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## **Tebboune, Haddad and the enigma of Saïd Bouteflika**

On 15th July the visit of the Algerian Prime Minister Abdelmajid Tebboune to the Ecole supérieure de la sécurité sociale in Algiers revealed frictions inside the country's political system. The event displayed tensions between Tebboune and the head of the Forum des chefs d'entreprises (FCE, the Algeria's employers organization) Ali Haddad. Even though Haddad had been invited to the event, he was nonetheless asked to leave the conference room before the arrival of Tebboune.

It is not the first time that Haddad had to face the hostility of the government's officials. During the last Forum African d'investissement et d'affaires held in Algiers in December 2016 Haddad was already in an uncomfortable position. In that occasion the former Prime Minister Abdelmalek Sellal and his Foreign Minister Ramtane Lamamra quit the Centre Internationale des Conférences in a clear snub to Haddad, accusing the head of the FCE of violating the diplomatic protocol, as Haddad was expected to speak before Sellal, Lamamra and the former Industry Minister Abdeslam Bouchouareb.

In this occasion it became clear that Haddad had become a powerful and influential figure, considered a threat by different political figures engaged in navigating the opaque political system. Chief executive of the Entreprise des travaux routiers, hydrauliques et bâtiments (ETRHB, a small family business from Azeffoun, in the wilaya of Tizi-Ouzou), in 2014 Haddad was involved in the presidential campaign of Abdelaziz Bouteflika, playing a relevant role in raising funds to help the President achieve his fourth mandate.

Appointed head of the FCE just after the presidential election, Haddad saw its company being awarded with several contracts for public works by the Algerian government. The ETRHB was engaged in the building of the East-West highway, rails, and stadiums; it extended its activities in different sectors such as sport, media and hotels. In a few years, Haddad's company became a powerful economic group, taking often advantage of the 51/49 rule imposed by the Algerian government for joint ventures with foreign partners.

Detractors consider him as an oligarch that depleted the State's budget thanks to his connections with the Bouteflika's administration. More recently press sources said that the ETRHB was put on notice due to considerable delays in the contracts awarded and for having received advance payments for public works without implementing them. As an example, in 2014 ETRHB received an up-front payment of 80% to build the runway of the Hoari Boumedienne airport in Algiers, but the works have not commenced yet. At the same time, the delays in the building of the Cherchell port in joint venture with Chinese companies have been blamed on ETRHB's lack of expertise.

The incident between Tebboune and Haddad is not a mere clash of personalities, but is an indicator of a complex political game started just after the general elections in May 2017. Following the

controversial episode of 15th July, Tebboune reminded that he was just implementing the government's programme approved by the President, which includes the goal of 'separating the political power from the power of money'. Some observers considered these words as a confirmation that Tebboune could have been asked to renew the Algeria institutions, removing controversial political figures that emerged during the fourth mandate of Bouteflika.

Similarly to the most recent developments in Tunisia, a policy presented as a fight against corruption could also serve a different political purpose. In Algeria's case, the goal could be to pave the way to favourites for the next presidential elections expected in 2019. The dismissal of Gen. Mohammed Médiène as head of the Département pour les reinsegnements et la sécurité in 2015; the resignation of Amar Sâadani as Secretary General of the Front de Liberation Nationale (FLN) in October 2016; and the replacement of Sellal as Prime Minister in May 2017 are all pieces of an accurate strategy to eliminate relevant competitors or 'spoilers' along the way.

In this context, the clash between Tebboune and Haddad could be indicative. The head of FCE is considered a strict associate of Saïd Bouteflika, brother and special adviser to President Abdelaziz Bouteflika. To bring discredit to Haddad, removing any direct link between him and Saïd Bouteflika, could facilitate Saïd's candidacy to the Presidency. The move, considered risky, has just been revealed by the Secretary General of the FLN Djamel Ould-Abbès: in a recent interview Abbès said that Saïd Bouteflika, as well as any other Algerian citizen, has the right to present his candidacy to the presidential elections in 2019. In politics, every word matters and Ould-Abbès' imprimatur represents a considerable hint to resolve the enigma of Saïd Bouteflika and his ascent to power.

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