



EGYPT PARLIAMENT WATCH



WEEK IN BRIEF MAY 20-26, 2018

Summary

- Fifty-one members of the Free Egyptians Party (FEP) withdrew from the organization and joined the Nation's Future Party, making it the largest party in the House of Representatives, with over 100 members. Following this influx in members, the Nation's Future Party altered its internal leadership and formally withdrew from the Coalition in Support of Egypt; other political parties contemplated joining the new majority organization in the House.
- The Wafd Party hosted 90 political parties at its organization headquarters to discuss the national consolidation process, and the parties are expected to finalize these plans in the near future. Wafd Party officials asserted their desire to establish the organization as a major bloc within the House rather than consolidating into another group, such as Nation's Future.

Notable Developments

Nation's Future Party Comprises a Plurality of House:

A significant shift in the political landscape took place this past week, as the Nation's Future Party became the party with the largest number of members of the House of Representatives, with over 100 members. Fifty-one members of the FEP—including Representative Alaa Abed, who was removed from his position as parliamentary chairman of the FEP last week—joined the Nation's Future Party. These former FEP representatives constitute roughly 80 percent of the organization's membership, leaving the party a shell of its former self. This decision violates Article 6 of the House's bylaws, which prohibits representatives from changing party affiliation mid-session. Following the addition of the new members, the Nation's Future Party reshuffled its internal

leadership: Representative Ashraf Rashad al-Sharif retained his position as party chairman, while Representative Alaa Abed, Representative Abdul Hadi al-Qasbi, Representative Ashraf Rashad Osman, and former diplomat Muhammad Manzour were named the organization's four deputy chairmen. The Nation's Future Party also **announced** its decision to withdraw from the Coalition in Support of Egypt. Coalition in Support of Egypt Chairman Muhammad al-Suweidi **noted** the legal issue regarding Article 6 of the House's bylaws when questioned about the bloc's status following the Nation's Future Party's decision to leave the coalition, which Suweidi **denied** occurred.

Following the internal shuffling in the Nation's Future Party, the **Conference Party** and the **National Movement Party** both denied that they had consolidated into the Nation's Future Party. Both organizations asserted in separate statements that they are considering their options regarding party merging. The Conference Party holds 12 seats in the House, while the National Movement Party holds four.

Wafd Party Emerges as Secondary Bloc in House:

After the leadership changes in the Nation's Future Party, the Wafd Party continued to establish itself as the other parliamentary bloc in a post-consolidation House of Representatives. Party spokesman Yasser al-Hudeibi **rejected** the notion that the organization will consolidate into a larger political party, **asserting** that the Wafd aspires to form its own political coalition based on the group's historical stature in Egyptian politics. Additionally, the Wafd **hosted** 90 political parties at its headquarters to discuss the consolidation process, though the Nation's Future Party and Free Egyptians Party were noticeably **absent** from the deliberations. This meeting did not yield a resolution to the political party dynamic, though Wafd Party Chairman Bahaa Abu Shoqa **asserted** that another meeting with 21 representatives from this initial discussion will reconvene in the near future to finalize a national consolidation plan. In related news, Conservative Party Vice-President Muhammad Amin **expressed** his party's desire to merge with the Wafd Party based on similar ideologies between the two groups. The Conservative Party holds six seats in the House.

Representative Accused of Anti-Semitic Sentiments:

Abdel Rahim Ali of the Arab Affairs Committee **spoke** at a conference at the French National Assembly on behalf of the Paris-based Center for Middle Eastern Studies, which was denounced by the Conseil Représentatif des Institutions juives de France (CRIF), a France-based Jewish advocacy organization. CRIF **issued** a statement quoting researcher Romain Caillet, who **accused** Ali of anti-Semitic behavior and being a conspiracy theorist in regard to Israel. Caillet has previous **connections** with the Muslim Brotherhood and was **placed** on a jihadist watch list in France in 2008. Ali, founder of the center and editor-in-chief of *al-Bawaba*, reportedly **denied** the allegations and said that his organization does not support anti-Semitic thought, but rather works to uncover the truth regarding jihadist ideology and its effects on Western civilization.

Other Developments

In Legislation:

The Housing Committee **approved** the Reconciling Building Violations Law. The bill **permits** the repurposing of construction sites to allow for housing settlements, yet the law **prohibits** the construction of settlements on agricultural or state-owned land.

The Constitutional Affairs Committee **completed** its discussions of the amendments to the Code of Criminal Procedure and submitted its report of the bill to the general body of the House for review. The amendments **cover** four important topics, including transitional justice, the 2014 Egyptian Constitution, replacement methods, and a desire to change the law to suit the current political atmosphere in Egypt.

The Religious Affairs Committee **finished** discussing all but two articles of the Dar al-Ifta Law. The law would **codify** the legal organization of Dar al-Ifta, while also granting the institution financial, administrative, and technical independence.

Yehia Kedwani of the Defense Committee **submitted** amendments to the Penal Code that would increase the punishment for civilians found guilty of insulting public officials. Under the new legislation, insulting a civil servant would result in one year's imprisonment and fine of 10,000 Egyptian pounds (LE), insulting a court official would result in a similar imprisonment time and a fine of LE50,000, defamation of a public official would result in two years' imprisonment and fine of LE50,000, and physically assaulting a public official would result in three years' imprisonment and a fine of LE100,000.

Yehia Kedwani of the Defense Committee **submitted** an amendment to the Pensioners Law, which would raise the maximum pension that individuals are eligible to receive.

In Session:

Tariq Mutawali of the Youth Committee **expressed** his intention to increase the amount of allocated funds for the Ministry of Youth for the fiscal year 2018–19 budget to ensure the completion of sports projects nationwide and to promote youth centers across the country.

Muhammad Saad Tamaraz of the Agriculture Committee **called** for a general discussion in the House on rice prices, especially considering that these prices increased during the month of Ramadan.

In News and Statements:

Media Committee Chairman Osama Heikal **expects** parliament to extend its legislative session into the second week of July. Though the session is set to close on June 30, the multitude of legislation to be voted on may require the body to extend its session.

Muhammad Fayoumi of the Local Administration Committee **warned** citizens not to rely on Facebook as a source of news because of what he described as a prevalence of false information disseminated by the Muslim Brotherhood on the social networking site. Fayoumi encouraged Egyptians to listen to state media reports and cabinet statements as their official news source.

Yehia Kedwani of the Defense Committee **stated** that the rising population is becoming an increasingly important national security concern for Egypt. Kedwani called for the creation of a Ministry of Population separate from the Ministry of Health to continuously assess this issue.

Speaker of the House Ali Abdel 'Al hosted a delegation from the Vietnamese parliament, and the group discussed the historical relations between their countries, as well as economic and security concerns in the Middle East.

Looking Ahead

- The general session of the House will **reconvene** on June 3.
- The House will **discuss** the Reconciling Building Violations Law in general session following the approval of the state budget for the 2018–19 fiscal year.



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Egypt Parliament Watch is the most comprehensive project on Egypt's elected legislature, providing analysis of the body's performance in fulfilling its constitutionally mandated tasks, the legislation it produces, and the political dynamics at play.