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Nasnas urges government to fill vacancies in ESC

Roger Nasnas, the head of the Social and Economic Council poses for a photo during an interview with The Daily Star in Beirut, Thursday, Aug. 21, 2014. (The Daily Star/Mohammad Azakir)

Dana Halawi | The Daily Star

BEIRUT: President of the Lebanese Economic and Social Council Roger Nasnas called upon the government Thursday to break years of stalemate and appoint a new assembly for the ESC.

“We are trying to raise awareness so that our politicians and our public opinion will understand that the ESC has a very important role to play in economic and social life. Therefore they [ministers] should set aside their demands in terms of representatives in order to let the institution work again,” he told The Daily Star in an exclusive interview.

The ESC is an institution that was created within the scope of the Taif agreement. The organizational law governing the body’s operations was adopted by Parliament in 1995, and the ESC’s first assembly was appointed by the government in 1999.

The council gathers representatives of Lebanon’s civil society and is composed of 72 members from different sectors and backgrounds.

Nasnas was elected as president in December 2000 and still holds this responsibility today.

However, his activities have been largely limited to keeping the institution operational until the appointment of new members.

“The inability to appoint new members is due to the paralysis in state institutions,” Nasnas said, adding that action should be taken soon to enable the council to assume its full responsibilities.

The ESC’s main role is to advise the government in its economic and social policy.

“It is very important to appoint the assembly and then the civil society will be able to participate by enriching the society and government with its studies and practical expertise in the different sectors of the economy,” he said. “This will help in formulating a broad economic and social strategy.”

Although the lack of a full assembly has curtailed the ESC’s activities, Nasnas said that he has been able to create momentum for the council by communicating and creating direct links with economic and social councils worldwide.

“I created a great image for Lebanon through the council and proved its presence outside the country,” he said.

Nasnas added that he participated in a meeting in Bucharest last May which gathered economic and social councils from around the world.

The participants, thanks to the efforts of Nasnas, sent a letter to Prime Minister Tammam Salam informing him that they would pressure their governments to support Lebanon regarding the issue of Syrian refugees.

“I also received an email today from ESC in Congo offering to help on the Syrian refugee issue,” he said.

Nasnas has also launched several workshops and conducted important studies in cooperation with experts in order to draw a clear vision that can be implemented upon the appointment of any government.

The studies conducted by Nasnas and his team of experts covered issues such as the state of private high school education, the economic and social crisis, small and medium enterprises, social security reform and costs of production in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan.

Nasnas has also invited experts from foreign councils to review the law that was prepared by the Parliament for the establishment of the council.

“The law that was adopted by the Parliament for establishing the council should be reformed,” he said. “A team of experts did a study on how it should be reformed in terms of structure and earmarking money to members in addition to changing other items in the law.”

