

France's Macron discussed Tunisia situation with President Saied

Sat, 2021-10-02 22:21

PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron discussed the political situation in Tunisia with President Kais Saied, and Saied told Macron that a new government would be formed in the coming days, Macron's Elysee department said on Saturday.

On Friday, Tunisia's parliament speaker Rached Ghannouchi declared the assembly in session and urged lawmakers to resume work, defying Saied's suspension of the assembly in a new escalation of the country's political crisis.

Saied has been under domestic and international pressure to name a government after his intervention in July, when he dismissed the prime minister, suspended parliament and assumed executive authority.



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Tunisia's first woman prime minister raises spirits despite power grab

Algeria recalls ambassador to France as tensions rise

Author:

Reuters

ID:

1633192822810666000

Sat, 2021-10-02 15:55

ALGIERS: Algeria decided Saturday to recall its ambassador to France for consultations, as diplomatic tensions mount with Paris.

The move comes after France's President Emmanuel Macron made critical remarks about Algeria published in French daily Le Monde in which he said the former French colony was ruled by a "political-military system".

"Algeria recalls its ambassador (Mohamed Antar-Daoud) from Paris for consultations," state television said, quoting a statement from the presidency.

It said a longer statement would follow to explain the move.

Le Monde on Saturday quoted Macron as saying Algeria has an "official history" which has been "totally re-written".

He said this history was "not based on truths" but "on a discourse of hatred towards France", according to Le Monde.

The remarks, widely picked up by Algerian media, came in a meeting earlier this week between Macron and relatives of figures from Algeria's war of independence.

It is the second time that Algeria recalls an ambassador from France.

Algiers also recalled its ambassador in May 2020 after French media broadcast a documentary about Algeria's pro-democracy Hirak protest movement.

Saturday's move comes amid tense ties following a decision by Paris to reduce the number of visas granted to citizens from Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia.

The Algerian foreign ministry summoned the French ambassador on Wednesday to protest the visa ruling.

France on Tuesday said it would sharply reduce the number of visas granted to people from Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, accusing the former French colonies of not doing enough to allow illegal immigrants to return.

Algeria's foreign ministry handed "a formal protest" to French ambassador Francois Gouette.

It called the visa reduction an "unfortunate act" that caused "confusion and ambiguity as to its motivation and its scope".

Morocco's Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita has described the French move as "unjustified".

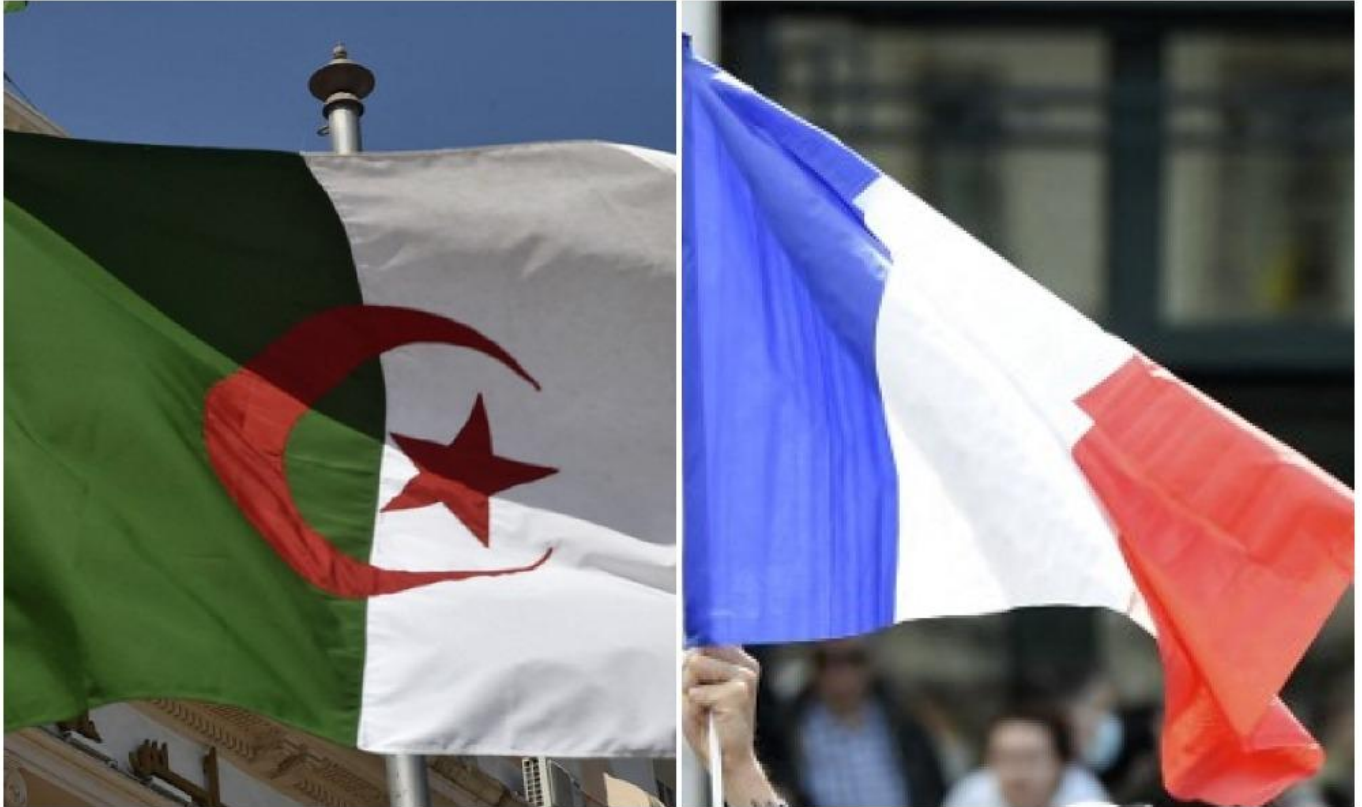
There has not been yet an official reaction from Tunisia.

French government spokesman Gabriel Attal told Europe 1 radio on Tuesday that the visa reduction decision was "unprecedented".

Paris made that choice, he said, because Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia "are refusing to take back nationals who we do not want or cannot keep in France".

The radio said Macron took the decision a month ago after failed diplomatic

efforts with the three North African countries.



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[Efforts ongoing to resume the Renaissance Dam negotiations, says Egyptian minister](#)

Sat, 2021-10-02 16:06

CAIRO: Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry said there was currently communication between the Democratic Republic of Congo and the three countries involved in negotiations about the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam.

Ethiopia says the dam on its Blue Nile is crucial to its economic development and providing power to its population.

Egypt views the dam as a grave threat to its Nile water supplies, on which it

is almost entirely dependent. Sudan, another downstream country, has expressed concern about the safety of the dam and the impact on its own dams and water stations.

Shoukry said his country was “always ready to engage in negotiations,” but stressed the importance of having a legal and binding agreement on filling and operating the dam’s reservoir based on the outcome of a UN Security Council session.

He described the council’s statement on the dam as a “great achievement” that came after a lot of hard work to reach a consensus between the body’s 14 member states, including its permanent members.

He said a DRC delegation had visited Egypt and expressed a number of ideas, and that there were currently high-level communications under the auspices of Congolese President Felix Tshisekedi.

“The goal is to reach a binding legal agreement on filling and operating the dam within a short, pre-announced period, and that there be an enhanced framework of observers assisting the African Union to provide solutions and proposals,” Shoukry said.

He also responded to statements from Ethiopian officials saying they would refuse to sign any binding agreement: “It is propaganda for Ethiopian consumption and a challenge to the international community. It proves that Egypt has flexibility as a responsible country and it casts shadows on the actions of the Ethiopian government. Egypt does not set pre-conditions for engaging in negotiations.”

The minister explained that his country involved Ethiopia in “good faith,” but, after a long period of negotiations, both Egypt and Sudan felt these negotiations were “endless.”

“We place our trust in Tshisekedi that negotiations will resume in accordance with what was approved by the African Union office, as well as the outcomes of the presidential statement issued by the Security Council. If the Ethiopian side has the desire to reach an agreement, we are fully prepared.

“If this intransigence continues, this does not indicate a comfortable situation and I predict more tension at the regional level. I have emphasised many times that the matter is related to preserving Egypt’s water needs, and we have seen even after the first and the second filling that Egypt is taking measures that secure its needs and can continue to provide the required protection in different ways.”

The dam negotiations between Sudan, Ethiopia and Egypt have been suspended since the failure of the last round held in Kinshasa.

Over the course of previous rounds, Cairo and Khartoum insisted on reaching a binding agreement before the second filling, which Addis Ababa has already implemented.



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Ethiopia will 'pay price' for Renaissance Dam: Arab League chief
Egypt welcomes UN call for new Renaissance Dam talks

Keeping Turkey-EU ties alive ‘hugely important for all sides,’ says ambassador

Author:

Menekse Tokyay

ID:

1633123478925812500

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ANKARA: Despite several disputes in Turkey-EU relations last year, including tensions in the East Mediterranean and the migrant crisis, both sides are continuing their cooperation in various spheres.

This work ranges from the demining of vast territories along the Iranian border, opening hundreds of schools for Syrian refugees, and developing cooperation to combat climate change together.

On Sept. 28, the EU and the UN Development Programme launched a 18.6 million euros (\$21.5 million) project to clear 83,000 landmines along the country's eastern border with Iran by Jan. 2023 in partnership with Turkish authorities.

The latest demining operation, which began on Tuesday, is considered the largest ever undertaken by the UN.

Ambassador Nikolaus Meyer-Landrut, who heads the EU delegation to Turkey, said the project was helping the country fulfill its commitments to the Ottawa Convention, which it has been a party to since 2004 and bans the use of anti-personnel landmines.

"The EU funding helps to improve the working conditions of Turkey's border management authorities," he told Arab News. "Anti-personnel mines are very dangerous, indiscriminately killing animals, civilians including many children, and it does not constitute anymore and anyway a modern border management system."

Turkey currently hosts about 4 million refugees. Afghans, the second-largest refugee community in Turkey after Syrians, are mostly arriving through the Iranian border.

In terms of EU-Turkey relations, accession negotiations are almost frozen although EU leaders earlier this year said the bloc was ready to support a concrete and positive agenda with Turkey, especially in the areas of economic cooperation and migration.

On the other hand, the European Parliament is also discussing a report recommending an end to the Customs Union and replacing it with a free trade agreement. For many, giving up the Customs Union would also mean giving up the accession process and that would create political problems, especially under conditions where Ankara supports the modernization of the Customs Union to cover sectors such as services, tourism, business and e-commerce.

"The EU and Turkey, since the beginning of this year, are working toward the implementation of a positive agenda. In several of its decisions, the

European Council has mentioned different points that it wishes to make progress on, such as sustained cooperation on migration issues and cooperation in Afghanistan as well as the resumption of high-level dialogue," the ambassador said.

As a first step, on Sept. 16, the European Commission's executive vice president for the European Green Deal, Frans Timmermans, and the Turkish minister of environment and urbanization, Murat Kurum, met in Brussels for a high-level dialogue on climate.

Brussels also welcomed Turkey's recent decision to ratify the Paris Agreement before the climate change summit in Glasgow next month.

As another avenue for high-level dialogue, the EU commissioner for home affairs, Ylva Johansson, will visit Turkey mid-October to launch the Turkey-EU High-Level Dialogue Mechanism on migration management including visa liberalization issues.

The third high-level dialogue before the end of the year will be about cooperation on health issues, including the alignment of digital vaccination certificates.

Turkey's efforts to integrate the Syrian refugee population have been welcomed by Brussels, which has contributed to several projects.

Young Turkish and Syrian students, sitting next to each other, playing together and learning the same curriculum, as well as young Syrian university students studying law at Turkish universities, were all very positive experiences and these people would be always grateful to Turkey for all they had learned as part of the national education system, the EU ambassador said. "Whatever you are able to teach to the young generation now will be the basis of their future lives. They will be able to contribute to society, they will be able to earn their own lives, pay taxes in whatever country they will be. To give these people a perspective, they should be educated. It is for their personal benefit and the benefit of society. It is the best prevention strategy for not being a lost generation," Meyer-Landrut said.

EU ambassadors approved on Wednesday 149.6 million euros (\$173.5 million) as additional funding for Syrian refugees in Turkey. The support will extend the EU's monthly cash assistance to the refugees.

However, no progress has been made so far on the update of the migration deal signed with Turkey in 2016.

And, despite an on-off peace process over recent years, Cyprus still remains a sticking point for Turkey-EU relations, especially after the divided island became an EU member in 2004.

Despite several diplomatic efforts by the UN, no comprehensive settlement has been reached so far in the decades-long dispute.

"The UN is the roof organization under which Cyprus talks need to take place. The UN resolutions set the framework and the UN is the actor. The EU will support the efforts of the UN and every effort of the parties to negotiate a solution," Meyer-Landrut said.

The EU supports a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation in Cyprus, while Turkey claims the time has come for talks between two states, not two communities. Turkey expects the incoming German government – which still remains a driving force in the EU – to support and contribute to the betterment of Ankara's ties with Brussels, similar to outgoing Chancellor Angela Merkel's rule. Turkey's EU ties predate an association agreement that it signed with the EU's predecessor, the European Economic Community, in 1964. The country was

granted the status of a candidate country in 1999 and started accession negotiations in 2005.



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[Qatar women ready to contest polls described as 'extremely positive step'](#)

Author:

AFP

ID:

1633123370345807100

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DOHA: Qatari women are standing in the country's first legislative election Saturday, but in far lower numbers than men.

Of the 284 hopefuls running for the 30 available council seats, 28 are women. The remaining 15 seats will be appointed by the emir.

"It's an extremely positive step that women are part of this process," said Elham Fakhro, senior Gulf analyst at the International Crisis Group.

"However, I think we do have to limit our expectations (of their influence) ... as there are only 28 women running for positions – it really shouldn't be surprising."

One candidate, Leena Al-Dafa, said her priorities if elected would be promoting education for women, supporting female teachers and the issue of citizenship for the children of Qatari women.

Qatari citizenship can currently only be inherited by children from their fathers, meaning the children of a Qatari woman who marries someone of another nationality will not be citizens.

This affects the children's ability to benefit from lavish grants, land allocations and other state support.

"The most important issues for me are (citizenship of) children of Qatari women and documents. This is the most important issue that I adopted from the heart," Dafa said ahead of a campaign event.

Dafa, an education official who is running in Qatar's 17th district against two women and seven men, said competence was more important than gender.

"I do not see it as a competition between me and the men because I see the men as complementary to the legislative process.

"And we are talking about competencies, not gender," she added, before addressing a small crowd of women voters at Qatar's Education City golf club. Fakhro suggested the emir could directly appoint women "to improve the gender balance" if none or few are elected – similar to what happened in Bahrain's legislative election.

Representation of women in Qatar is stronger than in its Gulf neighbors with the Health Ministry led by a woman and the Foreign Ministry represented by a spokeswoman.

Women also hold prominent roles in the World Cup organizing committee as well as philanthropy and the arts, medicine, law and business.

The constitution of Qatar provides for "equal opportunities for all citizens."

Men outnumber women in Qatar by 2.6 to one, according to the latest official data, largely because of the disproportionate number of migrant workers in Qatar who are men.

Qatari officials have previously insisted "gender equality and female empowerment" are central to the Gulf state's "success and vision."

Fakhro, the analyst, said women running in Gulf elections was an important signal "that these countries are ready to advance women and do want them to be part of public life."

"(They can) advance women's rights and to ensure legislative equality in areas of family law and divorce – and across the board," she said.

Human Rights Watch previously acknowledged that Qatari women had "broken barriers and achieved significant progress," pointing to the number of female graduates, which outstrips males, and the high per capita number of female doctors and lawyers.



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