

The Launching of the

"Professional Development Program for Teachers of the Armenian Schools in Lebanon"

On Saturday, 20th of May 2017, Haigazian University launched a "Professional Development Program for Teachers of the Armenian Schools in Lebanon". The program aims at providing professional development opportunities for about 150 teachers of the Armenian schools in Lebanon and is the result of a partnership between Haigazian University and the Armenian Communities Department of Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. The opening ceremony was held in the hall of the First Armenian Evangelical Church of Beirut and was attended by educators, school principals and teachers participating in the Program.

The ceremony began with the national anthems of Lebanon and Armenia, after which Shaghig Hudaverdian, lecturer at the Haigazian University's Education Department, welcomed the audience. In her opening address, Hudaverdian briefly presented the goals of the project, which not only aim for the professional development of the teachers of the Armenian schools in Lebanon and their acquisition of new knowledge and skills, but also contributes to the creation of a healthy and well balanced atmosphere and conditions leading to effective education.

The Director of the Armenian Communities Department of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Dr. Razmik Panossian, provided the rationale for the Program based on his Department's vision. He mentioned that creating high quality schools and placing emphasizing on recruiting and developing professionals will guarantee the survival of the Western Armenian language and the strengthening of national identity. He highlighted the necessity to focus on teaching through modern methods and complying with student needs in the 21st century.

Dr. Panossian highlighted the importance of this joint venture with Haigazian University and cited various parallel projects of the Armenian Communities Department of the Gulbenkian Foundation that also aim for the preservation and promotion of Western Armenian. At the end of his speech, Dr. Panossian once again underlined the importance of continuous professional preparation and training of teachers.

In his turn, the President of Haigazian University, Reverend Dr. Paul Haidostian, welcomed those attending this opening ceremony, affirming that any educational work affects not only the students but also the people around them, therefore leaving a clear mark on their immediate environment and the wider social and national sphere.

Dr. Haidostian noted that storing knowledge cannot be the only reason for a person's pride. A proper education should trigger healthy communication, mutual trust, and develop internal motivation. He affirmed that this Program presents an opportunity for the participating teachers and school principals to contribute to the growth and development of the Armenian schools in Lebanon.

He also admitted that the rapid changes and developments of the world could have a threatening impact on the Armenian schools in Lebanon and this Program could be considered as an opportunity for its sustainable development. At the end of his speech, Dr. Haidostian thanked the Gulbenkian Foundation and wished the participants much success.

The chair of the Education Department at Haigazian University, Dr. Hagop Yacoubian, addressed the audience and affirmed that this program aims to create a culture conducive to the development of critical

thinking at the Armenian schools in Lebanon, as well as to facilitate the development of the Western Armenian language. Dr. Yacoubian highlighted some of the characteristics of the program. Based on evidence-based good practices, the program provides ongoing and practical learning opportunities for the participants. He later presented the components of the project that involve workshops on general as well as specialized topics. Dr. Yacoubian further informed the audience that the workshops which will take place between June 2017 and May 2018 will be conducted by professors who will be invited from Haigazian University, as well as from other universities in Lebanon and abroad.

Finally, in his bilingual speech, Sebouh Gurunlian, the Director of the Center for Continuous Education (CCE) at Haigazian University, reflected on the mission of the Center for the past thirty years and expressed his joy for the cooperation with the Armenian Communities Department of Gulbenkian Foundation. He informed the participants about the role of the CCE in the realization of this program, and then, he introduced the Project Manager Kayane Madzounian who will act as the main liaison between the participants and the steering committee for the duration of the program.

The ceremony ended with the Haigazian University Alma Mater, followed by a reception.