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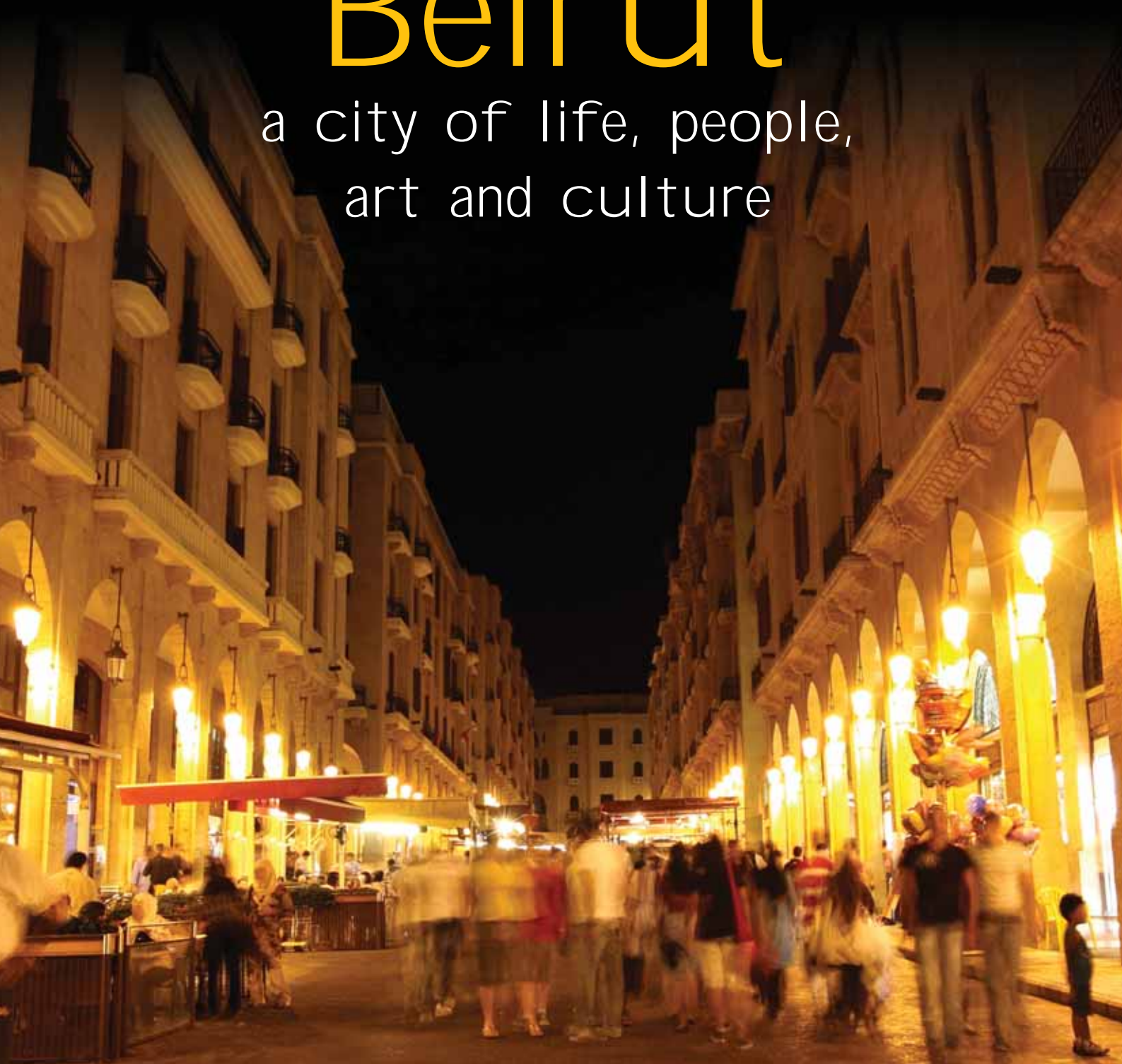
November • 2011

AUSTRALIAN LEBANESE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

NEWS

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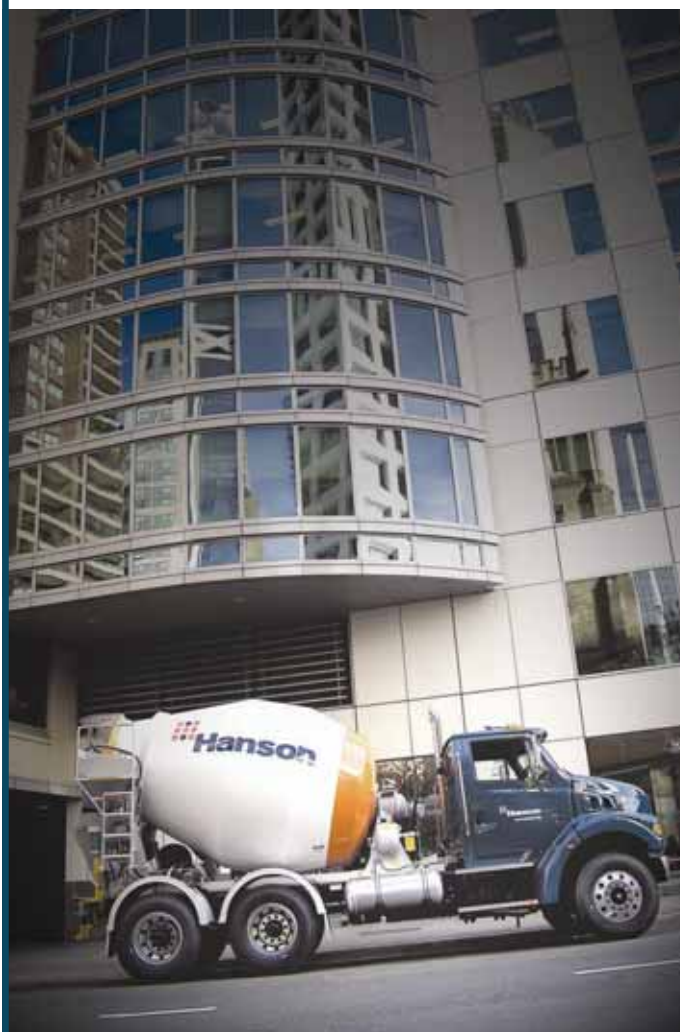
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AUSTRALIAN LEBANESE
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

NEWS

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A Word from the President

Dear Members and Friends,

It has been a very exciting and innovative period,
in which the ALCC has had many enquiries on
trade activities between Australia and Lebanon.

As you are aware, the ALCC has, and is always ready to give
advice on matters relating to Trade.

The opportunities are open to those willing to make a move in
the right direction, and that is where the ALCC is willing to
assist, whether it is importing luxury items from Lebanon, or if
you are willing to invest in property. We are here to give you
advice on the very latest.

The Annual Business Luncheon held at Doltone House on July
7th, was a most successful event, with Mr Ric Battellino –
Deputy Director of the Reserve Bank of Australia as guest
speaker, who delivered an excellent speech to a most attentive
audience. We hope to obtain excellent speakers again, in the
coming year.

As the year draws to the close, I am reminded of the human
and cultural side of the aims of the Chamber, and as Christmas
is approaching, I would like to take this opportunity in wishing
you every good wish for the Festive Season, with a healthy and
happy New Year. We will continue to work on important issues
in the coming year.

Joe Khattar

President

The Australian Lebanese Chamber of Commerce Ltd.



AUSTRALIAN LEBANESE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE Board Members

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PROPERTY DEVELOPERS AND EASEMENTS – WHAT RIGHTS DO YOU HAVE TO ACCESS YOUR NEIGHBOUR’S LAND?



Danny Arraj

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Blackstone Waterhouse Lawyers

Introduction

One of the most difficult challenges that can face a developer of property in NSW is ensuring adequate access for the development site. The need for adequate access can include temporary access during construction as well as permanent rights for things like rights of way and drainage. In NSW a developer does not have an automatic right to gain access over neighbouring land? Restricted access can destroy the viability of development projects. Early planning is essential to minimise risks when adequate access to the development site is restricted.

Historically, developers had to negotiate terms of access with neighbouring land owners. Over time, certain statutory rights have been given to developers. These rights are not automatic, and come with a price. Some of these rights, and the conditions attached to them, are summarised in this article.

Trespass

Normally, the use of a person’s land without consent or an easement is trespass. The Courts will enforce a land owner’s rights against trespassers by an injunction or by awarding damages. Either way, a developer who needs access to neighbouring land but who has not obtained the neighbour’s consent, or a registered easement, faces substantial delays and escalation of project costs.

Trespass also applies to air space and to temporary use of land. At law, a person’s ‘land’ includes all the soil under the land and all the air space above it (except for limited examples such as strata or stratum title land where the title restricts the height).

Some surprising examples of trespass include:

- Use of a crane on land where from time to time the crane jib extends over the neighbour’s air space;
- Wires crossing a neighbouring property; and
- Loading materials from a truck in the street over a corner of neighbour’s land.

Access rights

There are many different types of rights of access that can be needed for development projects where the permission of a neighbouring land owner is required. The nature and extent of rights of access vary widely, depending on the accessibility and lay out of the development site and the neighbouring land. Some rights of access will need to be permanent, while others are only required during construction.

Often, access rights are required to satisfy the conditions imposed by Councils and other authorities. These can include obligations to obtain easements for drainage or services.

Examples of rights of access that may be required for development projects include:

- Site access during construction from public roads, such as driveways;
- Access for temporary installation of scaffolding;
- Over head access for cranes;
- Access for temporary installation of services such as electricity and water;
- Permanent access for installation of services such as electricity substations;
- Temporary or permanent access for building supports, such as rock anchors and retaining walls during excavation and construction;
- Permanent rights of access for carriage ways and walk ways, to and from public roads and amenities;
- Rights of access for sewer and water drainage; and
- Right of way for emergency fire exits.

If a developer does not obtain properly documented and legally enforceable rights of access, a neighbouring land owner’s refusal to provide access can jeopardise the project.

The most secure form of right of access is an easement registered on title. An easement is a formal interest in land. It is registered on the title to the land that is benefited by the easement, as well as the land that is burdened. Normally, an easement may not be varied modified or released without the consent of all of the owners whose land benefits from the easement. A registered easement binds all owners, lessees and mortgagees of the land that is burdened by it.

Challenges to developers in obtaining easements

Generally, developers look to deal directly with neighbours to negotiate the best bargain they can achieve to obtain permission to carry out building activities on neighbour's land.

In the past, this often meant that canny neighbours had the opportunity to levy a toll on developers and charge whatever they wished before giving permission to the proposed activity. This was regardless of whether the neighbour would actually suffer economic loss or injury from the activity. Ultimately, there was no legal control over what a neighbour may demand from a developer and neighbours could simply refuse to co-operate for whatever reason they saw fit. It was therefore not uncommon for developers and builders to be held to ransom by neighbours placing unreasonable financial demands.

Now, there are three pieces of legislation which give developers certain rights to obtain temporary or permanent rights over a neighbour's land. They are:

- Section 88K of the Conveyancing Act 1919; and
- Section 40 of the Land and Environment Court Act 1979; and
- Access to Neighbouring Land Act 2000.

Section 88K of the *Conveyancing Act 1919 (NSW)*

S.88K applications are perhaps the most familiar for developers. The S.40 application is similar but not identical to s88K.

There has been a steady flow of S.88K applications over the years since that piece of legislation was introduced. Some applications are for temporary access through neighbour's land for construction, others relate to permanent rights of way, or permanent rights for drainage or utility services.

S.88K of the Conveyancing Act 1919 (NSW) gives the Court the power to make an order imposing an easement over another person's land provided the easement is reasonably necessary for the effective use or development of the land. Normally all of the costs of such court proceedings are payable by the developer.

Obtaining an order for an easement over a neighbour's land is unlikely to be simple. There are various legal hurdles for a developer to overcome in order to obtain S.88K or S.40 order. In short:

- There must be reasonable attempts made by the developer to obtain the easement;
- The easement must be reasonably necessary for the effective use or development of the developer's land;
- The neighbour must be adequately compensated for any loss or disadvantage suffered as a result of the easement being granted;
- The Court must be satisfied that granting the easement is not inconsistent with public interest; and
- The Court has discretion whether or not to grant the easement.

The Courts will insist that the developer shows it has used reasonable efforts to obtain the easement before going to Court. That does not mean the developer must do everything possible to obtain an easement from a neighbour but the developer cannot simply start Court proceedings without attempting to obtain the easement. Evidence of attempts at negotiation must be submitted to the Court, so it is important that a developer documents those approaches properly in case they are needed later.

The Court will weigh up the developer's need to obtain the easement to develop its land, against the disadvantages of the imposition of a compulsory easement on a land owner. A compulsory easement will usually diminish the value of a neighbour's land. The reasonable necessity test requires more than that the easement is merely desirable. The Court may take into account whether a design solution may permit the development to go ahead without the grant of an easement (for example by changing water flows, location of services and the like). A condition imposed by a Council in development consent to obtain a drainage easement is a typical example of reasonable necessity.

The question of compensation is also a major issue for developers. The case law shows that usually, compensation sums are relatively modest. However, it is important for developers to have an accurate assessment of the likely quantum of compensation;

- First, developers may need to factor the potential amount into its financial feasibility.
- Second, offering reasonable compensation at an early stage in negotiations with an owner may assist the developer to satisfy the reasonable attempts test.
- Third, a proper valuation will be important to assist the Court to make an appropriate order. Sometimes, compensation can include not only cash payments, but also an indemnity (supported by a bond or other security) to repair any damage caused to the neighbour's land by the development.

Section 40 of the *Land and Environment Court Act 1979 (NSW)*

S.40 of the Land and Environment Court Act 1979 confers upon the Land and Environment Court similar powers to powers under S.88K described above. S.40 only applies if the Land and Environment Court has determined to grant or modify development consent in proceedings on an appeal before the Court. This means that easements can only be imposed by the Land and Environment Court under S.40 in **very limited circumstances**.

Access to Neighbouring Land Act 2000 (NSW)

The Access to Neighbouring Land Act 2000 confers powers on Local Courts to make orders allowing developers to have access to adjoining land for the purpose of carrying out certain work on their land. This right of access is permitted without the need to apply for a formal easement.

The Local Court may make **either a neighbouring land access order** or a **utilities service access order**. The Court however must be satisfied that the access sought is **reasonably necessary** and that it is for the **purposes of carrying out certain prescribed works**. The range of works for which may be given is very wide and includes:

- construction, repair and maintenance works;
- renewal or demolition of buildings and other structure;
- renewing, repairing or clearing drains, sewers, pipes or cables;
- carry out work on or in connection with a sewerage, drainage, water, gas, electricity or telephone service or other service.

The developer would need to show that they have attempted, unsuccessfully, to negotiate access to the neighbouring property with its owner before an access order will be made. The Court has the power to impose certain conditions to be complied with if the order is granted. This can include conditions of use, for instance restrictions on hours during which construction can be carried out.

A developer is obliged to restore the neighbour's land to the same condition it was in before the access, so far as is reasonably practicable, and must indemnify the neighbour against damage to their land or personal property arising from the access.

In addition, the Court has the power to require the developer to pay compensation to the owner of the land to which access is granted for loss, damage or injury, including damage to personal property, financial loss and personal injury arising from the access. An application for compensation may be made up to **3 years after** the access was granted.

Some of the criteria that needs to be satisfied under the Access to Neighbouring Land Act is similar to that under a S.88K or S.40 application. However, the grant of a right under this Act is often for temporary access, and is made by the Local Court. So it is often a simpler, cost effective and timely solution than an application under S.88K or S.40.

The Access over Neighbouring Land Act also envisages parties entering into agreements for access which may incorporate aspects of the rights and obligations under the Act. Developers should consider entering into such agreements with land owners to record any arrangements they are able to negotiate with them and to minimise the need to seek Court orders, where appropriate.

Summary

The procedures for obtaining statutory rights of access in NSW are certainly not automatic and developers should not assume that obtaining easements will be easy. It is vital for developers to consider access issues at the outset of the development project and to **seek timely legal advice** to minimise the likelihood of unexpected surprises, costs and delays to their projects by disgruntled neighbours.

The above is a brief general discussion on the law and does not constitute legal advice. For further advice on easements and your rights to access your neighbour's land, please contact Mark Fitzpatrick or Danny Arraj at Blackstone Waterhouse Lawyers on (02) 9279 0288.



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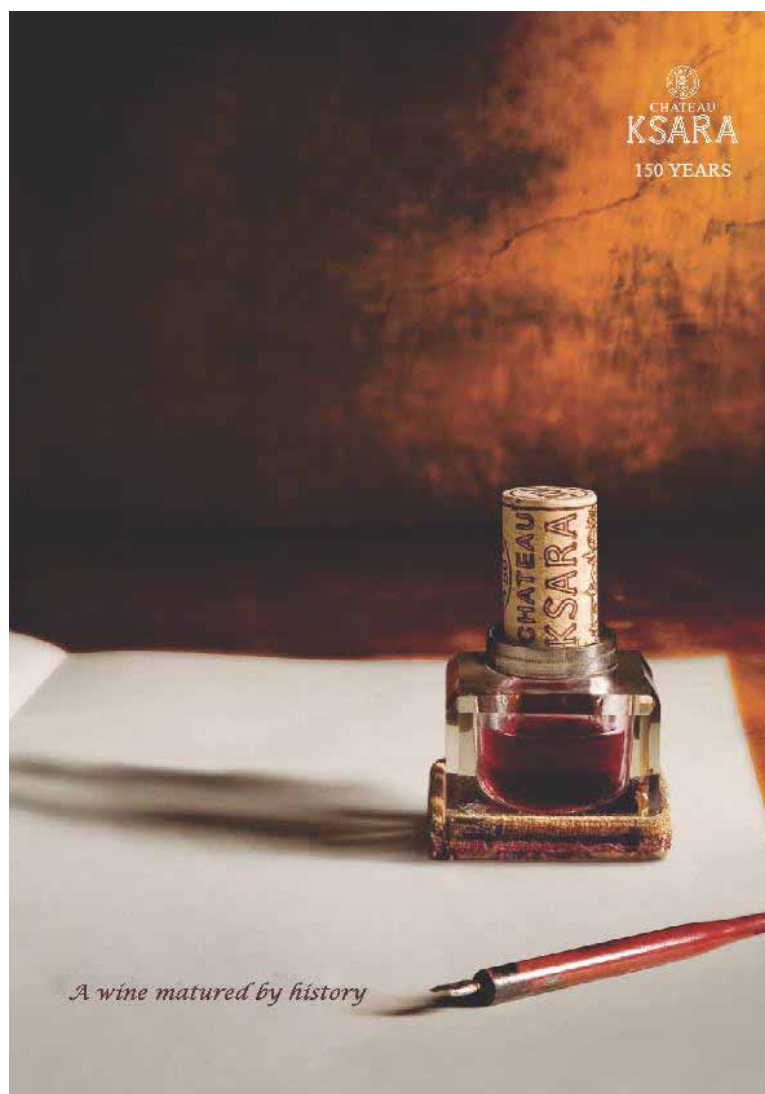
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Lebanese wine tradition dates back 5,000 years, when the ancient inhabitants of Lebanon, the Phoenicians, first began tending vineyards. The Phoenicians exported wine to ancient Egypt, Rome, Greece and Carthage; introducing the world to viticulture and oenology. Lebanon is also said to be the place where Jesus performed the miracle of turning water into wine.

Château Ksara has Reserved Lebanon's rich wine making heritage for over 150 years, laying down the



A wine matured by history

foundation for Lebanon's modern wine making industry. Founded in 1857 by Jesuit Priests who produced the country's first dry red wine, Château Ksara is Lebanon's oldest, largest and most visited winery, attracting some 40,000 visitors per year.

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IMF: LEBANON'S INFORMAL ECONOMY 30 PERCENT OF GDP

The International Monetary Fund estimated the size of the informal economy in Lebanon to be equivalent to 30 percent of GDP, similar to Tunisia, and compared to 26 percent of GDP in Jordan, 34 percent of GDP in each of Egypt and Syria, and 44 percent in Morocco.

It attributed the large size of the informal economy to the excessive regulatory burden in product and labor markets, low quality of institutions and governance, and an excessive tax burden, as reported by Lebanon This Week, the economic publication of the Byblos Bank Group.

The informal economy is defined as the segment of an economy that is not taxed, or monitored by any government institution, or directly included in GDP calculations.

The IMF said that rigid labor market regulations appear to be particularly relevant in Lebanon, as this burden explains about 37 percent of the size of the informal sector in Lebanon compared to 37 percent in Egypt, 29 percent in each of Morocco and Syria, 15 percent in Tunisia and 20 percent in Jordan. As such, it noted that the percentage of firms identifying labor regulations as a major constraint to their business operations is, on average, greatest in these countries.

It added that the low quality of institutions and/or governance explains around 32 percent of Lebanon's informal economy relative to around 29 percent in Egypt, 27 percent in Jordan, 22 percent in each of Tunisia and Syria, and 17 percent in Morocco.

The IMF noted that the excessive regulatory burden in product markets explains around 20 percent of the size of the informal sector in Lebanon, compared to 32 percent in Syria, 27 percent in Tunisia, 24 percent in Jordan, 22 percent in Egypt and 17 percent in Morocco.

It added that the high tax burden explains nearly 12 percent of Lebanon's and Egypt's informal economies, relative to 37 percent in each of Morocco and Tunisia, 29 percent in Jordan and 18 percent in Syria. The IMF said that such factors increased the costs of operating in the formal economy and provided strong incentives for workers and firms to operate informally where such costs can be avoided.

In comparison, the regulatory burden in product markets, institutional quality, and the tax burden explain each, on average, about 24 percent of the overall size of the informal economy in MENA oil-importing countries; while labor market rigidities contribute about 28 percent on average.

It said that such higher levels of informality imply that many workers in the MENA region's oil-importing countries have little or no social protection or employment, which undermines inclusiveness in the labor market.

It added that 62 percent of the labor force in Lebanon does not contribute to a retirement pension scheme compared to 67 percent in Jordan, 51 percent in Tunisia and 43 percent in Egypt.

In parallel, the IMF indicated that the barriers for businesses and labor to enter the formal sector also constitute barriers to inclusive growth.

It encouraged policymakers to implement reforms in order to remove these barriers by improving the regulatory framework for businesses, while at the same time creating an environment that fosters a fairer enforcement of regulations. It also encouraged policymakers to reform labor market institutions, reduce the tax burden and provide workers in the informal sector with access to skills upgrading.

With courtesy of the The Daily Star on November 02, 2011

ALCC SPONSORS' LUNCHEON - 2011

The ALCC hosted a luncheon for all its sponsors, who, with their busy day to day commitments were able to accept the invitation and attend this event, which was held at Embers Bar Restaurant, Surry Hills.

Some of Chateau Ksara's best wine collection was chosen especially for this occasion, by Management of Harkola, and complimented the excellent meal, prepared from the finest quality ingredients, presented to the guests, by the friendly owners and staff of Embers. It was most encouraging to see that those who have tasted Chateau Ksara for the first time, could not fault the exquisite taste and blend from the finest wines available.

This annual occasion, is the opportunity for the ALCC Executive Committee to be able to show its appreciation to all those who sponsor and support the work and initiative of the ALCC. We thank you for all your efforts and enormous generosity.

Sydney, September 2011

Luncheon was held at Embers Bar Restaurant



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BATTELINO ADDRESSES ANNUAL BUSINESS LUNCHEON 2011

The Australian Lebanese Chamber of Commerce hosted its Annual Corporate Luncheon, at Doltone House, Jones Bay Wharf, a highly anticipated event on the ALCC Calendar.

With the aim of uniting prominent business people from various industries, the lunch also provided valuable insight into the future of the Australian economy through the knowledgeable and respected viewpoint of the Deputy Governor of the Reserve Bank of Australia, Mr Ric Battelino.

With Mr Ross Greenwood, Presenter of 2GB Money News, as Master of Ceremonies, it was clear that the attendees were going to leave with nothing less than an educated perspective on the Australian and Global economy and the impact these have on their respective businesses and industries.

Australia was certainly the "lucky country" according to Mr Battelino, who pointed out that as a result of the Australian Governments implementation of economic measures aimed at stimulating the economy, Australia would avoid a recession; however, as Mr Battelino demonstrated, the Global economies of the USA and Europe, amongst others, were still feeling the effects of the Global Financial Crisis.

Conservative consumer spending and a shift in consumer purchase behaviour, serves as evidence of the lasting effect that the GFC has had on Global economies. This was a point which Mr Battelino had clearly demonstrated in his comprehensive presentation.

With a backdrop of splendid sunshine, attendees were treated to a delightful three course meal luncheon, which has become a signature of quality attributable to the Doltone House. With an excellent audience, and pleasant food served as the perfect combination for attendees to share experiences, stories and aspirations relating to the Australian economy and their respective businesses with fellow guests.

With the aim of creating a platform for like minded individuals to unite for growth in business and society, the ALCC through the Annual Corporate Luncheon once again succeeded in delivering a wonderful and entertaining event for all members, across all industries. We now turn our attention towards the Annual Awards Dinner, where the ALCC acknowledges the outstanding achievements of individuals and businesses from various categories of industry.

Lunch was held on 7 July 2011 and was sponsored by WK Marble/Quantum Quartz



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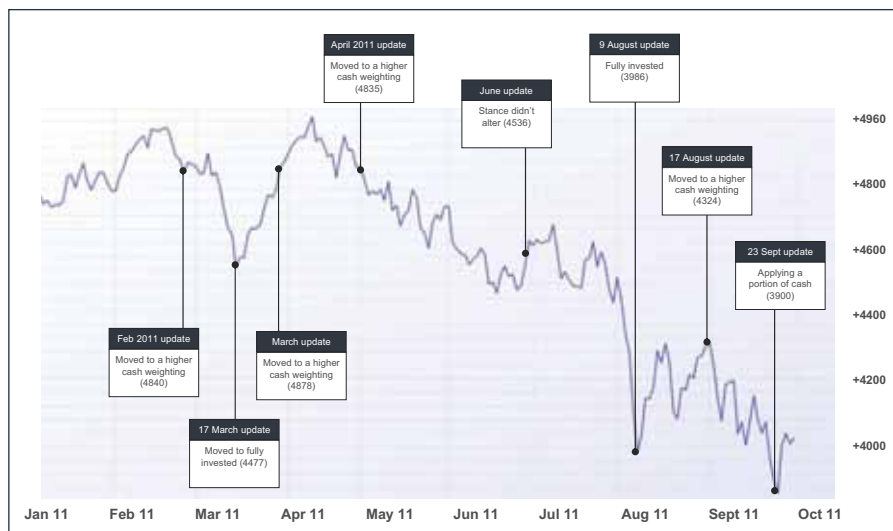
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Stock Market Update

Peter Semaan, Austock Securities

4 November 2011



As Europe continues to hold the key to global economic fortunes in 2012, from an equities portfolio management perspective, we continue adhering to the Austock investment philosophies and investment principles that have proven to outperform the general market. With capital preservation being the first priority, we have managed people's wealth by risk mitigating their investments in cash throughout the cycle.

The chart illustrates the various points where portfolios were overweight cash to protect clients' wealth. Unlike typical managed funds which have to be almost fully invested at all times, Austock client portfolios do not have to be invested when markets are falling and uncertainty dominating. This is where switching into cash at bank protects portfolios and outperforms the benchmark.

The European leaders taking the most decisive action so far by announcing a decision that bondholders will take a 50% write down on their Greek loans and the European Financial Stabilisation Fund will be raised to over \$1trillion euro demonstrated to us how quick markets move when there is an element of certainty introduced,

no matter how bad the issues may be at the time (up over 6.5% in Oct). On the contrary, non-constructive remarks such as those made by Greece's Prime Minister George Papandreou to hold a referendum on the required austerity measures needed to satisfy its latest bail out deal was enough to send global markets into a tail spin for a few days as it created uncertainty.

Looking forward, the European Central Bank unexpectedly cut interest rates by 25bp to 1.25% and the US Federal Reserve signalled additional monetary stimulus to lower US unemployment with potential actions on the table including a third round of securities purchases and extending the period of record-low interest rates. On the domestic front, the Australian Reserve Bank's interest rate cut with another potential cut in December or February next year could be the best thing for a beleaguered east coast economy.

This is the time to be looking at share market exposures and more importantly appropriate asset allocation to the companies that we primarily invest in - companies that have good management, good cashflow and good businesses in growth industries.

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Peter Semaan is a Private Portfolio Manager at Austock with over 11 years experience in the financial services industry spanning across funds management and equities and derivatives dealing and advising for HNW and Institutional clients.

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LEBANON'S ECONOMIC SCORE

Lebanon's economic freedom score is 60.1, making its economy the 89th freest in the 2011 Index. Its score is 0.6 point higher than last year due to considerable gains in monetary and investment freedom that were somewhat offset by declines in property rights and freedom from corruption. Lebanon is ranked 9th out of 17 countries in the Middle East/North Africa region, and its overall score is about equal to the world average.

The Lebanese economy has weathered the impact of the global economic turmoil and continues to be competitive in trade freedom and fiscal freedom. The financial sector is relatively well developed for the region, with an array of private banks and services. Surpluses from strong growth have helped to reduce the debt burden slightly, but government debt remains around 150 percent of GDP.

Trade Freedom

Lebanon's weighted average tariff rate was 4.8 percent in 2007. Lebanon's trade system is relatively open, and the country is working toward joining the World Trade Organization (WTO). Import bans and restrictions, restrictive licensing rules, subsidies, burdensome sanitary and phytosanitary regulations, corrupt customs administration, and weak enforcement of intellectual property rights add to the cost of trade. Ten points were deducted from Lebanon's trade freedom score to account for non-tariff barriers.

Fiscal Freedom

Lebanon has relatively low tax rates. The top income tax rate is 20 percent, and the corporate tax rate is 15 percent. Other taxes include a value-added tax (VAT), a transfer tax on real estate, an inheritance tax of up to 45 percent, and a recently reintroduced gasoline excise tax. In the most recent year, tax revenue as a percentage of GDP was 16.6 percent. Tax compliance is improving.

Monetary Freedom

Inflation has diminished, averaging 3.8 percent between 2007 and 2009. The government influences prices through state-owned enterprises and subsidies and controls the prices of bread, petroleum derivatives, pharmaceuticals, and electricity. Ten points were deducted from Lebanon's monetary freedom score to account for measures that distort domestic prices.

Financial Freedom

Lebanon's financial sector has undergone restructuring and has become more competitive. The five largest commercial banks account for roughly 60 percent of total banking assets. The government retains no ownership in any commercial banks, and competition among the private banks contributes to improving efficiency. Regulations are fairly transparent, and credit is allocated on market terms for both domestic and foreign businesses. Lebanon is a regional leader in the financial sector, and its capital markets are relatively well developed. Bank regulations limit banks' exposure to structured financial products. Lebanon's banking sector has weathered the global financial turmoil relatively well and has maintained financial stability.

*Adapted from
Promoting Economic Opportunity & Prosperity
The 2011 Index of Economic Freedom - Covers 183 countries across
10 specific freedoms such as trade freedom, b Source: wall Street Journal*



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SUSTAINED ECONOMIC GROWTH IN LEBANON

The Lebanese economy witnessed an unprecedented growth over the last 3 years with GDP growth rate registering a figure of 9.3% in 2008, 8% in 2009, and a 7.5% figure in 2010, based on World Bank estimates. Due to its sound macroeconomic policies, the Lebanese economy outperformed the regional average (Figure 1) and has sustained robust economic growth over the last few years; its resilient banking system and prudent macroeconomic policies have provided the right tools to mitigate the consequences of the external crisis.

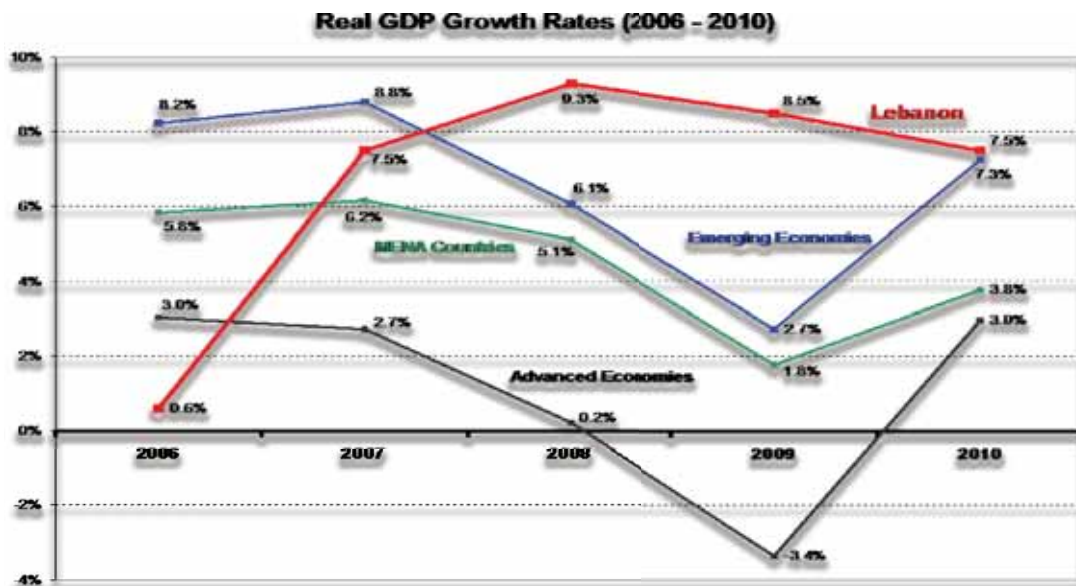
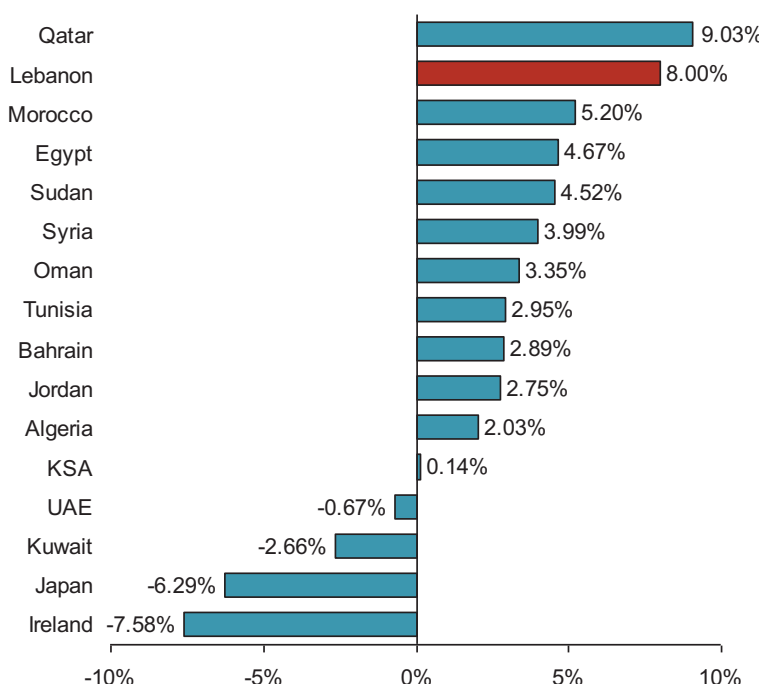


Figure 1:

Source: International Monetary Fund, World Economic Outlook Database, April 2010



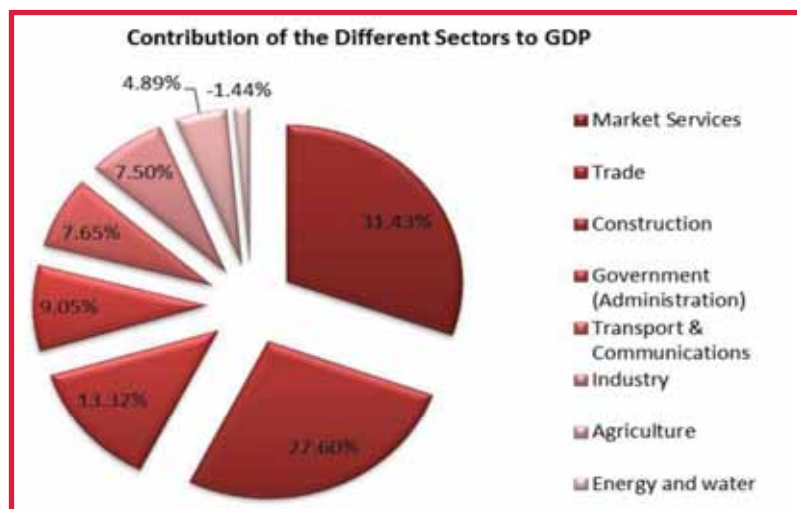
The economic and financial performance of Lebanon was notable in the face of the worldwide financial crisis and Lebanon was one of the few countries on a regional and international level that enjoyed positive and sustainable growth. With a real GDP growth of 8% in 2009, Lebanon, together with Qatar, recorded the fastest economic growth in the region. (Figure 2)

Figure 2: GDP Growth rates of Arab countries

Source: IMF, World Economic Outlook Database, April 2011

CONTRIBUTION OF THE DIFFERENT SECTORS TO GDP

Economic growth in 2009 continued to be fueled by the market services (banks, financial institutions,...) and trade sectors reflecting continued confidence in Lebanon's economic fundamentals. The graph below shows the value-added by the various sectors to the economy, highlighting the importance of the market services and trade sectors in Lebanon's economic performance, accounting for 73% of jobs and contributing by more than 60% to Lebanon's real GDP growth.



Market services regroup various activities among which, Tourism, which remains one of the fastest growing sectors, with tourist traffic registering an annual growth of around 40% in 2009. This trend is expected to continue in the future, fueling additional investments in the hospitality and leisure sub-sectors, as well as in cultural & religious tourism projects. The Tourism sector has been particularly attractive to investors due to the strategic location of the country (link to map), a rich cultural heritage, and the availability of a multilingual workforce.

Figure 3: Contribution of the different sectors to GDP

Source: Lebanese National Accounts 2009

Although the market services sector contributes the most to GDP, the Lebanese economy remains relatively diverse: Over the past twelve years, retail and wholesale trade have experienced a significant rise in their share of total GDP accounting for more than a quarter of total value added in 2009 (Figure 4). The Construction, Transport and Communication sectors have been fast growing over the past years, with the Transportation and Communications sectors growing by 13.5% during 2009 mainly due to investments in the Telecommunications sector. Conversely, two sectors of production, namely Agriculture and Industry, witnessed a decline in value added at constant prices. (LNA)?

Source: IMF 2010

Adapted from IDAL: Investment development Authority of Lebanon



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I regard myself very lucky to have experienced so many wonderful years of my life first as a young boy and later as an adult, in this very unique city Beirut. To visit the place where I started my first job in “Starco” a building close to Bab Idriss and the hotel district and to find it exactly as I had left it in the early seventies, was an emotional journey that brought back so many beautiful memories. My recent trip which lasted three months, gave me the chance to re-live those early years, by visiting, driving and walking through all the streets and suburbs that I love so deeply.

To see my old friends and to enjoy the warm Lebanese welcome, is something I value immensely, and I pray to God that the Lebanese will never ever lose that special quality. The city at present is witnessing the rise of many wonderful construction projects, and one of them is the large entertainment centre in the Bab Idriss area. It is a must for all visitors to enjoy the new Souks of Beirut, whether it offers the perfect mix of restaurants, cafes, shops or people; another major construction/tourism site is the “Zaytouni Bay” project which is an ideal Mediterranean setting. Beirut is once again a city full of “glamour, flavors and colors, and it is a must for all to visit this beautiful city, and to enjoy all that Lebanon has to offer.

As for Chamber business, I was able to follow up on some of the work already done, to boost trade relations between Australia and Lebanon, and vice versa. One of the major projects now seriously on track is the export of fresh produce from Lebanon to Australia. After so many years of hard work to bring this matter to fruition, I am happy to say that there is now a strong possibility it will happen. The reason is that the private sector and the Ministry of Agriculture, with whom I had several meetings, are working together and with the Chamber to kick-start this new and exciting project, I will be informing you more about this in detail in due course.

On the Australian front, invitations have been extended to several key Lebanese, and Arab investors to visit Australia in the near future. They have shown keen interest, following the emphasis that Australia has a stable economy, and the opportunities are enormous. It's always pleasing to hear that Australia is highly respected in Lebanon and the Arab world as a whole. It has always been our view that the business relationship between our two countries should continue to move forward and there is no reason why it shouldn't, providing the situation remains stable in Lebanon, and we do what is possible from the Australian side. I strongly feel that there is much to be achieved for the benefit of the two countries, if we continue to make the effort on both sides.

The chamber will be hosting prominent speakers from Lebanon during the coming year. For anyone interested in doing business in Lebanon or considering any investments, I would be happy to offer my assistance in any way possible.

Michael Rizk

Head of Trade Relations, Australia and Lebanon
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JEITA CAVES IN THE FINAL RACE FOR THE TOP WONDERS OF THE WORLD

By the time this edition of the Chamber is published, voting on the Seven Wonders of the world would have closed and Jeita Grotto (Caves) in Lebanon is one of the final ten to be voted on. Jeita Grotto is a compound of crystallized caves in Lebanon located 20 km north of Beirut in the Valley of Nahr al-Kalb (Dog River). This grotto is made up of two limestone caves, upper galleries and a lower cave through which a 6,230 m long river runs. Geologically, the caves provide a tunnel or escape route for the underground river. In this cave and galleries, the action of water in the limestone has created cathedral-like vaults full of various sizes, colours and shapes of stalactites and stalagmites, majestic curtains and fantastic rock formations. The total length of the cave is more than 9,000 m and there is one among the biggest stalactites in the world hanging 8.20 m. The grotto accommodates a huge hall with a distance of 108 m from the ceiling till the water level.



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