

What next after Turkey's former PM launches new party?

Sat, 2019-12-14 01:37

ANKARA: Turkey's former Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu held the long-awaited publicity meeting for his new political party, the Future Party (Gelecek Partisi) on Dec. 13 in Ankara, a day after he registered it with the Turkish Interior Ministry.

The press conference was broadcast with English and Arabic simultaneous translations.

Davutoglu has previously attached high importance to ties between Turkey and the Arab world, and has repeatedly called for a reengagement with major Arab countries.

The party is expected to erode support for the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, diminishing his grip on the Turkish Parliament.

Gelecek Partisi is the first breakaway party from the AKP, which will be followed by a second, formed by Erdogan's ex-economy tsar, Ali Babacan, with his technocrat and liberal team expected to launch in the first week of January.

Disgruntled voters

Paul T. Levin, director of the Stockholm University Institute for Turkish Studies, said Davutoglu may well have some success in siphoning disgruntled AKP voters away from Erdogan with Babacan.

Davutoglu, once a close ally of Erdogan, gave many references in his address to the bad political management of Turkey. He underlined his support for freedom of religion and belief, liberty, equality, the fight against nepotism and corruption, transparency in party financing, the rule of law, and the return to the parliamentary system.

"Today we establish the party by saying: The future belongs to our people, the future belongs to Turkey," he said.

According to Levin, unlike the clique that now rules the AKP, Davutoglu does not have the reputation of being mired in corruption and nepotism.

"He has strong Islamist credentials and his outspoken criticisms of the AKP's authoritarian turn may entice some religious conservatives dissatisfied by the AKP to switch in protest," he told Arab News.

The council of the party's founders, which has 155 members, symbolizes different segments of Turkish society, with hijab-wearing women, Christians, Kurds, Alevites and others all represented.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The new party is expected to erode support for the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP).
- Davutoglu, 60, resigned from the AKP in September, saying Erdogan's party was unable to solve Turkey's immediate problems.

It is the first time in Turkish history that Turkish citizens with Greek, Armenian and Assyrian roots have taken part in a founders' council. Several associations of Roma, Caucasus and Arab-origin communities were also present.

Ayhan Sefer Ustun, former head of the parliamentary Human Rights Commission, is one of the 18 former deputies from Erdogan's AKP who initiated the party.

Future Party

He said they launched Future Party because the AKP drifted from its core principles like liberty, pluralism, and participative democracy.

"Our party is a new breath into Turkish politics. The participation of so many members to the council shows that there is a need for such a political move. It is an alternative for the voters," he told Arab News.

The Future Party has the support of wealthy businesspeople and civil society representatives as well as academics.

Davutoglu, 60, resigned from the AKP in September, saying Erdogan's party was unable to solve Turkey's immediate problems because each intra-party criticism was labeled as "treason."

His rebellion within the AKP was mainly triggered by the party's critical losses in nationwide local elections in March, especially in Istanbul and Ankara, as well as other normally safe areas.

Levin said Davutoglu lacked the broad popularity of his rival, though, which could hinder him.

The next elections in Turkey are set for 2023, but there is a growing expectation for a snap election next year.

According to Turkish law, a political party is eligible to stand if it completes the establishment of local branches in at least half of the cities throughout the country, and holds its general congress six months before elections.

"Would Davutoglu be able to climb above the single digits in the polls? It would greatly surprise me and most other observers. Granted, the next election is scheduled for 2023, and that is exactly three lifetimes in Turkish politics, so never say never," Levin said.

On the day of the party's launch, the newly established nationalist Good

Party's leader, Meral Aksener, announced that it would support the Future Party with deputies to help make it into Parliament at the next election.

It is almost certain that the new breakaway parties will enter an alliance with relatively established political parties to overcome the 10 percent electoral threshold.



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[Ahmet Davutoglu](#)

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[Future Party \(Gelecek Partisi\)](#)

Former PM calls for overhaul of Turkey in challenge to ErdoganErdogan's former allies to challenge AKP's rule in Turkey

[Pompeo says US stands with Lebanese people as Hezbollah chief warns of delay in forming government](#)

Author:

AFP

ID:

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Fri, 2019-12-13 19:34

BEIRUT: US Secretary Mike Pompeo said on Friday that the US supported the Lebanese people in their fight against government corruption and terrorist threats.

Pompeo took to Twitter on Friday, where he posted: We stand with the people of #Lebanon to fight against corruption and terrorism. Today we designated two prominent Lebanese businessmen whose illicit financial activity supports Hizballah. We will continue to use all the tools at our disposal to counter the threat Hizballah poses.

We stand with the people of [#Lebanon](#) to fight against corruption and terrorism. Today we designated two prominent Lebanese businessmen whose illicit financial activity supports Hizballah. We will continue to use all the tools at our disposal to counter the threat Hizballah poses.

– Secretary Pompeo (@SecPompeo) [December 13, 2019](#)

On Friday, the US Treasury Department imposed new sanctions against two alleged Hezbollah money launderers and financiers, including a diamond trader who collected art.

It accused Lebanon-based Nazem Said Ahmad, whose art collection includes works by Pablo Picasso and Andy Warhol, and his companies of helping to launder large sums of money for the group.

“Ahmad, who has a vast art collection, is one of Hezbollah’s top donors, generating funds through his longstanding ties to the ‘blood diamond’ trade,” it said.

A second man based in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Saleh Assi, was sanctioned for laundering money through Ahmad’s diamond business and supporting another alleged financier already under sanctions.

Pompeo’s comments came as the head of Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, warned that the formation of a new cabinet desperately needed to redress a tumbling economy could take time.

Lebanon has been swept by unprecedented nationwide protests since October 17, demanding the complete overhaul of a political class deemed inept and corrupt.

The government stepped down on October 29, but bitterly divided political parties have failed to agree on a new premier ever since.

Hezbollah chief Nasrallah spoke ahead of parliamentary consultations to nominate a new prime minister on Monday.

"The consultations are supposed to take place on Monday and we hope that whoever receives most votes will be designated to form a government," he said in a televised address.

"But the formation will be no easy feat," he warned.

In a multi-confessional country often in political deadlock, the name of the new prime minister is frequently picked before symbolic parliamentary consultations.

"Until now the parliamentary blocs have not agreed on a name" for the new premier, Nasrallah said.

He said it was likely each bloc would "name who it wanted without any prior agreements."

The protesters have demanded a government made up solely of experts not affiliated to the country's traditional political parties, but analysts have warned this could be a tall order.

Nasrallah said he would support a "government of national partnership," and one with "the widest possible representation" that did not exclude any of the major parties.

He said it could be headed by outgoing premier Saad Hariri or someone the outgoing premier designated.

The names of various potential candidates have been circulated in recent weeks, but the Sunni Muslim establishment on Sunday threw their support behind Hariri returning.

The international community has urged for swift cabinet formation to implement key economic reforms and unlock international aid.

The World Bank estimates a third of Lebanese live in poverty and this could rise to half.

It has projected a recession of at least 0.2 percent for 2019.

A sworn enemy of neighboring Israel, Hezbollah is the only faction not to have disarmed after Lebanon's 1975-1990 civil war.

The United States considers Hezbollah a "terrorist" organization, but the movement is also a key political player with ministers in the outgoing government and seats in parliament.

The United States has targeted the Shiite party with tough sanctions, ramped up under the administration of President Donald Trump.

Nasrallah lambasted comments by US officials, including Secretary of State Mike Pompeo who Wednesday said the Lebanese were aware of the "risk" of Hezbollah being in their country.

Nasrallah suggested the United States might be “blackmailing” the Lebanese, and only offering to help in a time of economic crisis if they first dealt with that “danger.”

He alleged the US had been unable to neutralize the movement despite actions including “sanctions.”



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Lebanon protesters defiant despite Hezbollah attack
Hezbollah says its ‘arm won’t be twisted’ as Lebanon crisis deepens

[New Algerian president faces tough challenge](#)

Author:

Sat, 2019-12-14 01:10

ALGIERS: Algeria's new president faces the country's biggest political crisis in decades, a hostile economic climate and attacks on his legitimacy after winning an election with low turnout opposed by a massive protest movement.

Abdelmadjid Tebboune, 74, beat the other four candidates – all also former senior officials – to win the race outright with 58 percent of the vote, ensuring there will be no second round.

The authorities hope the election of a new leader will end months of turmoil following the toppling of Abdelaziz Bouteflika, whose 20-year-rule was brought to an end in April when the army pulled its support after mass demonstrations.

But protesters have dismissed the entire election as a ploy by Algeria's shadowy, military-backed authorities to quell the months-long uprising and restore the old political order.

As housing minister, Tebboune was responsible for building the tallest mosque in the world, a project the government pushed as a national symbol, and for expanding the state's generous program of low-cost homes with a million new apartments.

Officials say 40 percent of voters took part in the poll, enough to demonstrate the legitimacy of the exercise.

But protesters and their sympathizers who boycotted the election could dispute Tebboune's mandate. And, as the protest movement has no clear leadership, it is not clear how Tebboune could negotiate a widely accepted path forward.

Aside from the months-long political crisis, he will also face Algeria's most difficult economic situation in decades, with declining energy revenues and bitter cuts to state spending.

Energy exports, the source of 95 percent of state revenue, fell 12.5 percent this year. The government has burned through more than half its foreign reserves since energy prices began dropping in 2014, and has approved a 9 percent cut in public spending next year, while keeping politically sensitive subsidies untouched.

It has also approved new investment rules to allow foreign companies to own majority shares in "nonstrategic sectors," and to make it easier for international oil firms to work with state energy giant Sonatrach.

Tebboune was viewed as a technocrat during his years as a Cabinet minister under Bouteflika. He served as premier in 2017 before being pushed out after less than three months when he fell out with influential business tycoons in the president's coterie, many of whom are now in prison on corruption charges.

Separate from politics

Like the other candidates, Tebboune has tried to harness the protest movement

as a source of support for reform while rejecting its overriding message that the entire ruling elite should go and that the military should quit politics.

He has used the circumstances of his brief premiership in 2017 to polish his credentials as a man of integrity who stood up to Bouteflika. He vowed during the campaign to “separate money from politics.”

However, his own son was also arrested in the purge that followed Bouteflika’s fall and is now also awaiting trial accused of graft. Tebboune supporters said his son’s plight proved his independence from the military-backed authorities.



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Algeria declares former PM Tebboune winner of presidential election
Violence, protests mar Algeria’s disputed presidential elections

[**A project helps Syrian entrepreneurs**](#)

in four countries escape the shadow of war

Fri, 2019-12-13 00:14

CAIRO: The Startup Roadshow was founded in 2018 to help Syrian refugees and expats in four different countries: Lebanon, Iraq, Turkey, and Jordan.

It was established when Spark, a Dutch organization supporting youth projects all over the world, reached out to Jusoor.

“We have been running our entrepreneurship program for five years, and we’ve been running training boot camps and competitions for Syrian startups,” said Dania Ismail, board member and director of Jusoor’s Entrepreneurship Program.

“We have also developed our own proprietary training curriculum, which is tailored to Syrian entrepreneurs, in the region and around the world.”

Spark sought out Jusoor to create a project to support Syrian entrepreneurs in those four countries, later bringing on Startups Without Borders to handle the competition’s outreach, marketing and PR.

“We came up with this idea where a team of trainers, facilitators, and mentors would move from one city to another because it’s hard for Syrian youth to travel around. So, we decided to go to them,” said Ismail, a Syrian expat all her life.

The competition goes through five cities: Beirut, Irbil, Amman, Gaziantep and İstanbul.

The boot camps last for five days in each city, and throughout the Roadshow, 100 entrepreneurs will undergo extensive training and one-on-one mentorship to develop their skills and insights into the business world.

“We have five modules that are taught on different days. Then, the pitches are developed, practiced and presented,” Ismail, 39, said.

“In each location, we pick the top two winners – in total, we’ll have top 10 winners from each city.”

The top 10 teams pitched their ideas live in front of a panel of judges, at the second edition of Demo Day 2019, which was held in Amman on Nov. 4.

The best three Syrian-led startups won cash prizes of \$15,000, \$10,000, and \$7,000, respectively.

They also had the opportunity to pitch their business ideas during Spark Ignite’s annual conference in Amsterdam. The competition aims to give young Syrians the hard-to-get chance to secure a foothold in the business world.

“We’re trying to empower young Syrians who are interested in the

entrepreneurial and tech space. We want to empower them with knowledge, skills and confidence to launch their ideas,” Ismail said.

Despite the limited duration of the Roadshow and the lack of financial aid, the people behind the program still do their best to help all applicants.

“We try as much as possible to continue supporting them on their journeys with mentorship, advice and connections through our very large network of experts and entrepreneurs,” she said.

Jusoor’s efforts to help Syrian youth do not stop at the Roadshow, and the future holds much in store for this fruitful collaboration.

“We’re expanding our entrepreneurship program, and our next project will be an accelerator program that will continue working with a lot of the promising teams that come out of the Startup Roadshow,” Ismail said.

“We want to provide something that has a partial online component and a partial on-ground one, as well as an investment component where these companies receive funding as investment, not just grants and prizes,” she said in relation to the second phase of the Entrepreneurship Program, which is launching in 2020.

Ismail said: “The Roadshow was created so that Syrian youth can have the chance to change their reality, becoming more than victims of an endless war.

“The competition gives them the tools to become active members of society, wherever they may be, contributing to the economies of those countries.

“Once you’ve built up this generation and given them those skills and expertise, they’ll be the generation that comes back to rebuild the economy in Syria, once things are stable enough there.

“We hope that a lot of these young entrepreneurs the Startup Roadshow was able to inspire, train or help will be the foundation for the future of a small- to medium-sized economy inside Syria.”

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Poll bodes well for future of women's empowerment in the Arab world
Podcasting presents exciting opportunity for Arab entrepreneurs

[Israel bars Gaza's Christians from visiting Bethlehem and Jerusalem at Christmas](#)

Author:

Reuters

ID:

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Thu, 2019-12-12 19:12

JERUSALEM/GAZA: Christians in the Gaza Strip will not be allowed to visit holy cities such as Bethlehem and Jerusalem to celebrate Christmas this year,

Israeli authorities said on Thursday.

Gazan Christians will be granted permits to travel abroad but none will be allowed to go to Israel and the occupied West Bank, home to many sites holy to Christians, a spokeswoman for Israel's military liaison to the Palestinians said.

Israel tightly restricts movements out of the Gaza Strip, territory controlled by Hamas.

The spokeswoman said that following "security orders," Gazans would be allowed to travel abroad via Israel's Allenby Bridge border crossing with Jordan but not to visit cities in Israel or the West Bank.

Gaza has only around 1,000 Christians – most of them Greek Orthodox – among a population of 2 million in the narrow coastal strip.

This year's decision is a break with usual policy. Last year, Israel granted permits for close to 700 Gazan Christians to travel to Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Nazareth and other holy cities that draw thousands of pilgrims each holiday season.

Gisha, an Israeli rights group, said the ban points "to the intensifying of access restrictions between the two parts of the Palestinian territory," calling it "a deepening of Israel's separation policy" for the West Bank and Gaza.

The Palestinians seek to set up a state in the West Bank and Gaza, territory Israel captured in the 1967 Middle East war.

Israel in the past has defended its restrictions on Gazans traveling to the West Bank, saying many Palestinians from Gaza stay on illegally when granted short-term permits.

In Gaza, one Christian woman voiced hope Israel would reverse its policy so she could visit her family in the West Bank city of Ramallah.

"Every year I pray they will give me a permit so I can celebrate Christmas and see my family," Randa El-Amash, 50, said, adding: "It will be more joyful to celebrate in Bethlehem and in Jerusalem."

Christian leaders in Jerusalem condemned the move, but added that they are appealing to Israeli authorities to reverse the decision.

"Other people around the world are allowed to travel to Bethlehem. We think Gaza's Christians should have that right, too," said Wadie Abu Nassar, an adviser to local church leaders.



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Ancient West Bank site draws Christians, and controversyLebanese monastery brings together Christians scattered by war