Berghof Foundation

> *Work package 1: Discussion on a future vision, common values and political and economic reforms*

> رزمة العمل **1**: نقاش نحو رؤية مستقبلية ، وحول القيم المشتركة، والإصلاحات السياسية والاقتصادية الممكنة

UPDATE 3

Track 1 of our multi-level dialogue project in Lebanon focuses on bringing together a group of experts and opinion leaders, in short GEOL, to discuss a future vision for Lebanon. So far, we had organised two meetings in 2022. In November 2022, on the Lebanese National Day, we stepped ahead by organising a one-day retreat for this group that had its challenges but concluded with important agreements. In December, we organised a follow-up for a smaller, more engaged group that resulted in the decision to conduct research on the sectarian system in Lebanon.

Retreat

We have to accept that organising this retreat was premature. Most members of the group still had not developed the interpersonal relationship that would make such a gathering comfortable. Moreover, the high attendance (15 people) made the group a little difficult to manage, with differences and arguments dominating their interactions. In our opinion, the participants will need to work on removing emotional barriers. It will take consistent efforts by the Berghof Foundation to provide a conducive environment that encourages diligent interpersonal communication before and after such events.

Nevertheless, the retreat ended on a positive note, as the following agreements were reached:

- The group wants to only handle those major, deep-rooted, and pressing topics not addressed in other venues.
- The participants desire to produce tangible results and not to linger in theoretical discussions and analysis.
- The group decided to deal with one topic at a time, producing a "**White Paper**" (or policy brief) on each topic: an authoritative, in-depth report or guide on a specific complex issue that presents the issuing body's philosophy on the matter and suggests solutions. It should not be of a technical nature, but rather presented in a clear and simple no-jargon format, not to exceed 5-7 pages.
- The first topic the group decided to engage with is "abolishing the sectarian system of political power-sharing" in Lebanon – a hefty undertaking, but a very relevant and important discussion to be handled at this stage of the country's life.

Follow-up meeting

Within a month of the above retreat, and to build on the momentum attained, we organised a follow-up meeting before the end of December. Research in our field has identified the positive effects of using interpersonal approaches to build and nurture relationships that eventually impact conflict transformation. Thus, we invited the group for a holiday lunch with a rather informal setup. The group met in a venue with couches around a low table, which allowed for a relaxed, amiable atmosphere. Also, rather than inviting the whole GEOL, and while maintaining the balanced selection criteria followed by the larger group, a smaller group of eight people was selected for this meeting. They had shown great commitment to this endeavour and an interest in investing the time and effort needed. Henceforth, we will refer to this group as core-GEOL, which will meet every six weeks.

The gathering did an evaluation of the retreat in November and talked about the rationale for downscaling the group. The core group decided that its discussions and suggestions will be shared with the full group, who will meet less frequently but will eventually approve any output. The group confirmed the topic chosen at the retreat for the first White Paper – "abolishing the sectarian system of political power-sharing". They decided that two researchers should be hired by the Berghof Foundation to support this process. The researchers, hired before mid-January, will be from two different political backgrounds to ensure that the topic is tackled from different angles. They will produce a draft document before the month's end, after scheduling a meeting with the core-GEOL members. The output should include the following parameters:

- o   What are all the options on this topic?
- o   What do different political parties and stakeholders say about these options?
- o   What will be needed to achieve these options (constitutionally, socially,…)?
- o   What are the political and societal implications of implementation?
- o   What are the recommended / most appropriate / least controversial choices?
- o   What is the timeline for implementing these choices?

Discussion at the follow-up focused on the current national governance paralysis. The participants started to see the need for an informed citizen group to come up with meaningful initiatives that can shake up the dangerously stale and toxic political environment. They are taking their work more seriously, and they see it as the start of something meaningful and impactful.