

**XVI Euro-Mediterranean Dialogue on the Phoenicians' Route
2023 International General Assembly 20th anniversary of the Phoenicians' Route 2003-2023
Sardinia – Italy Cabras, 20 October**

Lebanon is among the 40 member States of the EPA Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe

**Rachid Chamoun, PhD
Adjunct Professor, SARd, LAU,
Honorary President of the Phoenicians' Route
Advisor to the Lebanese Minister of Tourism for International Relations
Representative of Lebanon in the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes EPA**

Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Within the embodiment of this cultural event celebrating the 20th anniversary of the Phoenicians' Route, I am honored to be entrusted by the Lebanese ministry of tourism to represent Lebanon in its position as the 35 Member State of the governing board of the EPA into the cultural routes of the council of Europe among the 40 member States of the Enlarged Partial Agreement.

Currently, Lebanon is represented by 4 distinct Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe: (1) The Phoenicians' Route, (2) The Routes of El Legado Andalusi, (3) The Routes of the Olive Tree, and (4) Iter Vitis Route [Wine Route].

We are grateful for the support of the EPA member States towards accomplishing the mission for Lebanon being the first Mediterranean / Middle Eastern country to join the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes, given the relevance of Lebanon's cultural magnitudes into the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe program.

Lebanon's rich cultural identity is reflected in its tangible and intangible heritage. The Natural heritage Protected Areas in Lebanon includes 8 Nature Reserves, 24 Natural sites, 5 Himas, 12 Protected Forests and 5 cultural heritage sites inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

Lebanon is also very active in academic and scientific research in the field of cultural heritage and sustainable cultural tourism through the participation of the Lebanese American University among the 22 Universities across Europe and the Mediterranean region.

The Lebanese Ministry of Tourism has developed an instrumental tourism plan with The Arab Tourism Organization (ATO) as an active member of The Arab Ministerial Council on Tourism (AMCT) Arab League state that is responsible for promoting the sustainable Middle Eastern and

Arabian tourism sectors. Furthermore, Lebanon has been nominated to head the tourism industry in the Middle East and Arab region and shall establish a regional office in Beirut.

Within the frame work of our collaboration with our Euro-Mediterranean and Arabian states' partners we have signed an international agreement with Greece and Cyprus on May 12 , 2022 to further activate our collaboration towards developing and sustaining our cultural tourism economic industry.

Our collaboration with the International Tourism Organizations seeks to sustain the development of the tourism for Lebanon in line with the United Nations sustainability objectives. According to the data of (2022-2023); the tourism industry played an active role in the economic growth and have contributed over 40% of the GDP of the national economy. Soon Lebanon shall recover from its political and economic constraints and we are expecting a very promising summer.

Our collaboration with the international tourism institutions and organizations is based on a shared vision and aspirations for the tourism reality in Lebanon for a short, medium, and long-term plan.

In collaboration with our local and international partners, we have accomplished several activities and initiative towards promoting our tangible and intangible heritage within the framework of the European institute of cultural routes.

Since our affiliation with the Phoenicians' Route, on December 2016, we have contributed to strengthen the cultural tourism sector in Lebanon and beyond , and have achieved valuable initiatives to include but not limited to the Phoenician Museum within the premises of LAU Louis Cardahi Foundation and the Alphabet Museum in the Municipality of Byblos, the Phoenician Museum in Jounieh and the High Mountain Phoenician Center in the historic Biosphere Reserve of Jabal Moussa, and have developed Smart ways Lebanon by the Phoenicians' route, a significant digital online project towards exploring the heritage cities of Lebanon.

I thank all our active partners and members of the Phoenicians' Route and the cultural routes of the council of Europe along with the Lebanese Ministries of Tourism and Culture, and LAU-Louis Cardahi Foundation, to include all the Lebanese cities and towns along Smart ways Lebanon by the Phoenicians' Route. Also, I would like to share a special acknowledgment to our active partners for their continues support: the Lebanese Tourist Guides Syndicate, Vibes World Sustainable Tourism the Lebanese Federation of Tourism Union, and Jabal Moussa Association.

Our intercultural dialogue shall benefit from and contribute to the cultural values of the European Institute of Cultural Routes, and seek towards enhancing and sustaining our institutional joint mission to disseminate knowledge about Lebanon and the Euro Mediterranean region.

We are keen to establish mutually beneficial Public-Private partnerships; we appreciate the collaboration and support of our national and international partners that are working in line with the ministry's vision and action plan.

In spite of the current socio-political and socio-economic difficulties Lebanon is facing, the Ministry of Tourism continues to support and engage in national and international activities towards protecting and promoting our cultural heritage through sustainable cultural tourism – reaffirming our future vision for Lebanon where its citizen can live in a peaceful state of humanity, harmony, and peace.

Lebanon's Tourism sector remains robust, and will continue to evolve with the collaboration and support of the national and international organizations and institutions; especially as an integral part of the mission within the embodiment of this cultural event. Cultural Route of the Council of Europe and the World Tourism Organization – UNWTO.