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Lebanon's energy warriors

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Like other East Mediterranean states who popped premature champagne corks over reported oil and gas riches lurking beneath their offshore territorial waters, Lebanon's government and media went into hoopla mode in 2012 over the reserves. The optimism quickly sank into the country's ever gurgling political morass. **Gary Lakes** reports on a youthful initiative to revive the hydrocarbon party spirit.

A group of enthusiastic young Lebanese skilled in law, political science, journalism, energy and environmental studies has set up a non-governmental organization and tasked itself with trying to breath life into the country's stillborn dream of oil and gas wealth.

The Lebanese Oil and Gas Initiative (LOGI) intends to define for politicians and public a realistic prospect for the country as a hydrocarbon producer and provide some industry insight to balance public expectations, which in the past soared into the clouds. In particular, these young professionals want to ensure that a transparent, accountable and stable system of governance is put in place to oversee the hoped-for petroleum sector.



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“LOGI’s purpose is to create a platform that will connect experts and tap into the expertise of industry professionals,” Karen Ayat, a co-founder of the NGO told *Global Sources Magazine* earlier this week. “LOGI aims to join forces with decision-makers so that we can gather the best advice that is adequate for Lebanon and suitable to our peculiar political make-up.”

After all the previous hype, Lebanon has failed to get past the pre-qualification stage of an international licensing round that opened in February 2013 and then stalled in the political mud. Before a closing date for the round can be set and allow pre-qualified firms to submit bids for the offshore blocks, Lebanon’s cabinet must first approve two decrees that have been pending for more than two years.

One would approve the delineation of Lebanon’s 10 offshore blocks, the other would set the terms for a model exploration and production agreement. The tax law on to hydrocarbon matters must also be clarified. In a country unable to choose a new president and perennially locked in war rivalries, effective government is a dream more ephemeral than hydrocarbon riches.

Many professionals in Lebanon do understand the country’s potential as a realistic energy producer and exporter. But they also know that the country’s byzantine political structure blocking the development of resources that could both benefit the people and bring in substantial foreign revenues that Lebanon sorely needs.

The situation is as frustrating for international oil companies keen to bid on offshore blocks as it is for the young optimists behind LOGI. Rather than succumb to complacency, the activists are determined to move the energy debate into the national mainstream.

“Our only purpose is to help Lebanon,” said Ayat, an East Mediterranean energy analyst and associate partner at Natural Gas Europe. “Our strength is in our non-affiliation to any political group. We see in any citizen with Lebanon at heart a potential partner for the success of LOGI’s efforts and through them the successful entry of Lebanon into the natural gas production market.”

She said LOGI intends to act as an intermediary between Lebanon’s citizens and government officials –conveying public concerns to relevant authorities, asking questions and demanding answers, and rendering the process is as transparent as possible.

“Our network of experts will be working on specific projects aimed at studying Lebanon’s situation and the best possibilities related to its oil and gas sector,” Ayat said, adding that LOGI had already produced a paper on the country’s export options.

“Our research could be highly useful for the government. Many industry professionals and academics, Lebanese and non-Lebanese, have expressed interest in contributing to LOGI. We truly believe that such work would add tremendous value to Lebanon,” Ayat said,



LOGI co-founder Karen Ayat, journalist, East Mediterranean energy analyst and associate partner in Natural Gas Europe. [Photo: LOGI]

The NGO already has “excellent feedback” from the public and media, and it trusts that Lebanon’s politicians will view it as a constructive partner. LOGI has an Internet presence and has raised more than \$10,000 in funds. It is planning public events to encourage constructive debate about Lebanon’s resources and the steps needed to create a functioning energy sector.

The group has already launched a program called Lebanese Oil and Gas 101 to demystify the oil and gas industry for the public and explain how the national resources might be exploited for the common good.

“We come with the best intention to help build a better future for ourselves and the generations to come by embracing this one-time opportunity for Lebanon and making the most of it,” Ayat said.

But Lebanon is Lebanon – it has its particular and sometimes indomitable ways. However, very many Lebanese and non-Lebanese are convinced oil and gas could pave the way to a better future for the whole country. With its youthful enthusiasm, LOGI’s task might not be as formidable as it first seems.



Harvard graduate Georges Sassine, a LOGI co-founder, delivers the group’s video presentation on YouTube. Their website features a crowdfunding campaign. (Links below). [Photo: LOGI]

Links: [YouTube video](#) | [LOGI website](#)

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