



**The New Lebanese Government:  
Overview and Assessment**

November 2009

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## I. Introduction

Five months after his appointment to form the Lebanese cabinet, Saad Hariri will finally be able to assume his duties as Prime Minister, following the approval by the opposition of his cabinet configuration. The 30-member Council of Ministers dubbed “Government of National Unity” is based on the 15-10-5 formula granting the parliamentary majority 15 ministers, the minority 10 and the President 5.

## II. The New Government – Statistics in Brief

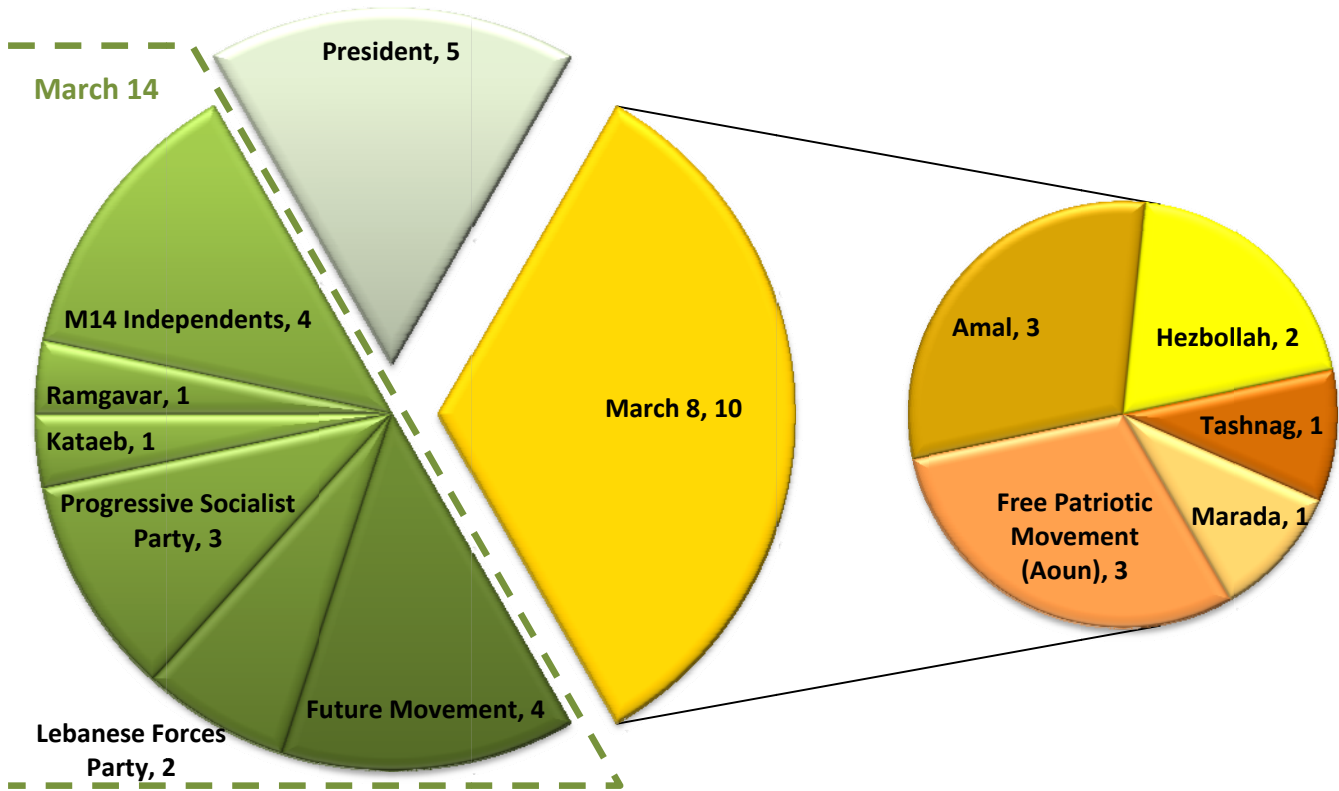
### 1. Cabinet Members

Ministerial Portfolio	Minister	Party Affiliation	Confession	Coalition
Prime Minister	Saad Hariri	Future Movement	Sunnite	March 14
Finance	Raya AlHasan Aafar	Future Movement	Sunnite	March 14
Justice	Ibrahim Najjar	Lebanese Forces Party	Greek Orthodox	March 14
Economy	Mohammad Safadi	M14-Independent	Sunnite	March 14
Social Affairs	Salim Sayegh	Kataeb	Maronite	March 14
Information	Tariq Mitri	M14-Independent	Greek Orthodox	March 14
Culture	Salim Warde	Lebanese Forces Party	Greek Catholic	March 14
Labor	Boutros Harb	M14-Independent	Maronite	March 14
Public Works	Ghazi El Aridi	PSP*	Druze	March 14
Displaced	Akram Chehayeb	PSP*	Druze	March 14
Education	Hassan Mnaymneh	Future Movement	Sunnite	March 14
Environment	Mahmood Rahal	Future Movement	Sunnite	March 14
State	Michel Pharaon	M14-Independent	Greek Catholic	March 14
State	Jean Ogassapian	Ramgavar	Armenian Orthodox	March 14
State	Wael Abu Faour	PSP *	Druze	March 14
Defense & DPM	Elias Murr	Non-Affiliated	Greek Orthodox	President
Interior	Ziad Baroud	Non-Affiliated	Maronite	President
State	Adnan Hussein	Non-Affiliated	Shiite	President
State	Adnan Qassar	Non-Affiliated	Sunnite	President
State	Mona Ofeich	Non- Affiliated	Greek Orthodox	President
Foreign Affairs	Ali Chami	Amal	Shiite	March 8
Telecom	Charbel Nahas	FPM**	Greek Catholic	March 8
Energy & Water	Gebran Bassil	FPM**	Maronite	March 8
Health	Mohammad Khalife	Amal	Shiite	March 8
Agriculture	Hussein Hasan	Hezbollah	Shiite	March 8
Tourism	Fadi Abboud	FPM**	Maronite	March 8
Industry	Ibrahim Dedyan	Tashnag	Armenian Orthodox	March 8
Admin Reform	Mohammad Fneish	Hezbollah	Shiite	March 8
State	Youssef Saade	Marada	Maronite	March 8
Youth & Sport	Ali Abdallah	Amal	Shiite	March 8

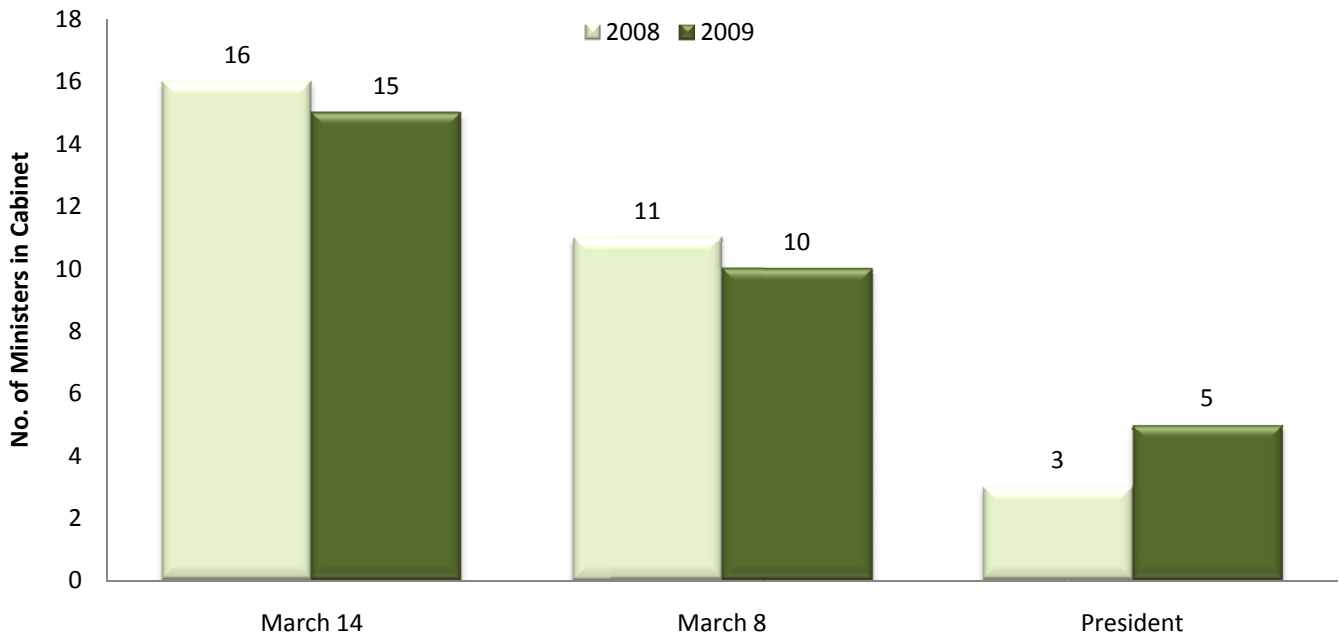
\*PSP: Progressive Socialist Party

\*\*FPM: Free Patriotic Movement (Aoun)

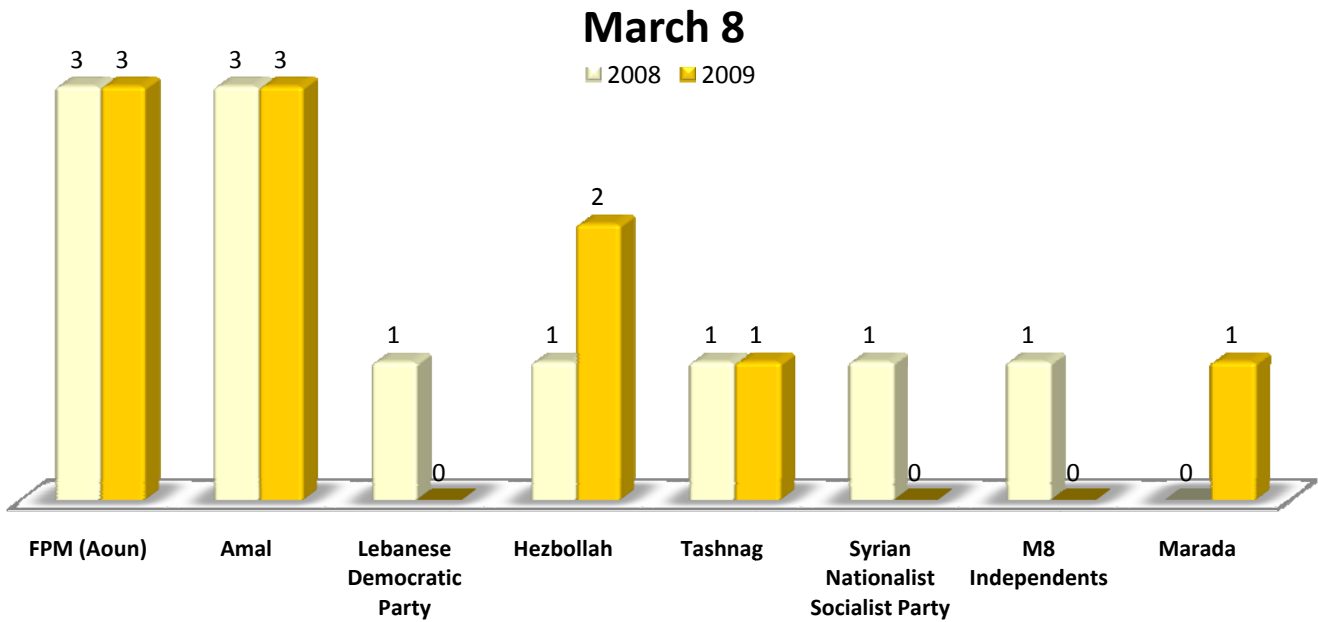
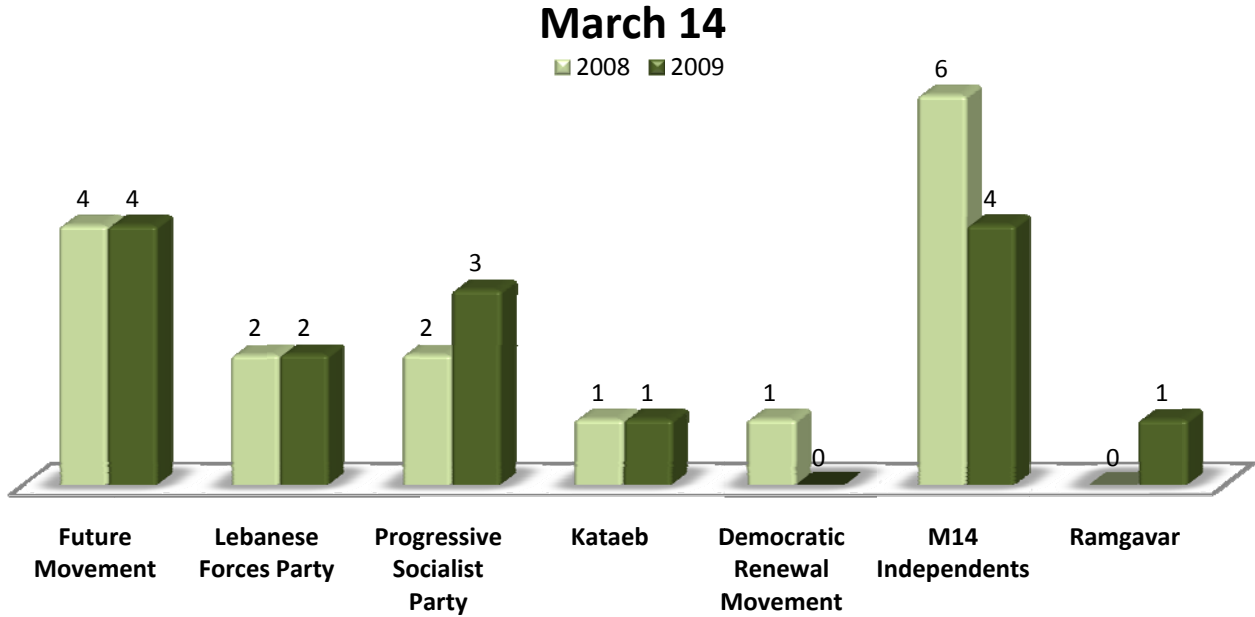
## 2. Composition by Political Affiliation



## 3. Changes in Cabinet Composition by Coalition



#### 4. Changes in Shares by Political Affiliation



### **III. Delay in the Cabinet Formation**

Saad Hariri was first appointed on June 27, 2009 by President Michel Sleiman to form and head the new Lebanese Council of Ministers. On September 10, 2009, Hariri stepped down after the Opposition rejected his cabinet line-up proposal, based on the consensual 15-10-5 formula. He was reappointed on September 16<sup>th</sup>.

Hariri was personally conducting the negotiations on behalf of the Majority (M14) with the Minority (M8). After reaching a quick understanding with 2 of the major opposition groups (Amal and Hezbollah), Hariri was left to deal with the demands of FPM leader Michel Aoun.

Aoun's demands were numerous starting first and foremost with the reappointment of his son-in-law Gibran Bassil as Minister of Telecommunications. Other demands included a higher number of ministers than in the 2008 cabinet, a "prime" ministry (such as Interior or Finance), specific portfolios such as Education and the refusal of letting his M14 Christian opponents hold certain cabinet posts such as the Justice. Hariri was unable to keep up with Aoun's increasing and changing conditions and the negotiations were heading toward an inescapable impasse.

Finally, following a visit to Syria by Aoun's son-in-law, Gibran Bassil, during which Syria apparently expressed its wishes to see the formation of a Lebanese cabinet as soon as possible, a meeting in Lebanon of the March 8 leaders (Berri, Nasrallah, Aoun and Franjeh) was held: the Opposition accepted Hariri's formula and the Cabinet was born on November 9, 2009.

### **IV. The 15-10-5 Formula**

The Lebanese Constitution stipulates that the President "issues, in agreement with the Prime Minister, the decree appointing the Cabinet" (Article 53). Likewise, the Prime Minister "signs, with the President, the Decree forming the Cabinet". Then the Cabinet "must present its general statement or policy to the Parliament and gain its confidence within thirty days of the date of issuance of the Decree in which the Cabinet was formed. The Cabinet does not exercise its powers before it gains the Parliament's confidence, except in the narrow sense of managing affairs." (Article 64)

Despite a semblance of acceptance of the results of the June 2009 parliamentary elections, the March 8 coalition was quick to assert its refusal of letting the constitutional Majority govern. Subsequently, March 8 abandoned their claim for the "blocking third" only after March 14 agreed to relinquish the majority in the cabinet. This led to the innovative formula: 15-10-5. This formula deprives the majority of the 15+1 needed to pass any vote in the Council of Ministers, and the minority of the 10+1 veto power to block any major executive decision, leaving the decisive vote to a non-aligned group of 5 chosen by the President to complete the 30-member Council of Ministers.

Expectedly, this formula raised many objections. Privately and sometimes publicly, M14 figures criticized Hariri's "capitulation" in face of Hezbollah's exigency. Even the Maronite Patriarch Sfeir found the formula impractical and paralyzing.

However, with Jumblatt threatening to break with the Majority and President Sleiman's refusing to sign the decree forming the cabinet unless it is a "unity government", there was no choice for M14 but to concede to the 15-10-5 formula.

## **V. Foreign Positions**

Originally, outside interferences were blamed by both M14 and M8 to be at the root of the failure to form the government. The Majority accused Syria and Iran of instructing their proxies to raise their impossible conditions, while the opposition charged the US, France, Saudi Arabia and even the UN with encouraging the Majority to reject various deals reached with the Minority. Specifically, Michel Aoun complained of "too much US, French, Saudi and Syrian interference in this [cabinet formation] process." Even EU Foreign Policy chief Javier Solana told Al-Arabiya television that "the delay in the Lebanese government formation is due to the interference of regional powers."

### **1. The United States**

The US stood by its principled position of respecting the Lebanese Constitution and rejecting foreign interferences in internal Lebanese affairs.

The White House stated on the anniversary of the attack on the Marine Barracks on October 23rd that [the US] "are hopeful that a new government in Lebanon will soon be formed", and that [they] "look forward to working with a Lebanese government to promote stability in the region and prosperity for its people."

Moreover, Assistant Secretary of State Jeffrey Feltman stated that [the US] "hope that Lebanese leaders consider forming the government as soon as possible in conjunction with the Lebanese Constitution and the June 7 elections results." Feltman further stressed that "Only the Lebanese need to take decisions regarding their country," while commenting on foreign interventions in the formation of the Lebanese Cabinet.

Also, US Ambassador to Lebanon Michelle Sisson denied any interference of her country in the cabinet formation, rejecting accusations [to the US] of encouraging the March 14 coalition to form a majority-only government.

## **2. France**

The Sarkozy Administration has been much more inclined to seek regional involvement in Lebanese problems, specifically from Syria.

In fact, Secretary General of the French Presidency Claude Gueant stressed that positive ties between France and Syria were beneficial for Lebanon. He also hoped that “the government will be formed quickly,” adding that “following the Syrian-Saudi talks, and the meeting between Syrian President Bashar Assad and Saudi Arabia’s King Abdullah in Damascus, some obstacles hindering the government formation have been removed.”

Furthermore, French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner reportedly expressed to Lebanese officials France’s worries about a possible deterioration of the security situation in Lebanon in the absence of a speedy cabinet formation.

## **3. Syria**

The role of Syria seemed to have been crucial in impeding, then in facilitating the creation of the new Lebanese Government.

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad originally stated around the time of the Lebanese elections that “regardless of who wins the Lebanese elections, a national unity government and not a majority-run government should be formed.”

Syria’s allies in Lebanon were quick to echo this principle following the victory of the anti-Syrian coalition in the June parliamentary elections.

During the negotiations over the cabinet formation, several March 8 figures visited Syria including house Speaker Nabih Berri and met, often discreetly, with Syrian officials including President Assad.

Well-known Syrian proxies, such as Wi’am Wahab and Suleiman Franjeh, were engaging in various initiatives on behalf of Syria to negotiate agreements between the March 8 camp and PM-Designate Hariri.

Finally, and as mentioned above, it was Syria who pressured the March 8 minority to agree to the proposed Cabinet formula. After a long silence, Nabih Berri, one of Syria’s closest ally, called for a rapid resolution to the cabinet problem. Suleiman Franjeh gave up his claim for a specific portfolio in the cabinet and agreed to a ministry without portfolio. Aoun's representative, Gibran Bassil, went to Damascus, met Syrian Officials and later affirmed "Syria's keenness to see a national unity cabinet in Lebanon as soon as possible."

#### **4. Iran**

Iran's position has been less clear than the Syrian one. Nevertheless, many in Lebanon assume, and rightfully so, that Aoun could not have maintained such an obstructionist stance without Hezbollah's approval, and that Hezbollah would not block the creation of the government without Iran's backing.

Lebanese Forces Party Leader Samir Geagea accused the regional forces supporting Hezbollah (i.e. Iran and Syria) of preventing the formation of a government in Lebanon to reap certain benefits for their regional agendas. On the other hand, the pan-Arab daily 'Asharq al-Awsat' affirmed that Syria promised Saudi Arabia to intervene with Iran to remove the obstacles that are preventing the formation of a new Lebanese Government.

Other credible Lebanese sources mentioned a Qatari initiative few days before the resolution of the Lebanese cabinet problem, involving a series of meetings and discussions between Syrian, Iranian and Qatari officials which ended up with the decision of facilitating the formation of the Lebanese cabinet.

#### **5. Saudi Arabia**

Saudi Arabia expressed its confidence in the ability of the Lebanese to form a national unity government, and the Saudi government said in a statement following its session on August 17 that "the Lebanese should join forces to form the cabinet in order to achieve stability, security and prosperity". Riyadh also committed to double the efforts in order to help the Lebanese speed up the formation of the cabinet.

During his visit to Damascus, Saudi King Abdullah specifically discussed the problem of the Lebanese cabinet with President Assad, although not in details as Saudi Information Minister, Abdul Aziz Khoja, stated.

#### **6. Egypt**

Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Abul Gheit claimed that the hindrance was not due to internal disagreements but was rather the result of "foreign influences that are preventing cabinet formation."

#### **7. UN**

UN Officials stated in several occasions their unease over the delay in the formation of a new government. "The government vacuum is a source of great concern", UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon Michael Williams said, noting that "several important social and economic programs have been on hold as a result".

## **VI. Reactions to the Cabinet Formation**

### ***1. Lebanese Reactions - March 14***

Future Movement's Head and Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri stated immediately following the announcement of the new Cabinet that "this government confirms the success of the Lebanese experiment, in coexistence and national consensus" but he also warned that "this government can either be a chance for Lebanon to renew the trust in the state and its institutions, or become another episode in which the Lebanese fail to achieve consensus." He later commented that "the National Coalition government as it was formed must be the exception, rather than the norm to be followed in the future."

Progressive Socialist Party Leader Walid Jumblatt hailed the new government as a bastion facing Israel's aggression against Lebanon. He credited for its birth the Syrian-Saudi rapprochement together with the support of Iran and Turkey.

Lebanese Forces Party MP Antoine Zahra saw Lebanon as having lost, in terms of sovereignty and independence, since the cabinet could not be formed without regional forces intervening with the local players.

Notably, the Lebanese Kataeb Party threatened to boycott the government and withdraw from M14 in view of the utter disrespect shown to the Kataeb in the negotiations over the cabinet and the distribution of the portfolios.

### ***2. Lebanese Reactions - March 8***

Hezbollah's Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah declared that "the success of the new government benefits Lebanon and the resistance in Lebanon," and urged patience in tackling major issues so that the country can rest for some time. "We want for the government to be one of national cooperation and national coherence," said Nasrallah.

Hezbollah's 'Al Manar' TV Station commented that both Hariri and the opposition emerged as victorious. Hezbollah's MP Nawwaf Moussawi hoped that the new cabinet "would give a chance to construct national unity, remove sources of tension and be a starting point of cooperation between different political parties."

Lebanese Speaker and Amal Party Leader Nabih Berri said that the new cabinet's slogan should be "making up for what was lost." He further specified that "Lebanon missed many opportunities in the last few years" and that "this could be compensated if we stick to national consensus."

Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) Leader Michel Aoun expressed his satisfaction in dealing with Hariri and described the formation of the new government as "a series of concessions from most parties."

### **3. Foreign Reactions**

The announcement of the new government was widely welcomed in all foreign circles.

The White House asserted that it “looks forward to working with the new Lebanese government” but also hoped that “the cabinet statement and government program will reflect a commitment to full implementation of UN Security Council Resolutions 1559, 1680, and 1701” and to “extending the state’s authority over all of Lebanon, and advancing political and economic reforms.”

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon expressed his satisfaction with the formation of the cabinet and hoped that the Lebanese leaders “will continue to work together in a spirit of unity, dialogue and cooperation”. He also urged the newly formed unity government to abide by the Security Council Resolution 1701.

The European Union issued a statement welcoming the formation of the Lebanese cabinet while encouraging “the new government to carry out necessary political and economic reforms” and reiterating “its full support for Lebanon, its people and institutions.” On another note, Javier Solana, the High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the EU, praised the new government formation and invited it to “act constructively to recognize and ensure the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Lebanon.”

In a joint statement, Saudi King Abdullah and French President Nicolas Sarkozy praised the formation of the new government in Lebanon saying it consolidates national unity. In addition, French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner said: "Saad Hariri and his government can count on the resolute support of France, which will continue its actions in favor of unity and stability, and the sovereignty and independence of Lebanon."

British Prime Minister Gordon Brown also sent Hariri a message congratulating him on forming the government, hoping to see the implementations of political, social and economic reforms agreed to in the Paris III Conference and the European Neighborhood Policy Action plan.

Syrian President Bashar Assad congratulated President Sleiman on the new cabinet and PM Hariri received a congratulations letter from his Syrian counterpart Mohammad Naji Otri, in what was the first official Syrian contact with Saad Hariri.

## **VII. Conclusion**

In analyzing the compromise formula, the negotiating process and the composition of the new Lebanese Government, the following observations can be made:

- **March 14-Majority** lost with the 15-10-5 formula as well as in the negotiations with their political opponents. The critical defeat was in relinquishing their right to govern. Although

they kept some key posts such as the Prime Minister, Finance and Justice, they still ceded to the March 8 camp very important ministries such as Foreign Affairs and Telecommunications.

But even more damaging, is the rift within March 14 components. After the effective defection of the Druze (Jumblatt), the Christians of M14 (LF and Kataeb) appear increasingly dissatisfied with Hariri. After all, they (M14 Christians) are the ones who handed the victory in the elections to Saad and the Majority, only to later see Aoun, whom they defeated in the Christian vote, negotiate over their heads and collect prizes from Hariri.

- **March 8-Minority** lost their veto power and Aoun specifically had to drop some of his conditions. Nevertheless, the M8 groups maintained their cohesion, despite slight differences, and proved that the majority cannot govern without their blessing.
- **President Sleiman** emerged as a winner from the formation process: he kept the two critical ministries of Interior and Defense under his direct control, and he increased his share in the cabinet from 3 to 5 ministries, giving him a decisive power inside the government.
- **President Assad** appeared in the end as the key player in the cabinet formation. One of Syria's closest collaborators in Lebanon, Wi'am Wahab, clearly stated that: "Syrian President Assad should receive full credit for the birth of the new Government in Lebanon." Paris echoed that praise to Syria, as revealed by the Syrian secretary of the parliament Khalid Aboud who said that "President Sarkozy knows that Syria is the key to unlocking Middle East problems" adding that "the French have recognized Syria's help in forming Lebanon's government". In fact, immediately following the announcement of the new Lebanese Cabinet, Assad headed to Paris on November 12 and 13, in a visit that further consolidated the improving French-Syrian relations and Syria's stance in the International Community after years of isolation.

Lebanese President Sleiman visited Damascus right before Assad's trip to Paris in what was viewed as a 'thanking visit' [to President Assad]. Sleiman in fact stressed that "the distinctive relations with Syria serve the interests of Lebanon, expressing his will to continue boosting them." Furthermore, it is expected that, after a boycott of nearly 5 years, following his father's assassination blamed on Syria, Saad Hariri would visit Damascus soon.

In the end, and in spite of the positive outlook expressed by the Lebanese and the rest of the World, and as this last episode in Lebanese national decision-making has proven, political and constitutional processes are mere formalities nowadays in Lebanon. The main decision-maker regardless of constitutional rules and electoral victories remains Hezbollah, imposing their will over the Lebanese through the might of their weapons.