

In the Grip of Immobilism

The Lebanese State deserves a medal for the not-so-glorious distinction of never failing to miss the boat. Missed opportunities are strung like the beads of an immeasurable rosary and no deadline, be it constitutional or simply necessary for basic administrative function, is now met. One would think that the whole country has somehow mysteriously frozen in space and time.

Lebanon has squandered two full years in its search for the President of the Republic. Although parliamentary elections were held last May under a flawed electoral law, the political class is still unable to create a government. And even when a cabinet does see the light of day, its very structure, which is based on permanent consensus, would make it a paralyzed institution, incapable of making any decision.

The country has also missed the boat of effective municipal waste management. Since the outbreak of the crisis two years ago, no viable decision has been made due to conflicts of interest. The only easy-way-out solution proposed relies on landfills whose location is being fiercely negotiated with different community leaders.

There has also been corner-cutting when it comes to power shortages. Nearly 30

years after the end of the war, power rationing is still in place on a large scale and no decision has been made regarding the installation of new plants or, what would be an even better solution, exploring renewable energy options (hydraulic, solar, wind). Finally, a partial and shaky resolution was imposed by renting highly polluting powerships, without even tackling the main issue.

The public authorities' display of apathy has even extended to the issue of Syrian refugees. Instead of ensuring that they are registered and properly settled in geographically defined camps, the State has subcontracted the problem to NGOs and the UN relief agency. At the same time, red tape has been worse for investors and other wealthy Syrians, who have opted to put their money elsewhere.

In short, there have been missed opportunities in cutting corners and generalized inaction, with the Lebanese political class putting on show such a measure of immaturity that the Lebanese are wondering today whether mechanically celebrating the independence of their country year in year out might be somewhat improper.

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Questions and Concerns Are a Humanitarian Obligation

The Holy See Secretary of State did not declare that Syrian refugees would not return to their homeland definitively, as some would like to interpret. What he did say was that the international community had no intention of returning them at this time, especially that the Russian initiative failed. Lebanon no longer has a card except for the timid return led by the Director General of General Security Major General Abbas Ibrahim. As reluctant and timid as it may seem, this option is the only possible and currently available one until regional conditions are unblocked and untangled, as the issue is rather political than humanitarian. The accusations levelled by Lebanese actors at UN institutions of encouraging non-return are misplaced. The General Security, which is currently coordinating the return, faces great difficulties and the revision and agreeing of names is a time-consuming effort so as not to send back those who could be at risk of retribution

from the regime. This is carried out by the United Nations, as it is explaining to the returnees the living conditions and what would be available to them, whether they would be returning to their villages, and whether houses or shelters are available. These questions – which are also concerns – are the minimum humanitarian obligation to be met in trying to secure the life of these refugees, who although may be a burden to Lebanon, have the right to live in humanitarian conditions at the least. Some of them may not be seeking an easy and comfortable life, but they do not wish death nor another return to Lebanon fleeing an undignified return to their homeland. Ensuring proper return conditions is essential, even if the return would be delayed for a few months... only.

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This supplement is produced by UNDP and funded by Germany.
The Arabic version is distributed with An-Nahar newspaper while the English version is distributed with The Daily Star and the French version with L'Orient-Le Jour.