

RASED for Parliamentary Monitoring Program 12nd Weekly Report on the Performance of the Jordanian 17th Parliament During its 2nd Ordinary Session January 24, 2015

The Regulatory session which was held in the 12th week at the House of Representatives showed clear governmental attention for handling MP questions, especially by the Ministry of Political and Parliamentary Affairs. This ministry is supposed to be tasked with the ministerial response, and not merely to be “a channel for the transfer between the MP and the concerned Minister.”

In this regulatory session, the Minister of Political and Parliamentary Affairs confessed the faultiness in response to the question posed by MP Dr. Zakaria al-Shaykh regarding the Governorate Development Fund, considering that this response came from a non-jurisdictional party. Minister Khalid al-Kalaldeh of Political Development and Parliamentary Affairs said that “it was a mistake, the Ministry of Industry and Trade is responsible and will be processing the answer.”

However, in addition to the government’s delay in responding to MPs’ questions, thereby violating the Internal Regulations of the House of Representatives, it has become apparent that the government did not consult the amendments made to this regulation, specifically the Chapter on Questions and Response Thereto. His Excellency the Minister’s response to MP Bassam al-Battoush that the House lifted all restrictions places in the previous years on questions demonstrates a lack of governmental knowledge in general and at the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs in specific. This is the case especially with regard to the names and matters relating to public affairs, with a number of government parties present in the regulatory session seeming to have absolutely no knowledge of the Internal Regulations.

In the session reported on, MP Bassam al-Battoush suggested to change his question into an interrogation, in case Her Excellency Umayya Touqan, Minister of Finance does not provide an answer including names of the ministers, MPs and Senators, both current and past, who earn a monthly pension. HE Ms. Touqan thereupon responded by providing a list containing the names of all

persons receiving a pension in accordance with the provisions of the Civil Service Retirement Act, including ministers, dignitaries and deputies. Nonetheless, the answer did not include their names, with Ms. Touqan declaring that publication thereof is amongst public information which should not be published.

Al-Battoush responded saying, “We know that the House of Representatives amended its Internal Regulations, and thereby allows inclusion of names in answers. I want my right to receive detailed names to be adhered to, because it is related to public affairs. If not, this question will turn into an interrogation.”

Prime Minister Abdallah Nsour countered; “As I recall, there is an interpretation of the Senate of the Constitution building on the question of the Cabinet and National Assembly, which states ‘is it permissible to request persons’ names and their salaries.’” Thereupon urging the Speaker of the House or Chairman of the Legal Committee to provide an accurate answer on the matter.

In the same session, MP Roula Al-Huroub decided to question Minister of Foreign Affairs Naser Joudeh in the session to take place next Tuesday, after announcing she was not convinced of the government’s response to her question about the Israeli Teiman airport.

Regarding the issue of electricity price spikes which was a topic of widespread interest amongst MPs during the past week, the joint Financial and Energy Committees came to a decision. This was referred to the House for authentication, without having conducted any realistic study of the data and numbers which are supposed to be made available to MPs to testify to the decision and recommendations reached by the Committee.

The decision was reached through the holding of meetings between the two committees, as well as with the Prime Minister and appropriate ministers, and recommendations were formulated without data support of what made the committee reach this decision. However, the committee did conduct a detailed study of the government’s decision to raise the electricity tariff rates and its varying proportional percentages (15%) affecting the different segments according to the Sectoral Classification.

The 12th week also witnessed the Executive Office of the Parliament disseminating an official memorandum to the Members of Parliament. This memo informed the MPs that 10% of the total transportation allowance for MPs will be subtracted for each absence during a Committee or House meeting without prior notice. It is noteworthy that the previous RASED report unveiled a decision by the Executive Office to subtract 10% of the allowance for any absence without justification.

This decision in terms of its form is a positive step to reduce the phenomenon of quorum losses and non-attendance of said meetings. However, in terms of content, RASED argues there remains a need for practical mechanisms for application; it needs to be clearly stated in the Internal Regulation, including acceptable justifications for absence, when an apology for absence during a House or Committee meeting is to be offered, if it includes leaving such a meeting after its commencement, and not to return after an absence. Without such detailed regulations and its incorporation into the House's Regulation, it will merely remain ink on paper.

Parliamentary committees demonstrated mixed levels of activity during the past week. The Administrative Committee held a meeting in which Law 79 of 1966 on organization of cities, villages, and construction was discussed. This law is one of the oldest legislations on Committee's agenda, being placed on it since 49 years. The Administrative Committee registered this step as a reformative privilege and its intention to initiate an open materials and their study. Minister of Municipalities Eng. Walid al-Masri noted that the organization of cities, villages and construction law may be inconsistent with the Municipal and Decentralization Laws in some of its articles. Chairman MP Khamees 'Atieh stressed there is no conflict between the Law being discussed in the Committee and the Municipal and Decentralization Laws with the exception of articles related to the restructuring of committees, which can easily be addressed during the discussion of the three laws.

During the discussion in the Committee, Minister of Municipalities Eng. Walid al-Masri declared that the government will send the Draft Municipal Law to the House of Representatives within 10 to 14 days as it is currently in the last phase of proofreading and being organized as a formal law.

The Integrity and Transparency Committee recommended parliamentary fact-finding to take place in the wake of the parliamentary meeting with heads of public and private universities in a study on a national conference on higher education. This conference would have as aim to compile general recommendations, pay all public universities dues and scholarship fees from the Army and Royal Court accounts as raising funding is a burden on universities in general, and especially troubled universities.

The Legal Committee approved an amended Law on Shari'ah Courts after having held numerous meetings to discuss amendments to this law which reshapes the Law on Shari'ah Courts which was previously discussed in the same committee.

In the Public Services and Transportation Committee, MP Ibrahim al-'Atewa criticized the Greater Amman Mayor Aqel Biltaji regarding the invitation to attend the meeting to discuss the fast-bus project tender, despite attendance of the Executive Director of Transport and Traffic in the Greater Amman Municipality, Dr. Ayman al-Samadi. The same Committee also discussed Temporary Public Transport Law No. 33 of 2010.

The Water and Agriculture Committee held a meeting with official and relevant parties to discuss the request submitted thereto by livestock breeder representatives through the Farmers Union. This meeting was concluded upon the compilation of recommendations on quantities required to support the diet of fodder as well as the export and import of sheep to ensure harmony between the farmer and importer's interests. In addition to the tireless efforts made by the farmers claim on the output of the committees relating to compensation regardless of environmental damage related to the agricultural sector.

The Palestine and National Guidance Committees allocated their combined meeting to coordinate their positions with respect to keep Palestine and the Palestinian cause present in the consciousness of the Arab and Islamic nations.

The Joint Committee (comprised of the Legal, Public Freedoms, and Human Rights committees) continued their efforts to listen to a number of women's organizations, committees, unions and civil society organizations regarding their views on the Parties Draft Law for the year 2015.

In public statements the Chairman of the Committee MP Dr. Mustafa al-'Amawi noted the transparency and openness of the meetings, emphasizing that the debate will be open to all and there is nothing to hide. He also stressed that the Committee believes in partisan life and political equality for all, as ratified in the constitution, adding that in its final form the law is in line with the political reform process taking place in Jordan.

The Rural and Badia Committee dedicated its meeting held last Monday to discuss the issue of the Northern Badia who do not have national representatives.

The Committee of Order and Conduct debated the Code of Conduct for the House of Representatives, specifically a number of its articles and adjustments thereto. According to the Chairman, Adnan al-'Ajarma, the committee will recommend the Code of Conduct to the House of Representatives as a chapter of the Internal Regulations of the House. This requires its amendment and cancellation of Article 143, which states that the Code of Conduct is part of the Code of Conduct.

The Tourism and Antiquities Committee discussed the reality of the tourism sector in Jordan, and announced the continuation of such meetings. This is for the purpose of standing up for and further clarification about the tourism sector, and the need for support therefore due to its paramount importance and requiring its exploitation to support the national economy.

The Joint Committee of the Legal, Economic, and Investment Committees continued debating the Draft Law on Electronic Transactions of 2013. The committee will continue to do so in the coming meetings in attendance of relevant parties to listen to their views and suggestions relating to the Law to be taken into account. The Law is to be completed as soon as possible to be presented to the House of Representatives.

The Health and Environment Committee discussed the amended Draft Law on Medicine and Pharmacology of 2014.