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Finance Minister, Ali Hassan Khalil met with Ambassador Pierre Duquesne entrusted to follow up on CEDRE Conference.

After the meeting, Ambassador Duquesne stated the following:

Concerning the implementation of what was agreed to 11 months ago, during CEDRE Conference, and which was reflected in the ministerial statement adopted by the government and the Parliament, I would like to say that the ministerial statement is a good document that reveals the path that the Lebanese political authorities would like to take. The international community stands next to the Lebanese authorities and supports its content. The current government does not have the luxury to wait, as indicated also by the Minister, but things should happen fast. Of course, not everything can happen in one day.

The 2019 budget should be submitted shortly; 2018 budget was voted last March and the budget should mention the deficit reduction (according to the ministerial statement) by not less than 1% of the GDP. Progress should be made in this sense. As clarified in the ministerial statement, progress should be achieved in terms of public employment, pension and required reforms in the electricity sector. Work should happen on three levels simultaneously: projects, reforms and financing. All these aspects are linked and the vision established by CEDRE Conference, held under the patronage of my country, requires to move forward on all these levels. Projects should also be prioritized and infrastructure projects desperately needed by the country should be initiated. The meeting focused on general discussions and economic and financial issues.

Is it true that Lebanon has to implement reforms within two months to benefit from CEDRE's assistance?

I have just stated the contrary. I have just clarified that it would be impossible to achieve everything in some weeks. It is obvious that electricity

in Lebanon cannot be reformed in two months. But progress indications should be given in the different areas within a relatively short period. Not necessarily within 2 months. Moreover, the government was formed a month ago and the ministerial statement was approved by the vast majority in the Parliament. Let us benefit from this. We know that after the formation of any government, in all the countries of the world, one should benefit from the prevailing momentum to move forward. This is how it happens all over the world and Lebanon is no exception. For the fifth time, I will reiterate that we are not saying that everything shall be achieved within 2 months. On the contrary, it would be unfortunate to see that in 2 or 3 months, work hasn't started yet. CEDRE funds are always available. The donor states and international institutions are ready to help. But let us state things plainly. Reforms are not limited to the Budget. There are projects in the telecommunications, aviation and energy sectors. Laws were enacted but are not implemented because regulatory authorities are not working since the appointment of staff has not happened yet. How do you expect to convince investors from the public and private sectors to invest if they do not know how sectors are organized.

Reforms do not always mean structural amendments but simply, establishing the bodies as stipulated by Lebanese laws. The ministerial statement mentioned that the appointment of the three regulatory bodies for energy, telecommunications and aviation shall take place, and this is excellent. It is not difficult. Normal negotiation takes place between political powers in all the countries. This is normal, but someone tells you that EDL should be reformed within two months. I would like to reiterate that progress should be made on three levels: reforms, financing and projects. Or projects, financing and reforms, not in particular order. This is possible and essential.”

Khalil also met with the World Bank Regional Director, Saroj Kumar Jha, with whom he discussed the joint projects between Lebanon and the World Bank.