

## **Postponing Municipal Elections: Violating Citizens' Rights**

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In many parts of the world, local elections take place to select officials in local government; and elections to positions within a city, town or village are often known as municipal elections.

The Lebanese municipal system has been and still is a key pillar when it comes to administrative decentralization, economic development and political participation. In administrative terms, Lebanon is comprised of governorates (muhafazat), which in turn are divided into districts (qada'), each of which contains any number of municipalities (baladiyyat). Municipal governance is thus the third (local) level of public administration in the country. Lebanon's eight governorates are Beirut, 'Akkar, Baalbak-Hermel, Bekaa, Mount Lebanon, Nabatiyya, North Lebanon and South Lebanon. There are 26 districts in total, containing a total of 1,030 municipalities, unevenly spread across the country (Abu-Rish, 2016).

And according to "Section D" of the Lebanese Constitution Preamble that says: "The people are the source of authority and sovereignty; they shall exercise these powers through the constitutional institutions". Having said so, it is obvious, that the direct result of postponing the municipal elections, is a clear violation of the constitution as well as violation of the citizens' rights, since citizens/people are the source of authority and sovereignty.

From a political/philosophical/historical context, if we want to speak about the foundations of our national life in Lebanon, like other – supposedly – civilized countries, the concept of national right plays an essential role in the conception and construction of our national life. Thus, in the writings on one side and in a historical social conjecture on the other side, lie the foundations of this life and national rights.

If the Lebanese democracy – which is a political democracy tending to gradually become an economic/social democracy – is a reality it is thanks to the pronounced interest that the authorities carry today for certain regions and for certain categories of citizens; but on the contrary, the Lebanese "parliamentarism" appears to enlighten spirits as a bad caricature of true parliamentarism.

Doing politics, in the sense in which it should be done nationally, is to engage in subtle maneuvers to reverse a situation to the detriment of citizens and the benefit of another; it is uniting factions around someone to create what we call a popular force; it is using subterfuge and guerrilla tactics with a critical sense that is sometimes caustic but often devoid of constructive character. Because to build is to start from a guiding idea, from a plan.

Some citizens, supporters of the "policy" of the absurd, imagine that the solution can come from a kind of enlightenment that would cause a very grave crisis. As for myself, I admit that I do not have the temperament of an adventurer; and I am not tempted by this kind of eminently hazardous solutions. What must be noted, if we do not want to follow the "Ostrich policy", is that the specter of national unity, a basic problem, obscures, in minds and in facts, any other

question. The way it has been touted, and often stated through questions that apparently should be unfamiliar to it, is such that it is self-deceiving to imagine that it can still be contained.

Back to our main concern, what was done is a clear violation of the Lebanese Constitution and of the citizens' rights. Holding municipal elections is a constitutional and democratic entitlement that is equal in importance to parliamentary elections, and any postponement is inevitably a serious violation of the constitution, especially the right to vote and the principles of periodic elections and devolution of power.

As a believer in Public Institutions, I call upon the Constitutional Council – whose most of his jurisprudences has confirmed the unconstitutionality of the extension laws – to assume its historical responsibility and firmly address the ongoing violation of the Constitution and citizens' rights, because Constitution, Laws, some of the judiciary branch, and good citizenship are the remaining beacon of hope in the current "Lebanese mode".