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Minister of Finance Ali Hassan Khalil launched the new e-services developed by the General Directorate of Land Registry and Cadastre (GDLRC) during a ceremony held today and attended by a number of DGs, representatives of all official institutions, economic and social figures, ambassadors, clerics and interested parties.

In his speech, Minister Khalil highlighted the importance of progress, adding that in light of the recent political changes in the country and the order that has returned to the political and institutional life, we have the exceptional responsibility to make some real changes in the work of the State, putting it on the track of e-governance and reforms.

Transcript of the Minister's speech:

It is a great honor for me to stand again here today to witness with you the progress of one of the State's administrations that has faced, and is probably still facing, many issues and challenges as a leading administration that works with the public. Indeed, all citizens need, in one way or another, to get in touch with the Ministry of Finance and the GDLRC, which places on this administration the exceptional responsibility of understanding and realizing the importance of its role, as well as constantly working toward progress, while getting closer to the people and their problems and working on solving them. Today, in this meeting, we would like to stress on our clear will and confidence in our country's ability to resist, survive and move forward, as well as on its ability to keep abreast of all the developments of the century and to always resort to solutions that promote the citizen's trust in the State and its institutions.

Our first responsibility that emanates from our political and ministerial position, is to move forward and not stop at the limitations imposed by the reality of the administration, politics and interventions, or accept the status quo as if the deadlock, chaos and failure to take serious steps toward reforms are also inevitable. Our understanding of the role that we are playing means that we can break all the barriers which are hindering creativity, progress and the modernization of the administration to the fullest. People have lost their confidence in their ability to stand on their feet again as a result of the successive political crises that have afflicted our country and that might have, at a certain point, led to the disruption of the work of the major political institutions in the country.

But we are with you today, and in light of the recent political changes that took place in the country and the order that has returned to the political and institutional life at the level

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of the Presidency, Parliament and Government, in addition to the serious work being done in the different ministries and administrations, we have the exceptional responsibility, today and tomorrow, to make some real changes in the work of the State, the Administration and the institutions. We cannot remain still; the first steps toward a project aiming to develop public administration start by adopting automation and modern electronic methods in our administrations.

Our commitment at the Ministry of Finance shall not to remain idle words. We will seriously and effectively start in implementing e-government in all its forms and put it in the service of both citizens and the State. This commitment was not initiated today, but we are revealing part of it now and it will be completed shortly within a wide series of e-services at the level of the General Directorate of Finance. This will certainly make a positive difference in the work of the ministry and the administration, and should be extended to all the State's ministries and administrations. This is not a difficult task to achieve, but it needs a strong will... which we have... Our will can instigate the change we are talking about.

The Lebanese know-how can be seen in the implementation of many e-governments in fellow countries and we know that several relevant leading companies are seriously working in many of them. These Lebanese professionals are in charge of IT development, building e-governments and managing many institutions and administrations in these countries. Therefore, Lebanon should benefit much more from its expatriate and worldwide talent which is working in most of the competent institutions in this field. This is not just technical work, but a step toward the reform and progress of the administration. The reform process we are seeking can be achieved once we lift any political cover off any person who commits a violation in this country, regardless of his rank. No employee, regardless of his affiliation to any party, religion or area, should feel politically protected; he should feel that he is accountable to the State and its institutions and to the regulatory bodies and their institutions. Therefore, his responsibility is to carry out his duties to the fullest. We really have to get rid of the idea of mini-kingdoms, covered corruption and backdoor deals in the public administration and seek to achieve a reality where the citizen feels that he can acquire his right from the employee and where the employee has the duty to work toward achieving the right of this citizen.

Now that the State's regulatory bodies are ready and their staffing completed, which was the government's main objective, we can reach a better system in this sense. But we, as political forces and officials should allow these bodies to operate at their full capacity, without any consideration other than the interest pertaining to the exercise of this role. We cannot designate regulatory bodies and public regulatory administrations and impose on them constraints that hinder their real role.

We are criticizing ourselves and our position because the situation cannot stand any additional confusion and chaos than what has already resulted from the successive periods witnessed by the State as a whole. The struggle for reform and the battle against corruption require collective efforts from the State and its institutions, the private sector, the people, the media and, consequently, other bodies. The process cannot be individual, carried out by a single group, because if the current situations goes on, we shall face real structural risks related to the work, strength and survival of the State.

We are making these statements from the podium of the General Directorate of Land Registry and Cadastre to stress that our responsibility in this particular sector will go on and nothing will stop us, not even an employee who committed a violation, thinking he could get away with it, commit a fraud and pursue his role at the expense of the people and their properties, without real accountability. Allow me here to reiterate what I have once stated, although some might have felt that the case has been closed or that it was just a phase. Let me stress that there is a real follow-up on all those who work in this sector, a follow-up that resulted in the past- without much publicity maybe- and that will result in the next stage, in taking direct measures against every person who committed a violation thinking we won't see him.

In terms of developing the work in this Directorate, we have pledged to expand the land registries in Lebanon. This is not simple luxury. Indeed, working toward progress requires taking the weight off the shoulders of the citizens by implementing decentralization in its real sense. This is what happened through the inauguration of new land registries in Baalbek, Rashaya and Marjayoun, with new ones soon in Koura and Akkar and later in Jib Jenin. We are fully aware of the positive impact of this horizontal expansion and proliferation of land registries in providing opportunities for people to communicate more and ease their burden, and thus, encourage the regions and strengthen people's attachment to their land no matter how close or far they are from the center of power and decision.

We, at the GDLRC, also have an ambitious project. We have embarked on the process and started the pre-implementation phases. We have completed part of the preparations and will pursue them with the World Bank, with substantial funding in order to develop all matters related to land registry on different levels. This will certainly make an exceptional and crucial difference in the reality of this Administration and the State as a whole because the management of land and real estate affairs is closely related to the progress and improvement of the economic situation and the stimulation of the economy, which will in turn, lead us toward a real adjustment of our financial and economic situation at the level of the country. I am well aware of the challenges and crises facing this sector, and some real estate developers and professionals, as well as their syndicates are among us today. I know the pain they are enduring due to the temporary decline in this sector, but we have to realize that the value of land in Lebanon is high compared to its area and economic size. Therefore, when we organize its investment and rationalize all relevant matters, it becomes part of the economic activity toward the best.”

Budget and financial and economic reform

Today, we are witnessing together, during this phase, an adjustment of our financial and economic reality through the public budget approved in 2017. It is true that the budget came late and much was said about it, however, it instigated real change, reinstating the order that was missing in financial matters for the past 12 years without a budget. Today, we will mainly build on the items approved in the 2017 budget to adopt a new budget for 2018, as soon as possible. It shall include a vision that focuses on reforms, moving forward and some steps that can promote, not only transparency, public finance management, liquidity and expenditures, but also that can, in a way or another, promote the economic activity, if possible, through a series of procedures that we would be determining. We are confident that we are on the right path toward rebuilding the mechanisms required for the existence of the State, including its budget, so they become

in line with everyone's aspirations for improvement and progress, while keeping up with all issues related to controlling expenditures and waste, improving collection and activating tax measures that do not harm, but help in stimulating our entire situation in general.

Political stance: The elections

We are also very concerned by our political stability and should be alert and committed. This is why we are committed to holding the parliamentary elections on time. Some might believe that this issue is irrelevant to what we are discussing today, but, without order in political life, there cannot be order in the work of the State and its institutions. Confusion affects everything; therefore, we have to maintain our political stability that is remarkably protected by the efforts of the Lebanese army and the various security bodies. We are a small State, but we have accomplished a great achievement by confronting and defeating terrorism and protecting our borders, strengthening the confidence of the people in this stability at the security level. We should further strengthen this stability by ensuring that our political work stays in the right direction it took after the President's election and the government's formation, by electing a new Parliament.

We have taken an essential step toward the development of our electoral system by adopting the proportional representation law, but there are still many gaps and talks about mechanisms and techniques that could hinder the implementation of this law. Here, I would like to state firmly and clearly: the parliamentary elections will not be postponed and they will take place in accordance with the new law and its relevant mechanisms that we defended before the Parliament during the discussion of the law. We are not worried about ensuring the mechanisms of implementation of this law and therefore, we, as Lebanese residents and expatriates, should be prepared and seriously work on holding the elections on time.

Allow me here to reiterate our trust in our nation's ability to stand on its feet again. We are confident that this small nation, which has overcome aggression and terrorism, in addition to facing its own internal challenges and political battles for years, can, with the will of its people and those loyal to it, and the will of the elites that are still attached to their existence in it, triumph and become stronger, and we shall be proud of it as we have always been.

And now, a little less talk and a lot more action and procedures that shall restore authority and trust. Let us all take further steps within our different administrations and institutions. Until we meet again for the announcement of a new project... Thank you all.

Speech of Mr. George Maarrawi, DG of the General Directorate of Land Registry and Cadastre (GDLRC)

I am pleased to be here with you today to introduce the essential steps we started implementing within the GDLRC, building on the reform plan that we launched a few years ago.

Our slogan for this stage is "**Your property close to you**".

The change which started to give results during the past year emanates from the clear vision of H.E. the Minister of Finance, Ali Hassan Khalil, and his determination to initiate a comprehensive wave of reforms from his first day at the ministry, in addition to his strong commitment and unprecedented resolution.

And here we are today, launching three additional GDLRC e-services aiming to increase the transparency and efficiency of our services, while making them accessible to all citizens, local and foreign investors, as well as concerned parties. These new e-services allow to track ownership requests, paid invoices and title register changes considered to be one of our most important services since it allows the user to know any amendment made on his property. This service is important to Lebanese residents and non-residents and we can clearly say that: "your property is close to you wherever you are".

167 million Lebanese Liras were collected from the title register viewing service, without any advertising campaign. Moreover, the number of users of the fees simulation service has increased to reach 11,600 persons, whereas the number of beneficiaries from the transaction tracking service is 10,000.

In addition to the abovementioned services, the GDLRC is determining the time needed for the completion of real estate transactions, with the Central Inspection Board and the Research and Orientation Administration in the Civil Service Board, which leads to the identification of responsibilities, the activation of accountability and the promotion of transparency.

Work is currently undertaken to electronically link the Public Housing Institution and the GDLRC in matters related to ownership affidavits for those requesting housing loans, which shall speed the completion of transaction and prevent errors resulting from manual data entry.

Furthermore, the GDLRC is seeking, through its cooperation with universities, to motivate the youth and benefit from their talent in order to close the gap between them and public service in Lebanon. This cooperation also aims to support Lebanese university students by leaving a sustainable positive impact on their academic and professional paths.

Investing in real estate information analysis to make it accessible to the Lebanese citizen and economy by developing a **mass valuation system** and putting it at the disposal of the citizens so they can compare the prices of adjacent properties to the price of the property they intend to buy.

Creating an interactive page on the website, that allows:

- the user to electronically submit and track *suggestions or complaints*.
- the Administration to facilitate the monitoring, studying and assessment of the suggestions, as well as measuring their impact, in order to improve the quality of the services provided.

The GDLRC is also seeking to develop information security at all levels by using the best cyber security systems.

In conclusion, and in order to provide the best services,
Let's stay in touch!

The presentation of Mr. Ziad Maadarani, head of the IT Department at the GDLRC:

Mr. Ziad Maadarani, head of the IT Department at the GDLRC gave a detailed presentation about the e-services of both the website and the mobile application as follows:

- 1- Title Register Viewing: allows acquiring information about the digital title register.
- 2- Transaction Tracking
- 3- Fees Simulation: allows to calculate the approximate due fees
- 4-Title Register Changes: A service that sends an alert to the mobile phone and e-mail about the registration of new changes or the issuance of new title deeds on the digital title register.
- 5- Ownership Request Tracking: allows the tracking of the ownership affidavits transaction
- 6- Paid Invoices: reveals the paid invoices of the last transaction made on the property.