

AUB professor becomes first Lebanese member of international mediating organization

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AUB Professor Ahmad Moussalli of the Department of Political Studies and Public Administration has been invited onto the board of EPOS, an international, non-governmental mediating and negotiating operational agency based in Italy.

This is a first for both AUB and Lebanon. The organization, which deals in conflict resolution and prevention, appointed Moussalli (currently on a year's sabbatical from teaching political science and Islamic studies at AUB) to its board earlier this year.



Moussalli's many books, papers, debates, and discussions around the subject of arbitration as a form of conflict resolution are what attracted EPOS to include him in its team of experts.

"Arbitration is an informal procedure to resolve social, political, and even individual problems," says the professor who has been part of AUB's faculty for 22 years.

"I believe people should be able to negotiate their way of life with each other. The state has weakened society by making people depend on it and its formal laws.

"Arbitration is a way of humanizing the process and dealing with problems without violence or resorting to the state.

"State evidence doesn't take into account socio-economic, political, and educational differences."

Although he does not believe that arbitration should necessarily replace courts of law, he points to very clear examples of how it works in the confines of a society by "humanly connecting people to each other."

In Islamic law, for example, Moussalli explains how if one were to kill someone by accident (like in a car accident), the person would not be imprisoned, but would have to pay a fine to the deceased's family.

"But here, things like this are dealt with by the law," he says, describing how this could mean years in jail before verdicts are pronounced.

"Our societies are becoming very rigid and unfavorable to socialization," he adds, agreeing with Plato's statement that a society free of lawyers is a free society.

With his appointment to EPOS, Moussalli will be focusing on arbitration in the Arab and Islamic world, while also dealing with radical Islamic groups.

He will be acting as a consultant for the organization and will be asked to write opinion pieces from time to time.

"One of my objectives [on EPOS] is to work with conflicts between the West and the Islamic world.

"Since 9/11, many people think that war is raging between the West and Islam but I don't think this is true, so I want to show both sides different possibilities of co-existence."

He expands on this by explaining that the only time there was success in Afghanistan was when America was negotiating with the Taliban, not fighting against them.

Moussalli's expertise has been sought around the world. In April 2010 he participated in BBC's Doha Debates. He has also presented seminars, lectures, and talks in Turkey, America, Saudi Arabia, England, Korea, Cyprus, The Netherlands, Egypt, Belgium, and Italy, among others. "I've even had offers to move to the West," he says, "but I feel I can do something more useful in my own region, and I feel great about AUB."

He applauds the culture at the University for providing students with "a background to what's important in life".

"AUB brings together people from different cultures and diverse backgrounds to learn about each other through discussions and trying to understand one another," he explains.

"It teaches students how to think broadly through its liberal arts program and offers a well-rounded education where, for example, an engineer will not only learn about engineering."

Moussalli will be part of the EPOS board for an indefinite period. He is also a member of other professional organizations that include Middle East Institute, American Political Science Association, Middle East Studies Association, Society for the History of Islamic Sciences and Philosophy, and International Political Science Association.