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Photo by: Reuters

French envoy honors Hezbollah lawmakers in dinner reception

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Dinner could be considered violation of EU sanctions outlawing contact with Hezbollah's military wing.

BERLIN – Patrick Paoli, France's Ambassador to Lebanon, hosted a dinner reception in early November for two Hezbollah MPs and the political militia's international affairs representative.

The *Lebanon Daily Star* reported the dinner gathering on Thursday. Hezbollah MPs Ali Fayyad and Nawwar Saheli along with international affairs member Ammar Moussawi were honored by Paoli.

It is unclear if the ambassador violated EU sanctions outlawing contact with the military wing of Hezbollah.

The EU [designated Hezbollah's military wing a terrorist organization](#) in July.

Emmanuel Navon, a French Israeli political scientist, told *The Jerusalem Post* on Monday he assumes the meeting was with the "non-military wing" because it would "not be a breach of EU policy."

The *Daily Star* reported that sources said "that the meeting was Europe laying the groundwork to reverse the boycott of a political party that has national and regional influence, at a time when Takfiri and fundamentalist movements have grown.

The sources said "Hezbollah's position would improve on the internal, Arab and regional stage after the signing of a Western-Iranian agreement."

The EU permits contact to the so-called political wing of Hezbollah. The US, Israel, the Netherlands and Canada reject the separation of Hezbollah into political and military wings and have classified the entire Lebanese organization as a terrorist entity.

Navon, the director of the Department of Political Science and Communications at the Jerusalem Orthodox College, said "France was the former colonial power in Lebanon" and it considers itself "the guardian of a delicate balance that no longer exists."

This is "not the first time France is trying to play a pivotal role in the complicated Lebanese politics."

Hezbollah plays the role of kingmaker in Lebanese coalition politics and political parties depend on its power to enter the government. The Lebanese Shi'ite group's alliance with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's troops on the battlefield, working to oust rebels, has pushed Hezbollah's military apparatus into isolation.

Navon said that the event was hosted by the French ambassador, this means he was "acting on behalf of the French ministry, which always had pro-Arab policy," though "it is pretty common in France that the foreign office and president have different policies."

He said President Francois Hollande “might have blocked the event.”

A spokeswoman for the French embassy in Tel Aviv referred the *Post* to the country’s embassy in Beirut.

Jean-Christophe Auge, a spokesman for the French embassy in Beirut, did not immediately return a *Post* press query.

The *Daily Star* wrote, “Despite poor relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran undermining political solutions in Lebanon, Syria and Iraq, some European states have reformulated their foreign policy to welcome the Western-Iranian rapprochement and used it to rebuild relations with elements of Hezbollah.”

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