

# Commissions of the Lebanese House of Representatives pass the bill on 'return of stolen money' and is expected to be implemented

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Commissions in the Lebanese House of Representatives approved the 'draft law on the return of stolen money' submitted to the House of Representatives by the (Maronite Christian) Free Patriotic Movement (ÖYH) with some amendments. This approval was seen as a complementary step to a number of laws recently passed within the anti-corruption framework, including the Illegal Enrichment Act, the Anti-Corruption National Commission Act and the Criminal Review Act.

Parliament Vice-President and MP Elie Ferzli called the adoption of the law a 'high-level reform step', stating that the formula of the law takes into account all international agreements and is linked to the National Commission for Anti-Corruption, with the aim of identifying those who may be linked to corruption in some way. Ferzli urged the existing cabinet or any newly formed cabinet to rapidly pass the necessary decrees to put the law into effect, so that the National Anti-Corruption Commission can begin work immediately.

Ibrahim Kanaan, chairman of the Lebanese Parliament's Finance and Budget Committee, said that the adoption of these laws meant that the House of Representatives and in particular the joint committees, as well as the Finance and Budget Commission, fulfilled their duties. Kanaan added that now a law must be enacted for the return of stolen money.

Kanaan emphasized that if coordination between the judiciary, the law and the House of Representatives is not achieved, all efforts may be in vain, and pointed out that the Law on Independence of the Judiciary, one of the basic laws followed by the Administration and Justice Commission, must be approved soon so that this coordination does not violate the independence of the judiciary. Kanaan is also great about opening the Lebanese judicial system to the contracting mechanisms that allow serious and practical decisions and procedures at the implementation level, as the bill on the return of stolen money is regulated in cooperation with international parties in accordance with the

United Nations (UN) Anti-Corruption Convention. He stated that it is important. Hadi Habiş, a member of the Administration and Justice Commission (Sunni) Future Movement MP, said that with the approval of the draft law on the return of the stolen money, the lawmakers came together in the same framework with the hope of mobilizing the National Anti-Corruption Commission.

Although the House of Representatives has approved some laws directly related to corruption, experts say that the punishment of those who still perpetrate corruption in Lebanon still faces major obstacles due to the fact that these laws are often 'not enacted or discharged'.

Legal expert Dr. Paul Morcos told Şarku'l Avsat that the approval of the bill on the return of stolen money could help make progress in the fight against corruption. Because Dr. According to Morcos, this law establishes the necessary enforcement mechanisms, tools and techniques. However, the most important thing is to demonstrate a genuine intention to fight corruption and the return of stolen money, Dr. Morcos underlined that the lack of law has never been a major obstacle in this area.

Dr. Paul Marcos continued:

“If the government were serious about fighting corruption, it could have benefited from the 2009 UN Anti-Corruption Convention, which includes Lebanon and provides for international cooperation on the return of stolen money. In addition, Lebanon participated in the Automatic Information Exchange Agreement to prevent tax evasion between countries within the framework of the Global Forum on Transparency and Information Exchange for Tax Purposes.

Noting that apart from international agreements in Lebanon, a law was approved in 2015 to combat money laundering and terrorist financing, clearly define financial crimes and misconduct crimes, and which can serve as a basis for the punishment of those responsible. Morcos stated that the law also allows the Special Investigation Commission at the Lebanese Central Bank (BDL) to apply to financial units abroad to request information about the stolen money that was taken abroad.

Stating that the Special Investigation Commission 'can take action either with an order from the Public Prosecutor's Office or if serious doubts about the accounts of individuals are conveyed directly to him', Dr. "Even if the law is passed, the law cannot change anything unless the parties involved in the executive, administration, judiciary and security areas really intend to sacrifice the perpetrators, and Lebanon cannot recover even a penny of the stolen money," Morcos said.

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