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ASIA/LEBANON - Patriarch Rai on the presidential elections: a power vacuum would erase the role of Christians

Beirut (Agenzia Fides) - The Patriarch of Antioch of the Maronites, Bechara Boutros Rai, has relaunched the alarm about the destabilizing effects the power vacuum, caused by the failure to elect a president before May 25, would have for the future of Lebanon and especially for the Lebanese Christians. "The election of a President and his continued presence", said Maronite Patriarch during the homily of the Mass celebrated on Sunday, May 11 at the Basilica of Our Lady of Lebanon in Harissa "gives legitimacy to public institutions. The President is the head of state and the symbol of national unity. And we are praying God so that he may inspire the political blocs to hold these elections and to choose the best candidate in the present circumstances, for the sake of Lebanon and its institutions".
In the delicate Lebanese institutional system, based on the National Pact of 1943, which distributes the institutional roles among political representatives belonging to different religious communities, the office of President of the Republic is reserved to a Maronite Christian. "The dreaded vacuum in the presidency", said Patriarch Rai "is rejected by us and the Lebanese people because it would represent a challenge to the National Covenant and the Constitution" and "would eliminate an essential component of this Country, that is the Christian component".
The Parliamentary Assembly has been convened on Thursday, May 15 for the fourth attempt of the presidential election, but also the next session seems destined not to reach the goal.
The Presidency of the Lebanese Republic would become vacant on 25 May, the day when the term of office of the incumbent President, Michel Sleiman ends. So far, the two political blocs in the Country are - March 8 Coalition and the March 14 Coalition - have not reached a consensus with regards to the figure of a candidate. What weighs on the decision is mainly the contrasts between the Lebanese Forces - who have nominated their leader Samir Geagea - and the Shiite party of Hezbollah, which rejected the Geagea's nomination as a provocation. The same Geagea told a Saudi newspaper that he prefers the institutional power vacuum to the prospect of "putting the Country under the control of Hezbollah". (GV) (Agenzia Fides 12/05/2014)

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