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### The belated bliss of Lebanese freedom

**By Fouad Hamdan**

Commentary by

**Monday, March 27, 2006**

These are truly amazing days. When watching and reading the news about [Lebanon](#) in Belgium, I cannot but stumble from one positive surprise to another. I admire the hundreds of thousands of people marching and demanding genuine independence and an end to the tutelage of the dictator in Damascus. I respect counterdemonstrations organized by Hizbullah to defend their arms with an Iranian finger on the trigger. And all these protests are taking place peacefully.

When the government meets in the presence of the president, I notice a nervous Emile Lahoud and cannot but wonder how he can accept the daily humiliation of being sidelined by a government that has put the national interest at the top of its daily agenda. But the remote-controlled president is a stoic and has even ignored the arrests of his staff linked to the murder of the late Rafik Hariri. Anyhow, the pressure is mounting as more and more people every day sign the petition asking him to leave. Just to leave us all in peace.

Observing the daily [political](#) debate on Lebanon's future is like looking through a kaleidoscope. Colors and lines mix and develop into [beautiful](#) forms in motion. Former bitter enemies Walid Jumblatt, Samir Geagea and Amin Gemayel speak out for the disarmament of all who are not police or [army](#) personnel. Watch General Michel Aoun trying everything to become president, even if it meant embracing Hassan Nasrallah, who is little embarrassed by the [remote control](#) at times being applied from Tehran. Meanwhile, the statesmen, Saad Hariri, Fouad Siniora and Nassib Lahoud promote national dialogue, prepare the ground for a genuine independence and keep cool.

In Lebanon, the days of fear are over, hopefully forever. No one can stop us from saying what we think. Not even the bitter and vengeful Damascene lion. The price for this newly won freedom of expression was paid with the lives of Hariri, Samir Kassir, George Hawi and Gebran Tueni. A very high price. But now, at last, we dare to publicly say no to the hijacking of South Lebanon by the rulers in Damascus and Tehran. We say no to the Syrian-controlled Palestinian militia in Naameh. We shout no to the president of a few square meters in Baabda who is blocking political and economic reforms. No fear. And there is no way back.

Today, we finally say yes to peace in the South. Yes to getting back the Shebaa farms - if they are ours - through diplomatic means. Yes to demarcating all our borders. Yes to a Syrian Embassy in Beirut. Yes to allowing arms only in the hands of government authorities. And yes to justice being done in the cases of all the recent political assassinations.

At an incredible speed and since the murder of Rafik Hariri, society in Lebanon has been maturing politically. All attempts to sow discord among communities have failed miserably. When bombs exploded in Christian areas and when thugs ransacked parts of Achrafieh and attacked a church, people did not fall into this trap. They are defiant - and courageous.

I fear more blows in the future. Maybe some deadly blows. But the Lebanese will respond with wisdom - peacefully and with democratic means. This strategy, followed stubbornly by the March 14 alliance, is a winning strategy. Just persevere.

Many Lebanese abroad are hoping that our country will soon get a president that merits this honor. Surely, Hizbullah's leadership will come to its senses and make sure the party's decision-making is entirely Lebanese. And a mixed tribunal will show that political murders do not pay anymore. I am optimistic because democracy is growing stronger every day and all Lebanese, even politicians, are getting used to the taste of living in dignified independence. It just feels good to look in the [mirror](#) every morning and know you are starting to become free. No one can beat that feeling.

**Fouad Hamdan** set up Greenpeace in Lebanon in 1994-1999. He is now in Brussels as executive-director of the campaign and lobby [office](#) of Friends of the Earth Europe, an international organization influencing the environmental policies of the European Union. He wrote this commentary for **THE DAILY STAR**.