

Netanyahu Blasts 'Failing European Economies' During Cabinet Meeting

PM blames career bureaucrats for woes of Europe in order to justify bill that would allow ministers to appoint cronies to carry out their agenda.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has justified a bill that would increase the scope of personal appointments ministers could make in their ministries by disparaging European economies that were run by career bureaucrats.

"Look at what's left in Europe, their miserable economies," Netanyahu said, implying that Israel was at risk of moving in the same direction unless the bill at issue was passed, at Sunday's cabinet meeting during a debate on the bill.

"Who runs the government ministries? The clerks," Netanyahu said. "The guidelines [regarding the work in government ministries] have to go through the elected officials. We have to let the government manifest its policies." He called the bill under debate "the very least" that needs to be done, adding, "When they think that this is politicization, they don't know what they're talking about.

"The proposal would allow ministry directors-general, whom the ministers choose, to appoint a deputy director-general, who would not have to be vetted, to help carry out the minister's agenda. The move would allow the personal appointments of deputy directors-general in any ministry with more than 150 employees, and would actually add a position to six ministries where no such position exists.

In the end a vote on the bill was postponed, but Netanyahu and other ministers are determined to get more control over the running of their ministries and another debate will be held in two weeks. Opponents of the bill say it is aimed at making more senior positions available for politicians' cronies.

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The bill's sponsor, Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked (Habayit Hayehudi), told Netanyahu, "You are prime minister since 2009, but until now you've done nothing on the matter; we were the first." She added, "The ministerial team

worked for the past 10 months to see how we could simplify procedures and increase the ministers' influence.

"She was annoyed by the vote's postponement. "There are ministers who talk and there are ministers who act," she said. "Today the cabinet missed the opportunity to begin the change that will restore governance to the elected officials.

"Tourism Minister Yariv Levin, who together with Shaked headed a committee that reviewed the issue, said: "The opposition by some of the government minister's to the decision today prevented a historic change in the process of appointing the senior officials in government service. As a result, an opportunity was missed, that might not return, to significantly strengthen the ability of ministers to assure the worthy appointment of people who are committed to their policies.

"Levin added, "The proposal's opponents are personally responsible for the continuation of the current lack of governability, the inability to realize the ministers' policies and the serious and ongoing harm to the government's work."

Attorney General Avichai Mendelblit supports the reform. His deputy, Dina Zilber, presented their view to the cabinet. "These proposals demonstrate balance and will pass judicial review, even if they don't go down one's throat smoothly."

The cabinet also debated a change in the structure of the search committees that identify candidates for various senior ministry positions. Minister Yuval Steinitz, who was critical of the proposal to make personal appointments of deputy directors-general, supported this change. "The proposal is an enormous improvement over what we have now," he said.

Zilber agreed that the "changes in the search committees will ease bureaucratization."

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