding a fair tax base, simplifying procedures, and encouraging the shift toward the formal economy, since keeping 50% of the economy in the shadows facilitates tax evasion and money laundering.

# **III. At the Level of Public Administration and Governance**

## **8. Reform the Public Procurement and Contracting System**

As it constitutes the largest arena for corruption (procurement manipulation, unlawful contract splitting, waste and electricity contracts). This requires transparent digital platforms displaying bids, prices, and awarded entities.

## **9. Accelerate the Digital Government Agenda**

To reduce direct citizen–employee interaction, eliminate intermediaries who fuel bribery and favoritism, and adopt digital systems for licensing, payments, and tracking administrative files.

## **10. Increase the Cost of Corruption for Perpetrators**

By tightening sanctions related to illicit enrichment and expanding asset-confiscation and recovery powers so that the risks outweigh the benefits, especially for high-level officials.

## **IV. At the Level of the Private Sector and Civil Society**

### **11. Adoption of Strict Internal Governance Programs by the Private Sector** Including:

- Clear codes of conduct
- “No bribery” policies
- Financial disclosure (salaries, bonuses, boards of directors, audit results)
- Employee evaluation criteria that value integrity as highly as performance.

### **12. Strengthen Collective Action and Anti-Corruption Coalitions**

Among civil society organizations, unions, and the private sector, modeled after the coalitions that successfully advanced the Access to Information Law and the Whistleblower Protection Law.

### **13. Treat Corruption as a Shared Responsibility, Not a “Politicians-Only Problem”**

By acknowledging the role of citizens as both *corruptors* and *corrupted* when they resort to bribery or clientelism, and working to dismantle this culture through education, media, and leadership by example.

## **V. Cultural, Educational, and Youth Dimensions**

### **14. Integrate Integrity Education into School Curricula and University Programs**

Ensuring that concepts such as governance, the public good, and professional ethics are taught not as peripheral subjects but as core elements in shaping citizens, employees, and public officials.

### **15. Engage Youth in Public Debate and Policymaking**

As demonstrated by the participation of Lycée Montaigne students, through youth forums and training programs in public-policy monitoring, since preserving the confidence of younger generations is essential to the survival of the state.

### **16. Empower Women and Youth in Decision-Making Positions**

Drawing on studies showing that increasing women’s representation on boards and within institutions improves performance and investment outcomes, based on the understanding that diversifying leadership is key to breaking the old cycle of corruption.



## **VI. Drawing on International Experiences (the Spanish Model as a Case Study)**

### **17. Adapt the Spanish Experience by Establishing a National Office for Combating Corruption and Organized Crime**

Featuring:

- Nationwide jurisdiction
- Multidisciplinary teams (judges, police, economists, financial experts)
- A focus on major cases rather than minor administrative violations.

### **18. Expand International Judicial and Financial Cooperation**

Through mutual legal assistance agreements, information-sharing mechanisms on financial crimes and cross-border transfers, and the use of international institutional expertise to build national investigative and regulatory capacity.

## **VII. At the Level of the Broader Political Vision**

### **19. Link Anti-Corruption Efforts to State Rebuilding, Not Treating Them as a Technical File**

By recognizing that corruption in Lebanon constitutes a full governance system; therefore, it cannot be addressed through isolated measures but rather through a comprehensive political–institutional project to reclaim the state from entrenched private interests.

### **20. Replace Rhetorical Reform with Courageous Political Will**

Through concrete actions: prosecuting high-level officials, reopening major corruption files (waste management, electricity, financial engineering, irregular employment...), and publishing the results transparently before the public.

