

Congratulations to the Winners! Time to Elect a New Speaker

by Elie Al-Chaer*

-- June 19, 2005

Now that the parliamentary elections are over, and a new slate of deputies has been chosen, it is time to elect a new Speaker and go to work.

To the winners of these elections, we offer you our sincere congratulations and best wishes for success in your programs. Our hope is that you will manage to overcome the campaign bickering and work together in Parliament serving on behalf of the Lebanese people for the good of all.

To the losers of these elections, we wish you better luck next time; your participation was invaluable to the democratic process. You have given the people a chance to make a choice. We thank you and ask you not to give up for the future.

To the Lebanese people who voted in these elections or opted not to, thank you. Together we have shown the world that we are a people worthy of peace, independence and democracy. These elections were a first step in the march to rebuild our country. Our continued participation, as a people, in the political process is a guarantee that our voice will always be heard in any decision involving our country.

The first order of business of the new Parliament is for the deputies to choose a speaker, a President of the Chamber of Deputies; in Lebanon, this post is the head of the legislative branch and is no less important than the other two presidents (Republic and Cabinet) or the other two branches of government (Executive and Judiciary). Important to this step is the process by which the speaker is elected and "elected" is the keyword here; for "he" will have to work with these deputies in the coming few years and reflect the aspirations of the people who elected them [*"she" is not eligible at this time; our sincere apologies to the ladies in Lebanon, none of you is eligible for the post of Speaker of Parliament this time around, since this post is reserved by tradition to a Shiite and none of the elected Shia deputies turn out to be a lady. Better luck next time!*].

Our hope is that the deputies' choice will be a sincere reflection of the issues they advocated in their campaigns: reform, change, reconciliation, resistance, an end to the Syrian dominion in Lebanon, an end to all other forms of foreign intervention, while working with the rest of the world in an interactive and cordial environment based on mutual respect. Therefore, any candidate for Speaker should have a

clear vision on how to implement these issues by working with other members of parliament. Past experience is not enough and may not be relevant, given that the “Syrian decision maker” that facilitated the job of Parliament since 1992 has left, and the new legislature will require true leadership.

To those candidates for Speaker who may still be operating under a presumption of foreign mandates and perhaps believing that Iran, the Shiite powerbroker in the region, should have a say in who the next Speaker in Lebanon ought to be, and for that matter may have chosen to begin their campaign for this post in Iran, we say No.

The Lebanese people, who demonstrated over the past few months their unity against the foreign Syrian domination of Lebanon and who demonstrated in these elections an advanced ability to practice democracy despite insurmountable obstacles (terrorism, assassinations, bad election laws, etc.), deserve to have a leadership independent of foreign influence, able to rise to the level of the moment, and representative of their aspirations.

Any candidate for Speaker who does not meet these qualifications should not have a chance in the new Parliament. The elected Speaker should have a clear and well-articulated vision of how to tackle the upcoming issues facing the new Parliament; from reforming government and the laws (including the election law), to the economy, to health care, to social and cultural reforms, to handling the arms in the hands of groups outside the Lebanese army (Hezbollah and the Palestinians), to normalizing and formalizing the relations with Syria... and yes to the issue of war and peace with the state of Israel.

The march for democracy has begun, and the march for reforms needs to follow. Let us not stifle them by backpedaling to the Syrian era and making wrong choices that invite foreign intervention back into Lebanese politics, only to sustain the old and decaying political system. Our people demand more and deserve better, please try to give the people the best you can.

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