

EU envoy to meet Hezbollah official

BEIRUT: The European Union's top envoy will meet with Hezbollah Thursday, just three days after the bloc designated the group's military wing a terrorist organization. Angelina Eichhorst, the EU's representative to Lebanon, will meet with Hezbollah former MP Ammar Musawi, the party official in charge of international affairs, in Beirut's southern suburbs, the party's press office said in a statement.

The move appeared calibrated to bolster statements by European officials that political contacts with Lebanon would continue as usual despite the EU decision, and to stress that only the party's military apparatus would be targeted.

Twenty-eight EU foreign ministers unanimously agreed Monday to put the military wing of Hezbollah on a terrorism blacklist. The decision was driven by concerns over the party's alleged role in a bus bombing in Bulgaria last year and its intervention in the Syrian war.

Hezbollah itself does not distinguish between its political and military wings.

Eichhorst met Wednesday with caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati and Head of the Future bloc MP Fouad Siniora separately, as well as the vice president of the Higher Shiite Council Abdel-Amir Qabalan.

In a statement after the meetings, Eichhorst said that "dialogue continues between the European Union and all Lebanese political parties, including Hezbollah."

She said the European Union "stands for justice and is against impunity," adding that any terrorist attack on EU soil is unacceptable.

The envoy stressed to Qabalan that the EU move only targets the military wing of Hezbollah, and that dialogue and engagement with all the Lebanese remains a priority for the EU.

Eichhorst had said Tuesday the EU would work with any Lebanese government even if Hezbollah is part of it.

Officials continued to weigh in on the EU decision.

Hezbollah MP Hussein Musawi described it as "backward and lacking the most basic standards of human and judicial justice," and called it the result of American and "Zionist" pressure.

Caretaker Prime Minister Mikati said the European Union should reconsider its decision to blacklist the Lebanese resistance group.

"I hope that the European Union will reconsider its decision for the sake of Lebanon's interests and what best preserves the country's internal stability," Mikati said after meeting with the EU

ambassador at the Grand Serail.

Mikati also said that the Lebanese government would contact European diplomats to get clarification over the implications of the recent EU decision.

During her meeting with Siniora, Eichhorst explained the reasoning behind the European Union's decision and its future repercussions, the lawmaker's office said.

Siniora also met with U.N. official Derek Plumbly and the two also discussed the designation.

Meanwhile, Speaker Nabih Berri reiterated his rejection to the move during his weekly meeting with MPs.

"The [EU] decision is not based on any judgment and it hurts the [European] Union as well as Lebanon and serves in the first degree Israel," Berri was quoted by MPs as saying.

Ammar Musawi of Hezbollah met Wednesday with British MP George Galloway, who said the talks between the two aimed at expressing solidarity with the Lebanese party in light of the EU decision.

According to Hezbollah's office, Galloway described the move as "stupid and contradictory."

The British lawmaker also praised Hezbollah's political role in Lebanon, its efforts at preserving stability in the country, and the party's relationship with United Nations peacekeepers in south Lebanon.

The Hezbollah official also met with a Belgian Foreign Ministry delegation accompanied by the Belgian Ambassador to Lebanon Colette Taquet.

Musawi and the delegation discussed the conflict in Syria and agreed that dialogue was the only solution to the more than 2-year-old crisis.

They also spoke about the conditions of Syrian refugees in Lebanon and the need to exert more efforts to address this situation.