



# EGYPT PARLIAMENT WATCH



## WEEK IN BRIEF FEBRUARY 6–14, 2019

### Summary

- The House of Representatives agreed in principle to the proposed constitutional amendments. Media reports indicated a vote of 485 to 18 in favor, though no official tabulation or record of votes was released. Speaker of the House Ali Abdel 'Al subsequently referred the amendments to the Constitutional and Legislative Affairs Committee, which will review the proposal for up to 60 days.
- Social Solidarity Minister Ghada Wali announced that the special cabinet committee responsible for national outreach for amendments to the NGO Law will submit its findings on the national dialogue to the cabinet by February 14. Wali also mentioned a subcommittee of the Social Solidarity Ministry will draft the amendments to the law before submitting to the cabinet for review.
- After President Abdel-Fattah El Sisi assumed the chairmanship of the African Union, representatives praised Sisi's leadership as a contributing factor that led to this new role. Other representatives discussed Egypt's agenda for the AU and the policies it intends to promote.

## Notable Developments

### House Agrees in Principle to Constitutional Amendments:

Following three separate general sessions on February 13 to **discuss** the proposed constitutional amendments and the report of the General Committee on the initiative, the House of Representatives **agreed** in principle on February 14 to the committee's report, thus continuing the amendment process.

The House did not release a formal tabulation of votes or record of how individual representatives voted. Local media generally **reported** that 485 members voted in favor of the proposal, and **two reports** combined to list 18 names of representatives who voted against the amendments. The House of Representatives has 595 seated members, leaving more than 90 votes unaccounted for.

After the vote, Speaker of the House Ali Abdel 'Al **referred** the amendments to the Constitutional and Legislative Affairs Committee for review, which can last up to 60 days. Abdel 'Al outlined the process for the Constitutional and Legislative Affairs Committee, in which representatives will have 30 days to submit proposals to the constitutional amendments, followed by a two-week period in which the committee will consult public officials on the amendments. This will be followed by a week devoted to finalizing the amendments and another week to draft a report to be submitted to the entire legislature on the proposal. Parliamentary sources **indicated** to the newspaper *al-Masry al-Youm* that the constitutional amendment process will be completed by Ramadan, which begins on May 5.

Prior to the vote, a group consisting of representatives, political parties, and other political figures **developed** in opposition to the proposed constitutional amendments. The group, known as the Union to Defend the Constitution, **outlined** three strategies during the amendment process including raising awareness about the dangers of the amendments, collecting signatures of opposed individuals, and studying legal avenues to challenge the proposals. The group **includes** members of the 25-30 Bloc, the Tagammu Party, and the Conservative Party. Despite the Conservative Party leadership officially opposing the amendments, some representatives in the party **supported** the constitutional changes. Early reports indicate most representatives within the 25-30 Bloc and the Tagammu Party voted to reject the proposed amendments.

### Cabinet Progressing on NGO Law Amendments:

Social Solidarity Minister Ghada Wali **stated** that the special ministerial committee studying possible amendments to the Law Governing the Work of Associations and Other Foundations Working in the Field of Civil Work (commonly known as the NGO Law) met February 7 to discuss their outreach with civil society groups. Wali added that the findings of their discussions would be compiled in a report and submitted to the cabinet within one week. The minister also **mentioned** that a separate subcommittee will be formed to draft amendments to the NGO Law, which will subsequently need to be approved by the Ministry of Social Solidarity before being submitted to the cabinet. Wali did not **disclose** a timeframe for the drafting process, but previous speculation has mentioned parliamentary approval and presidential ratification of the proposed law by the end of March.

## Representatives Praise Sisi's New Role in the African Union:

President Abdel-Fattah El Sisi **assumed** the chairmanship of the African Union on February 10, a rotating post held for a one-year period by heads of state within the 55-member bloc. Leading up to Sisi's inauguration to the post and in the ensuing days, members of Egypt's House of Representatives praised Sisi for his leadership skills and discussed the new role that Egypt would assume in interactions with its African counterparts. Representatives, including Deputy Speaker of the House **Soleiman Wahdan** and Wafd Party Chairman **Bahaa Abu Shoqa**, asserted that the political gains made under Sisi permitted Egypt to assume this new role within the African Union. Meanwhile, African Affairs Committee Chairman Tariq Radwan **stated** that Egypt would prioritize sustainable development during Sisi's chairmanship of the African Union.

## Abdel 'Al Leads Parliamentary Delegation to Cyprus:

Speaker of the House Ali Abdel 'Al led a parliamentary delegation to Cyprus for tripartite discussions with parliamentary officials from Cyprus and Greece. During a speech delivered in Cyprus, Abdel 'Al **spoke** about Egyptian, Cypriot, and Greek trilateral relations in oil exploration, tourism, and security concerns. Abdel 'Al **highlighted** the strong relations between the three countries, noting the summit held for the countries' executives every year. In his meetings with parliamentary officials from Cyprus and Greece, Abdel 'Al **mentioned** that the countries are working to connect their electrical grids.

## Other Developments

### In Legislation:

Representative Amr Ghalab of the Economic Affairs Committee **requested** that the Constitutional and Legislative Affairs Committee expedite its deliberations on amendments to the Terrorism Law. The proposal combines amendments to the Terrorism Law, Traffic Law, and Tourism Facilities Law, and would intensify punishments within the Terrorism Law, require all four-wheel-drive vehicles to be equipped with a tracking device, and require property owners and lessees to register a rental agreement or change of ownership with the local police station within 15 days of the exchange.

The Agriculture Committee **approved** the draft Irrigation Law and submitted its final report of the bill to the General Committee for review. The draft law **seeks** to improve Egypt's national irrigation system, while also imposing punishments on individuals who damage the Nile River.

The Economic Affairs Committee **approved** the Electronic Payments Law. The bill requires employers to pay their employees, except temporary workers, using electronic payments and phase out cash transactions.

### In Session:

The House **approved** Sisi's appointment of Essam al-Gazzar as Minister of Housing. Prime Minister Mustafa Madbouli had been serving jointly as housing minister and prime minister.

Representative Omar Hamroush of the Religious Affairs Committee **submitted** a question to Health Minister Hala Zayad regarding the ministry's plan to address issues of medical neglect. There were no reports of a response from the ministry.

## In News and Statements:

A parliamentary delegation **traveled** to Berlin to meet with Hans-Peter Friedrich, one of the members of the Council of Elders in the German Bundestag; the delegation included Coalition in Support of Egypt Chairman Abdel Hadi al-Qasbi, Media Committee Chairman Osama Heikal, Local Administration Committee Chairman Ahmed al-Sageeni, Representative Megdi Malek, and Representative Abdel Hamid Demerdash among others. The group discussed bilateral relations and investment opportunities for Germany in Egypt.

Representative Atef Mukhaleef of the Economic Affairs Committee **led** a parliamentary delegation that also included Representative Muhammad Abdel Hadi Habib and Representative Hala Abu Ali to a UNESCO conference in Lebanon concerning sustainable development.

Wahdan and Budget Committee Chairman Hussein Aissa **hosted** officials from the International Monetary Fund to discuss Egypt's economic reform program.

## Looking Ahead

- The African Affairs Committee will **host** Chad's Ambassador to Egypt, Mahamat Habib Doutoum, on Sunday to discuss bilateral relations.
- The House will **hold** a final vote on the amendments to the Universities Law next Tuesday.
- The African Affairs Committee will **discuss** Representative Mai Mahmoud's briefing request about the committee's African relations file during a committee session next Monday.
- The parliamentary subcommittee studying Sisi's objections to the Clinical Trials Law will **convene** Saturday to discuss potential changes to the law. Sisi **objected** to the law in October 2018, which was initially approved by the House in May 2018, because of punitive measures in the law which Sisi described as overly burdensome for the medical community.



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EGYPT **PARLIAMENT WATCH**

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.