

EXTERNAL RELATIONS POLICY ASKS

INTRODUCTION

Owing to its geography, social makeup, weak institutions, and a general disregard for the preservation of the public good, Lebanon has unfortunately become a magnet for foreign intervention in its internal affairs. This has resulted in the country becoming a lightning rod for regional tensions and has been a site of proxy warfare conducted by external actors on its territory – much to the detriment of its population’s wellbeing.

The second half of the 20th century was characterized by the accelerating collapse of the Lebanese state leading to regionally sanctioned agreements concluded generally at the expense of sovereignty and the rule of law. Among the unusual consequences of these arrangements is the growth of paramilitary actors behold to foreign powers. During the last few years, Lebanon has come the closest in its history to turning into a failed state. It has lost the elements that constituted its comparative advantage in the region and with them the support of many of its traditional friends and trading partners in the international community. The country is viewed as a chronic problem that needs management rather than as a partner and responsible member of the international community.

In this regard, espousing **positive neutrality** constitutes a clear and perhaps exclusive path toward reconciling Lebanon’s foreign positioning with its core national interests by breaking the alignment of local actors with foreign powers. The Network has taken a clear stance on Lebanon’s neutrality which it has defined as being a National Imperative.

Due to its sovereign deficit, porosity of its borders, and shortsightedness of its leaders, the country is in the throes of a devastating **refugee crisis** as it hosts the highest number of refugees per capita on the planet with almost 40% of the country’s residents being refugees-mainly Syrians and Palestinians. Appropriate solutions in line with the Lebanese Constitution need to be negotiated with the international community by an assertive government of patriots. This objective of the return and third country repatriation of refugees present on Lebanese territory has the full support of the Lebanese people including the business community and private sector at large.

Lebanon’s extensive diaspora is key to achieving most of the country’s self-evident policy objectives. They play a critical role in support of Lebanon’s call for neutrality, enhanced security, promotion of bilateral and multilateral trade, channeling of investments, and establishment of the home country as a center for tourism, culture, and as a hub for business. Through the vast diaspora’s influence on the political process and their vote in their countries of residence, this important resource and effective lobby group can be solicited and engaged as agents for **public diplomacy** in support of Lebanon’s national interests.

POLICY ASKS



POSITIVE NEUTRALITY:

- The Network advocates for the adoption of the concept of Positive Neutrality and the implementation of all relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions (1559, 1680, 1701) relating to Lebanon to disentangle the country from its present alignments that are harmful to its security as well as to its economic and social development.



REFUGEE CRISIS:

- The Network insists that the private sector, civil society, and municipalities be part of the public policy process in relation to the management of the refugee file. The Network is actively advocating for the objective of achieving (a) control of the borders to stem illegal migration, and (b) the safe return of all refugees to their own countries or to other temporary host countries.



FOREIGN LABOR:

- The Network advocates for the involvement of the private sector in designing and implementing policies aimed at organizing foreign labor and their residency on Lebanese territory and ensuring that foreign workers pay taxes according to Lebanese applicable laws.



PUBLIC DIPLOMACY:

- The Network is actively seeking the development of a framework for the leveraging of the diaspora with a view towards engaging them in effective public diplomacy and particularly by creating institutions and platforms enabling a synergetic coherent public-private partnership in this respect.