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### **Lebanon's oil and gas exploration: What's next?**

Earlier this year, Lebanon signed its first offshore oil and gas exploration and production agreement for two of Lebanon's 10 offshore blocks with a consortium of France's Total, Italy's Eni and Russia's Novatek, with drilling expected to start in 2019. Walid Nasr, chairman of the board of directors and head of the strategic planning department at the Lebanese Petroleum Administration spoke Tuesday at the International Oil and Gas Summit held in Beirut on what to expect and what is being done until that happens. Among the key plans discussed, he revealed that 2018 will be spent undertaking several crucial studies, including geological, technical and environmental research, in addition to administrative work relating to issuing permits and preparing the supply base ahead of drilling works scheduled for 2019, which will start with the first well in block 4, followed by another well in block 9. The Lebanese Petroleum Administration is also working on a petroleum registry. The registry will include all the licenses, beneficial ownership and in the future, will include production income. The registry will be fully accessible to the public as part of transparency push by the ministry and the administration. LPA also plans to start serious cooperation with other countries in the region. "We have initiated talks with the European Union and the EU is a major partner for Lebanon, strategically, politically and economically," Nasr said. The talks include cooperation in terms of markets and exchanging know-how in the oil sector as well as discussions on environmental issues. As the country embarks on its first exploration experience, the presence of an oil and gas strategy is almost nonexistent. "For the oil and gas sector, we are trying to put in place an oil and gas strategy, an updated one based on the results of the first licensing round," Nasr added. When it comes to import and exports, the Energy Ministry plans to import liquefied natural gas, which will be used primarily for the power sector. As for exporting gas, "any surplus and the details will be discussed once we have actual volumes to be able to negotiate with neighboring countries," Nasr explained. Local content is something that was emphasized during the event. "We already have provisions in the contracts," Nasr said. "The first milestone is to design a recruitment plan and a training program in Lebanon. This will be submitted in July by the operator and the recruitment plan will include what are the positions needed for the coming three years of exploration," he added. The plan also includes a yearly program for training public personnel in the oil and gas sector so that all the institutions in Lebanon have the required capacity to implement their mandate.