

# Your legal traineeship in Lebanon, a country in crisis? Yes, especially right now!

*by Maximilian Lüderwaldt*

When you tell people that you are doing the last part of your legal traineeship in the Middle East and especially in Lebanon, the reactions always tell you something about the person you are talking to and his or her attitude towards supposed risk and travel away from package vacations and comfortable city trips in Europe.

Some say, "Have you gone crazy? That's way too dangerous!".

Others say "Exciting! Can I visit you there?"

How it really is on the ground, you can of course only assess if you have been there at least once and longer than for a tourist round trip, which I already made in 2019 with friends through Lebanon and also before and after through other countries in the Middle East. To really gain an insight into another culture as part of my school or legal training was made possible by my high school stay in the USA during my school years and my stay abroad at the University of Cambridge in England during my university studies. During my traineeship, I also wanted to do an internship abroad, but this was not easy, especially for our class that started at the end of 2020, because Corona and the resulting lockdowns and restrictions led to online teaching for large parts of the traineeship, and internships either outside of my state or outside of Germany were sometimes not even possible.

After just a few meetings during our fall 2020 introductory course, we were sent home due to the pandemic and then had the classes of the entire civil law station, the entire criminal station, and the entire administrative station, although in the summer (2021), online.

It was then a big contrast to take a plane from Frankfurt to Beirut in the summer of 2022 after the written exams at the Düsseldorf Higher Regional Court and to enter a completely different world.

I can recommend this elective station abroad in general and specifically in the Middle East in Lebanon in the office of the Rule of Law Program Middle East and North Africa with Director Philipp Bremer and his team to anyone at any time without reservation. Under Mr. Bremer, who previously worked in a major Düsseldorf law firm, the team currently consists of a German research assistant, Ms. Valeska Heldt, and several Lebanese local staff, including local lawyers such as Mr. Paul Saadeh, as well as most of the time a trainee lawyer and an intern.

The main value consists of three main pillars, in addition to many other positive side aspects: The legal education, the political-historical-cultural education that one experiences, and the encounters with the people in the region, be it in the daily work routine or during travels in Lebanon or in the neighboring countries or in the countries of the region, as in my case among others Cairo and Alexandria in Egypt, the divided Nicosia in Cyprus and several times Jordan as to Amman, Jarash or Petra. But also the places I visited on weekends within Lebanon such as Tripoli, Batroun, Jeita Grotto, Harissa, Byblos, Sidon, Tyre, Maghdouche, Anjar, Baalbeck, Chateau Ksara, Lake Chouwen, Qadisha, Bcharee, just to name a few, have been memorable and provided many unforgettable moments.

A foreign stage of several months in a so-called crisis country promotes one's own personal development even more and changes one's view of the world even more drastically than other foreign stations that I completed, for example, at the United Nations in New York, at the German Bundestag in Berlin, the Hessian State Chancellery in Wiesbaden or the European Parliament in Strasbourg or in a major law firm in London. All these were very valuable experiences, but on a different level, because:

In Lebanon, in contrast to the aforementioned more western places, you have to be able to deal with it if you feel lucky to survive several times a day in traffic. You also have to find a solution when the complete electricity and the complete water fails, so that you sit (despite living in a good part of town, as in this case Sioufi in Achrafieh or Badaro) in a completely dark apartment in a continuously dark street, nothing can cool in the refrigerator, and the air conditioning fails in the summer at 35 degrees and a high humidity or the cab driver speaks only Arabic (and not like most Lebanese, which I have met, also French or English) and suddenly it becomes clear that it is unclear where you are actually going. Or you see tanks and soldiers with heavy equipment, and another silo at the port collapses before your eyes or you get food poisoning. Also, it is sometimes difficult to get SIM cards and monetarily there is the official exchange rate and that of the black market, which almost everyone makes use of, where a euro/dollar is no longer worth 1500 LBP, as it was during my visit in 2019, but 35,000 LBP, so that when you exchange money you suddenly have several million Lebanese pounds in your hand. So one is suddenly a (lira) millionaire with just a few euros. Also food, fuel and pharmacy goods can be scarce here and there.

One could let this list become even longer. This might sound frightening to some people, but also leads to the charm of such a station. Not as a pure adventure, because of course it would be nicer, the problems would disappear and the situation in Lebanon would become better all at once. But that's not the way it is. And if the people here in the country deal with it on a permanent basis, then you can do it yourself for three months. And learn to see how resilient, friendly and on other levels than the materialistic people here can be happy - and fight, even if they often feel abandoned by their government.

But in order to really understand where this difficult situation comes from, out of which the people in Lebanon always make the best of, and this became really clear to me once again during the time here, it is not enough, as during our vacation in 2019, to travel the entire country by day trips. You have to, as my instructor Mr. Bremer also told me at the beginning of my station in his office, really "dive in." So while I was discovering

everything, including the first steps of learning Arabic, it was confirmed once again that you cannot get to know a country authentically on purely touristy trips, even though you may often have this illusion. This threshold of really getting to know a country is only crossed when one has local points of contact such as local friends, has planned a longer period of time for one's own stay, or has a job there, or, to put it more simply: has a daily routine.

But what does the daily work routine look like?

In the office itself, you are integrated directly into the friendly, professional, competent, team and are not treated like 'the trainee lawyer from Germany who is only here for a short time'. Sometimes legal work is on the daily agenda, sometimes legal or political translation work between English, German and French, and of course political-historical research. Conferences, seminars and other events also play a major role. One of the highlights was a several day trip to the Jordanian capital Amman (see also <https://www.kas.de/en/web/rspno/veranstaltungsberichte/detail/-/content/workshop-best-practices-in-the-profession-of-a-lawyer-in-the-region>), where on August 15 and 16, 2022, a workshop in cooperation of the Rule of Law Program Middle East and North Africa of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation and the German Federal Bar Association entitled "Best practices in the profession of a Lawyer in the region" took place.

The field of participants included more than ten countries, including Libya, Tunisia, Lebanon, Morocco, Mauritania, Algeria, Palestine, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Bahrain, the Kingdom of Jordan, and Germany. The guests were high representatives, some of them the presidents themselves, of the respective bar associations of their countries.

It was also interesting to accompany the visit of Mr. Maximilian Steinbeis, founder of the "Verfassungsblog" in Germany, in the framework of which the conference on "The Digitization and Future of Law" was held at the Lancaster Hotel in Beirut, or the conference on "caretaker governments" at the Smallville Hotel in Beirut's Badaro district, to name just a few examples.

One example of a major international legal research was writing a paper on the Abraham Accords. These are, in short, agreements between the State of Israel and the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, followed in their signing by Morocco and Sudan, brokered by the U.S., which some view critically, and others as one of President Trump's greatest foreign policy successes.

And the special thing about this research is that you don't do it from your desk in Germany, but you can always approach people directly through travel and conversation and ask them: "How do you see this? How do you feel about it? How does it affect the daily lives of your families?"

All in all, therefore, it can be said that an elective station here in Beirut will be an unforgettable experience for everyone, which combines very well the various aspects, from everyday work to travel to conversations in private meetings, that one can encounter in three months in the Middle East. So, Lebanon, right now!

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Please note: Due to the great interest, early applications are worthwhile. We are often fully booked six months in advance. Well over 1 year in advance, the chances are significantly higher. In addition to very good English skills, we also expect flexibility, the ability to work in a team and identification with the values of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation.