

# TRANSFORMATION IN TUNISIA: THE FIRST FIVE YEARS

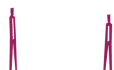
W. Mühlberger (Ed.), E. Cohen-Hadria, S. Gharib, C. Günay,  
I. Schäfer, S. Torelli



EUROMESCO  
JOINT POLICY STUDY

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## Foreword

*Wolfgang Mühlberger\**

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\*Senior Research Fellow, Finnish Institute of International Affairs

## Tunisia's Democracy Taking Root: The Early Consolidation of Institutional Modelling

Over the past six years, Tunisia has been testing new avenues of societal and political order. This practical quest was made possible through a countrywide upheaval starting in December 2010, which managed to topple the head of state, Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, together with his closest entourage only a couple of weeks later. In fact, the President's demise ushered in unseen and unexpected levels of freedom of expression, translating into a significant reconfiguration of the political system. Political entrepreneurs, old and new, have since embarked on a constructive path, trying to build a democratic state based on popular sovereignty, transforming a dominated and oppressed population into politically active citizens.

One of the challenges faced by this initiated process of institutional transformation is its consolidation, also through the replacement of a captured state structure via a *res publica* worthy of its name. At the same time, the old entrenched elites are trying to defend their acquired taste for preferential treatment, namely access to and preservation of privileges based on clientelistic networks. Furthermore, the ongoing societal transformation has been paralleled by a political transition, facilitated and occasionally mentored by powerful civil society actors, such as the UGTT, Tunisia's main trade union. Such a mediation role became necessary due to the extreme polarisation between the modernist and Islamist camp.

Whereas violent conflict has been eschewed, in particular during 2013 when the competition between the opposed ideological camps ran the risk of escalating into open conflict, the day-to-day business of the new institutions is no less challenging, facing major hurdles in the fields of governance, economy and security. The new government under PM Youssef Chahed is effectively facing a number of domestic challenges, sometimes negatively enhanced by geopolitical dynamics, such as the instability in neighbouring Libya, weak economic growth in the EU and the reluctance of international investors. All in all, the transition features several elements of hybridity and fragility, remaining in many aspects a work in progress and producing a significant number of uncertainties, in instances where the state should lead and reassure.

Against this complex backdrop of issues, the present Joint Policy Study provides an overview of the essential features and challenges of the transition, crystallised in four pivotal problem areas, each covered by renowned subject experts. The underlying idea is to provide a "reader" to both the expert audience as well as the wider readership

interested in the trajectories of so-called “Arab Spring” countries, of which, arguably, Tunisia is and remains the only promising example.

The newly-emerging citizenship in Tunisia not only entails rights and entitlements, but also requires participation in politics. Yet, as figures from polls and election participation have been indicating, the potential of co-determination is not being fully utilised. On the contrary, a trend emerges where a significant number of voters are staying away from elections. Why is it that the newly-acquired rights are not being fully embraced by the Tunisian polity? What perceptions and mechanisms are at play that threaten to undermine the democratic legitimacy of elected politicians? For what reason are Tunisians increasingly defiant of the state and its institutions?

In the first contribution to this Joint Policy Study, Emmanuel Cohen-Hadria, Head of Euro-Mediterranean Policies Department at the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed) in Barcelona, ponders these and related questions, from the vantage point of trust, or rather lack thereof, in the political actors. As the new Prime Minister Youssef Chahed mentioned in a recent interview with the magazine *Jeune Afrique* (“Youssef Chahed: Nous n’avons plus le droit à l’erreur”, 17th October 2016): “Le principal défi est effectivement le retour de la confiance. Il faut en finir avec le divorce entre la population et les gouvernants, qui a débuté bien avant la révolution.” Hence, the author’s choice of subject could not be more timely, nor his approach more fitting.

In the economic field, the bundle of problematic developments is no less staggering: a budget deficit rising steadily, paralleled by increasing sovereign debt levels; low economic growth, amplified by the loss of market shares; and lack of investment, in particular foreign direct investments (FDIs). The compounded effect of these elements has a negative impact on the labour market: unemployment remains on the rise, specifically youth joblessness reaches problematic levels, in particular if considered regionally. Furthermore, the state’s choice to overstaff the public sector by hiring tens of thousands of new civil servants since 2011, coupled with its lacking capacity to increase the tax penetration of various professional groups and a mushrooming black economy, controlled by mafia-style entrepreneurs, more often than not linked through clientelistic networks to political decision-makers, does not bode well for the economy transforming into a pole of socio-political stability.

Therefore, the second contribution by Dr. Isabel Schäfer, Senior Researcher at the German Development Institute (DIE), scrutinises the interlinkages and correlations between what could be considered an economic crisis, demography and unemployment,



analysing potentially adverse effects on the ongoing democratic transformation. As the government's ability and willingness to carry out reforms is of particular importance for relaunching the Tunisian economy, the author also explores the reasons for its obvious reluctance. Since the perceptions about economic well-being, income redistribution and corruption are of primary political relevance, this chapter touches on an element of the Tunisian transition that has highly disruptive potential.

A topic at the intersection of the reconfiguration of both the political landscape and the religious sphere is the role played by faith-based political entrepreneurs, as epitomised in the Tunisian context by its major movement of political Islam, the party En-Nahda (customarily rendered as *Ennahda*, by the party itself as well as French language media). Following the return from exile of the Islamist movement's leader Rachid Ghannouchi, his political platform went through a mesmerising transition, from effectively convincing a majority of the voters in the first free and fair elections after Ben Ali's fall to rebranding itself as a post-Islamist movement in 2016.

Hence, the third contribution highlights the role of political Islam in Tunisia by covering this topic at the convergence of the implications of newly-acquired freedom of expression, including for political movements, as well as the remodelling of the religious landscape since 2011. Two researchers from the OIIP, the Austrian Institute for International Affairs, Dr. Cengiz Günay and Sherin Gharib, propose an analysis of the newly-legalised political entity, the En-Nahda party. Their major argument is that En-Nahda has transformed into a "system party", and thus is struggling to remain a credible agent of revolutionary change, as expected by many of its supporters. Effectively, as the party's leadership proves ready for concessions, the party base and voters expect a more assertive stance in terms of Islamisation of politics and society. The authors' analysis takes stock of the evolution of this Islamist movement at a critical juncture, fraught with the risk of disappointing a significant part of its post-revolutionary constituency, potentially driving some younger elements into the less compromising camp of faith-based radicalism.

Practically, one of the challenges faced by movements of political Islam is often their demarcation from ideological strands and interpretations of the Islamic belief system prone to consider violence as a legitimate and, sometimes, even required means of achieving political ends. In the Tunisian case, this issue became visible when the self-declared "Leagues for the Defence of the Revolution" engaged in acts of violence against non-Islamist politicians – and the political leaders of En-Nahda failed to distance themselves from these actions. However, since these heady days following Ben Ali's demise, En-Nahda has come a long way, purportedly shedding some of its Islamist

credentials – whereby the cleavage with the radical Salafist or Jihadist end of the Islamist spectrum has been growing.

The final section, authored by Dr. Stefano Torelli, Senior Research Fellow at the Italian Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI), proposes a close look at the Jihadist scene in Tunisia in order to appreciate its home-grown elements, international connections as well as cross-border issues with neighbouring countries such as Algeria and Libya. Arguably the most problematic development of the Tunisian transition since late 2010, violent faith-based extremism has transformed into a structural threat for the Tunisian state. Islamist Jihadism not only led to the renewal of the state of emergency, but also produced a wealth of volunteers, heading for theatres of conflict in Syria and Libya – but also targeting foreign civilians and national security forces on their home turf. The potential return, en masse, of these foreign fighters from extraterritorial conflict areas represents nothing less than a strategic threat to the stability of the country. In light of these threatening developments, the author proposes a number of counter-terrorism measures, while also highlighting the institutional issues blocking an effective tackling of the problem.

What is at stake in the Tunisian transition is not only the ability of the new institutions to deliver on basic parameters such as functional political representation of interests, economic well-being and security but also their willingness to engage in reforms. The two main political blocs, Nidaa Tounes and En-Nahda, have not proven to be particularly keen to engage on this path. Free and fair elections certainly represent a basic ingredient for a democratic polity. Yet the institutional consolidation of an emerging political system will be continuously undermined by growing contempt and distrust of the state, poor economic performance and lacking security.

## **Trust, the Weak Link of the Tunisian Transition**

*Emmanuel Cohen-Hadria\**

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\*Head of Euro-Mediterranean Policies Department, European Institute of the Mediterranean

## Introduction

Since the Tunisian revolution of 2011, the prevailing assumption but also the hope of Western chancelleries has been that the Tunisian transition is a success story. Six years down the road, it appears that this prevailing assumption is to a large extent at odds with prevailing perceptions in Tunisia. This chapter starts with an analysis of dominant Tunisian discourses on the revolution and the transition in Tunisia. This analysis reveals a tension between various narratives. Two main types of discourses are identified: the “let’s turn the page discourse” vs. more critical discourses reflecting a sense of disappointment with the achievements of the revolution. The debate about the economic reconciliation law epitomises the tension between those discourses but also the fault lines between the political elite and large segments of Tunisian society as well as its malaise. Recent polls suggesting that most Tunisians think that things are going in the wrong direction as well as low turnouts in elections are two indicators that seem to confirm this malaise.

While the economic and security context is critical to understanding the situation, this chapter specifically relates this malaise to some socio-political features of the democratic transition. First, the malaise within Tunisian society partly stems from its difficulty to identify itself with the post-revolution political leadership. The age of post-revolution leaders, their perceived links with the old regime and the perceived continuity of nepotistic tendencies seem to have convinced many Tunisians that the post-revolution leadership would not be able to tackle issues that mattered to them and implement the “goals of the revolution”. Second, the transitional justice process in post-revolution Tunisia has not been run in a way that has fostered reconciliation and trust. Third, the perceived impunity has been reinforced by the perceived prevalence of a high level of corruption in post-revolution Tunisia. Last, the political configuration since 2014 characterised by presidentialisation trends, by coalition governments to the detriment of the development of a strong institutionalised opposition and by the failure of political parties to relate to the voters have affected how Tunisians have perceived the democratic game in the first years of the Tunisian post-revolution era.

There are risks associated with this malaise already manifesting itself in the multiplication of violent social movements, doubts about the democratic system and ultimately violent radicalism. Therefore, the author argues that addressing the gaps of democratic governance should not be viewed as a subaltern task.

## Discourses on the Revolution and on the Transition Almost Six Years after the Revolution: Fault Lines and Malaise within Tunisian Society

### Analysis of the Main Discourses<sup>1</sup>

Despite the initially broad popular endorsement of the uprising and a sense of unity within Tunisian society, it appears that discourses on the revolution itself and on the transition have grown apart over the last years. It is useful to refer to some parameters of critical discourse analysis while identifying these discourses, starting with the following definition: a discourse is “a particular way of talking about and understanding the world (or an aspect of the world)” (Jorgensen & Philipps, 2002, p. 1). It stems from this definition that a discourse is “always in conflict with other discourses that define reality differently and set other guidelines for social action” (Jorgensen & Philipps, 2002, p. 47). In other words, discourse analysis is largely about the analysis of a struggle for dominance of one discourse over the others. “Different discourses – each of them representing particular ways of talking about and understanding the social world – are engaged in a constant struggle with one other to achieve hegemony, that is, to fix the meanings of language in their own way” (Jorgensen & Philipps, 2002, pp. 6-7). Discourses are indeed not neutral as they have political and social implications. In terms of methodology, it follows that discourse analysis not only involves decoding the content of discourses but also who holds them, with what motivations, how they are produced and received, what they say about the divisions within the society and why a certain discourse is imposing itself.

About six years after the Tunisian uprising, one could identify two main types of discourse on the revolution and on the transition that unfolded. The first one could be labelled as the “let’s move on” discourse. It consists of considering that, since the revolution has taken place, has been successful and has delivered, the Tunisians should now “move on” and “turn the page”. Tunisia is “turning the page on the past” was an expression that President Béji Caïd Essebsi used after being elected in December 2014. In the face of continuous demonstrations, this line is held mainly by political and economic leaders with the objective of promoting stability. More critically, it can also be analysed as being promoted by the elites who have benefited from the post-revolution situation and who would have no interest in fundamentally changing the status quo. A variant to this is the “transitions take time” discourse that consists of attributing the difficulties of post-revolution Tunisia to the lengthy and complex nature of democratic transitions. This narrative has been held by politicians holding executive positions in post-revolution Tunisia such as President Moncef Marzouki, who said “most of the revolutions take a lot

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<sup>1</sup> This study is limited to domestic discourses. However, reviewing Western discourses on Tunisia would prove equally interesting. As eloquently argued by Nadia Marzouki and Hamza Meddeb in June 2015 in *Jadaliyya*, there is some continuity between “the current fascination with Tunisia’s democratic achievement” and “the blind celebration of the so-called Tunisian economic miracle during the Ben Ali era” (Marzouki & Meddeb, 2015). They point out the risks of “reducing Tunisia to a success story,” contributing “to obfuscating the reality of the social grievances, and frustration toward the political elites that is actually transpiring in the country.”

of time to achieve their goals” in an address to students at Princeton University in September 2013. Along the same lines, Prime Minister Habib Essid called for “patience” after a wave of demonstrations at the beginning of 2016. This discourse finds echoes in other countries of the region that have experienced the fall of authoritarian regimes.

Disenchantment with the revolution and the transition has gained ground over the last few years. In its extreme expression and in view of the situation of Tunisia six years down the road, the “there has been no revolution” line has been articulated by some who consider that the situation is no better than it used to be before 2011 on many accounts. This discourse has been declined by a number of observers, bloggers and citizens in social media on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the revolution. With further nuances, others acknowledge that freedom of expression is an undisputable acquis of the revolution but argue that the revolution has not achieved more than that. Perceptions that the concerns that motivated the mobilisations in 2011 have not been addressed have helped fuel this disillusion. As mentioned above, social media<sup>2</sup> has played a significant role in shaping this narrative.

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Examples of disenchanted discourses on Twitter

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Source: Twitter account @willisfromtunis, posted on 13 January 2016

Youth, civil society representatives and to some extent the political opposition have mainly shaped this kind of discourse. Youth emerged as a new social political subject during

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<sup>2</sup> Some examples of popular blogs: [www.nawaat.org](http://www.nawaat.org), [www.atunisiangirl.blogspot.com](http://www.atunisiangirl.blogspot.com) (Lina Ben Mhenni), [www.aya-chebbi.blogspot.com](http://www.aya-chebbi.blogspot.com) (Aya Chebbi). Twitter accounts: @willisfromtunis (Nadia Khiari), @Sarah\_bh (Sarah Ben Hamadi).

the uprising and as the main driving force of the revolution. The claim for dignity that accompanied the uprising and the sense of disillusionment that characterises many Tunisian youths are important factors to understand how youths have articulated their narratives on the revolution over the last few years. As further developed later on, the overwhelming feeling among Tunisian youths is that of having been completely sidelined during the transition process, not only economically as explained in the chapter of this study written by Isabel Schäfer, but also politically. Civil society organisations played an important role during the transition. A large number of organisations were created after the uprisings. Compared to youth discourses that have been inspired by the sense of being outsiders in a process that they have themselves initiated, civil society discourses are more “insider” discourses, which are articulated according to their areas of specialisation. Human rights activists attach significance to the persistence of repressive practices, women’s associations look into advancing women rights, journalists into freedom of expression and organisations such as I-Watch or *Al-Bawsala* articulate their discourse on the basis of their monitoring mandate.

### The Economic Reconciliation Law: The Clash of Discourses

The debate about the economic reconciliation law tabled initially in July 2015 epitomises the tension between these aforementioned discourses. Despite broad resistance within civil society and public opinion, there have been renewed attempts to take the draft forward and put it on the agenda of the assembly legislation committee a year later. At the time of writing, the Presidency had recalled the draft law but it is likely to return to the fore at some point with some changes. In broad terms, the idea of this law was to put in place an ad hoc conciliation mechanism to deal with various categories of persons involved directly or indirectly in corruption or tax evasion cases before the revolution.

For some, this law is an opportunity to move forward. “How about moving on from the past and looking to the future (...) The revolution is five years old, for how long is it going to go on? The reconciliation bill has to be accepted by everyone,” said Béji Caïd Essebsi in a number of public appearances (as cited in Chellali, 2015). For its defenders indeed, this law would not only contribute to reinforcing the reconciliation process in Tunisia<sup>3</sup> but it would also contribute to restoring the investment environment and thereby boost the national economy. One of the arguments that En-Nahda party leader Ghannouchi used in support of this draft law was that the money recuperated with this law could be invested and used to create job opportunities. Some economic experts as well as business interests such as the Tunisian Union of Industry, Commerce and Craft (UTICA) also added their voice in support of the bill, arguing that it would encourage economic recovery.

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<sup>3</sup> Boujemaa Remili, speaking in his capacity of Nidaa Tounes spokesperson in 2015, stressed the urgency to complete the reconciliation process and emphasised the need to speed up the reconciliation process: “Today, [the Truth and Dignity Commission] has received some 16,000 complaints. So, if every year it deals with 1,000 complaints, it will complete its work towards the year 2031. Can the country really wait that long?” (as cited in Miller & Wolff, 2015).

For its opponents, this draft law illustrates the denial of revolutionary goals and regressive trends in the transition process. In addition to arguments on the institutional coherence of the transitional justice architecture in post-revolution Tunisia and other economic arguments that we will review later on, the idea of a betrayal of the revolutionary claim of dignity is a major argument put forward by the opponents to this draft law. This is illustrated for example in a joint communiqué released on 1 July 2016 and co-signed by a dozen of civil society representatives in Tunisia: “ce projet de loi (...) signe également le retour et le pardon des personnes dont les agissements ont provoqué ce grand mouvement de changement social et politique déclenché en 2011... Ce projet de loi cristallise en effet la volonté de renouer avec les mauvaises pratiques d’un passé que les Tunisiens pensaient révolu depuis janvier 2011 (Loi sur la “réconciliation économique”, 2016). Similarly, the *Menich Msemah* campaign, a citizen initiative launched in 2015, has largely contributed to shaping the discourses opposing the draft law. After a first mobilisation in September 2015 aiming at blocking the introduction of the draft law, the campaign moved to a second phase in July 2016 under the slogan “wanted” with the objective of raising awareness about the prevalence of corruption.

### Discourses, Polls, Electoral Turnout... Fault Lines and Malaise within the Society

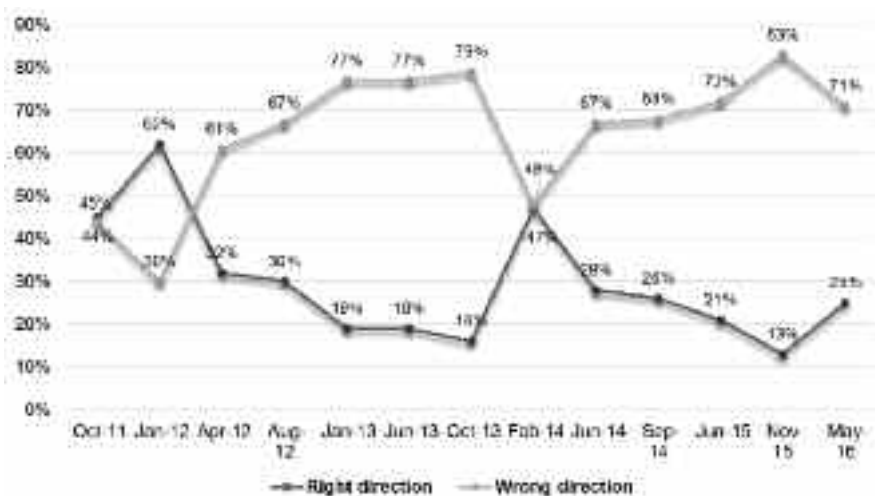
The analysis of these discourses points to the diversity of readings of the revolution and to a high degree of polarisation and fragmentation within Tunisian society almost six years after 2011. This fragmentation does not necessarily involve opposing political forces; the gap is rather between structured political forces and unequally structured but large segments of Tunisian society. In this respect, discourses show how institutional and street politics have grown away from each other over the last few years. To a large extent, discourses have been shaped by how people have felt included in, or in contrast excluded from, the post-revolution order. The actors who initiated the revolution are not the same as those who managed the institutional transition. Within Tunisian society, youth or Tunisians from “the interior” have felt particularly excluded. Recent polls conducted in Tunisia as well as electoral turnout are useful indicators to measure this malaise.

A number of surveys conducted in Tunisia in 2015 and in 2016 reflect a rather bleak assessment by Tunisians of the results of the revolution. In December 2015, the Sigma Conseil Institute carried out a survey on how the Tunisians perceived the events that led to the fall of the regime and the events that unfolded. Results suggest that only 11.2% think that the achievements since the revolution are significant. 79.5% think they are not significant (as cited in Ferchichi, 2015).



Other surveys show that a growing majority of Tunisians are increasingly uneasy about the transition. According to the survey conducted by the Center for Insights in Survey Research, 71% of the respondents thought that things were going in the wrong direction in May 2016. This compares to 30% in January 2011 (Center for Insights in Survey Research, 2016). Figure 1 illustrates the overall declining trend of confidence in the future of the country.

**Figure 1.** Thinking about how things are going for Tunisia as a whole, how would you say things are going in our country overall these days? Are they going in the right direction or in the wrong direction?



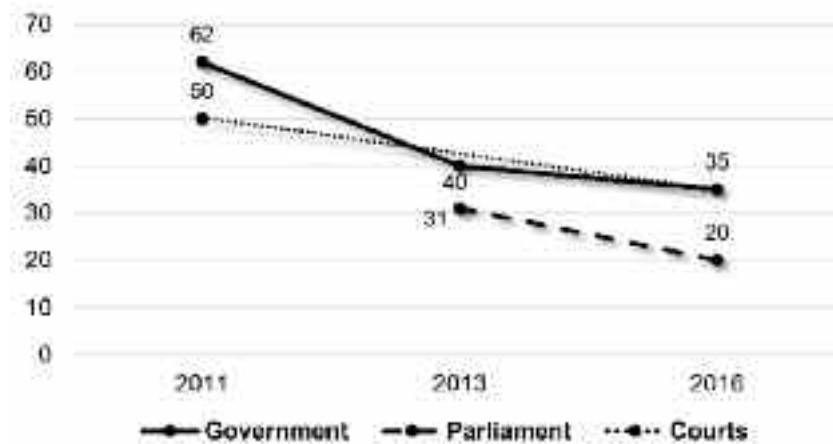
Source: Graph compiled from data collected by the Center for Insights in Survey Research, 2016.

Other data gathered by the Arab Barometer in May 2016 (Figure 2) seems to suggest that the increasing impression that things are going in the wrong direction is accompanied by a declining confidence of the Tunisians in state institutions. At the time of the survey, only 35% and 20% of the respondents said they had some or a lot of trust in the government and the parliament, respectively. It appears that the level of trust is particularly low among youths: only 23% of the respondents aged between 18 and 34 trusted the government for instance (Robbins, 2016).

Another indicator of this malaise is electoral demobilisation. Marzouki and Meddeb (2015) highlighted the irony that Tunisia was now sharing “the same ills as older democracies (low voter participation and a collective distrust in political elites),” which was not necessarily to be expected from the young post-2011 Tunisian democracy. The

first election after the uprising had allow turnout. According to the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, the turnout of the voting age population to the election of the Constituent Assembly was 44.57%. In 2014, the turnout of the voting age population to the legislative and presidential elections was, respectively, 45.39% and 40.45%. The low registration of citizens on electoral lists largely explains this overall low turnout for the 2011 elections. Indeed, in 2011, while 86.4% of voters who had registered turned out to vote, only about 4.12m voters were registered for a total voting age population of about 7.99m. The registration improved in the following years. About 5.31m and 5.29m voters were registered on the electoral lists for the 2014 parliamentary and presidential elections, respectively, for a total voting age population of about 7.89m. However, the turnout of the registered voters decreased to 67.43% and 60.35% for the 2014 parliamentary and presidential elections, respectively (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, n.d.).

**Figure 2. Low Confidence in Institutions**  
% who say they have some or a lot of trust in institutions



Source: Graph compiled from data collected by the Arab Barometer, Q201.

Note from Arab Barometer: Tunisia did not have a parliament at the time of the survey in 2011 and the question about trust in the courts was not asked in 2013.

The low registration for the Constituent Assembly elections in October 2011 can be related mostly to technical and calendar-related reasons as explained in the final report of the Carter Center<sup>4</sup> and also possibly to some extent by the fact “that many citizens did not exactly understand, despite the voter education efforts of the Instance supérieure indépendante pour les élections (ISIE) and the main political parties, what a Constituent Assembly was or did” as suggested by Kenneth Perkins (2014, p. 248). In turn,

<sup>4</sup> By the initial deadline of 30 July, only 23.5% of the eligible citizens had registered to vote, hence an extension of the deadline until mid-August (The Carter Center, 2011).

decreasing turnout of registered voters is certainly an illustration of the increasing malaise in the years following the revolution. Dissatisfaction with the political choice was one of the reasons for the low participation in the 2014 elections as noted in the Tunisia Elections Dispatch by the International Republican Institute ahead of the 2014 elections (International Republican Institute, 2014). The low youth participation was noted as a distinctive feature by informed observers, such as the IRI's Tunisia Resident Country Director, Djordje Todorovic (Petré, 2014).

## Malaise, Trust and Transition

In the introduction to his published volume, *The New Middle East: Protest and Revolution in the Arab World*, Fawaz A. Gerges explains that neither strictly political nor economic or social causes can separately and exclusively explain the Arab uprisings. "In the social sciences, neatly delineated single causes, though appealing, rarely capture society's nuances and complexities. Analysts focus on either political variables or economic vulnerabilities as the drivers behind the uprisings. Focusing on one without the other is a simplification of a more complex reality" (Gerges, 2014, p. 9). Similarly, we argue in this study that there is no single cause that explains the increasing malaise in post-revolution Tunisia. While the eyes of Tunisian policy-makers as well as of foreign chancelleries and donors are mainly directed to economic and security aspects, we argue here that economic, security and socio-political causes are inter-related and that socio-political causes of the malaise should not be underestimated. In other words, the economic and security context is undoubtedly critical to understanding this situation but the malaise is also to be directly related to some specific socio-political features of the transition, such as the crisis of leadership and representation, the incomplete transitional justice and the prevalence of corruption. Other political and institutional variables, such as the weak local governance, could have been mentioned in this context but the format of this chapter does not allow for that.

### A Contested Political Leadership

The malaise within Tunisian society partly stems from its difficulty to identify itself with the post-revolution political leadership. The aged political leadership and the related difficulty for youths to connect with holders of executive or legislative mandates have fuelled a sense of detachment in the years following the revolution. Claire Spencer (2016) identified that "for Tunisians who participated in the 2011 uprisings, it is the age and profile of the key leaders in this game of musical chairs that causes most concern."

An early draft of Article 73 of the Constitution adopted in 2014 set 75 years as the age limit for the position of President of the Republic. However, an adopted amendment led to the suppression of this provision, which was understood within Tunisian society as the result of an agreement between leading parties to assure the eligibility of Béji Caïd Essebsi, aged 87 when he was elected President in 2014. The age issue is a problem that has characterised most of the political parties after the revolution. Fabio Merone (2015) explains that “most of those involved in Tunisia’s negotiated transition either belong to an older generation or represented, like En-Nahda, those who wanted to compromise in order to be integrated into the national project” (p. 74). Along the same lines, Kenneth Perkins (2014) argues that En-Nahda’s leadership in 2011 was not immune to generational challenges and was largely disconnected from the youth culture.

The sense of confiscation of the revolution by an ageing elite connected more to the old regime than to revolutionary aspirations, has been particularly strong among the youth, who have felt misrepresented, excluded and even betrayed. This feeling added to an already entrenched aversion of youths to politics inherited from their experience during the former regime. In her essay, Alcida Honwana (2013) illustrates this phenomenon through a number of interviews she conducted with youths: “Initially, many young people were delighted with their newfound freedom and optimistic about the future. (...) Their hopes for social transformation soon began to fade. They became increasingly worried that the revolution was being taken over by the older generation that was clinging to the politics of the former regime or driving the country into religious conservatism” (p. 92). This feeling explains youth disengagement from politics and the belief that only street protest or civil society can bring about changes.

The difficulties of youths identifying themselves with the post-revolution political leadership is not only linked to the age of the latter but also to their links with the Ben Ali era. While the revolution aimed to break with the practices of the old regime, the perceived continuity between leaders from the Ben Ali era and the post-revolution leadership has fuelled disappointment and resentment. Youths have been active in countering this trend at first. In the immediate aftermath of the revolution, the interim government led by Mohammed Ghannouchi included some ministers with links to the Ben Ali era, which led to a series of demonstrations. Analysing the features of post-revolution political parties, Lise Storm (2014) highlights some elements of continuity with the Ben Ali era and distinguishes between parties that “did very little to hide their relationship with the ancient regime” (such as the Parti Néo destourien) and parties that denied elements of continuity although their leadership displayed clear relationships with the RCD (such as al-Moudabara) (p. 116).

A perceived continuity in nepotistic practices has added to the resentment of a part of Tunisian society against the post-revolution political leadership. The leadership take-over of Nidaa Tounes by Hamedh Essebsi, the son of the President, was widely perceived as reminiscent of the nepotism associated with the old regime. Earlier on, the appointment of Rafik Abdesslem to the position of Minister of Foreign Affairs in December 2011 was met with resistance on the grounds of his family ties to the President of En-Nahda Rached Ghannouchi.

All in all, the age of post-revolution leaders, their perceived links with the old regime and the perceived continuity of nepotistic tendencies seem to have convinced many Tunisians that the post-revolution political leadership would not be able to tackle issues that mattered to them and implement the “goals of the revolution”, thereby fuelling their malaise. The post-revolution leadership is largely seen as having continued with “politics as usual” or “politicking”, as having focused on identity issues instead of delivering solutions to those very problems that led to the revolution and as having failed to come up with a strategic vision for the future of the country that would have mobilised the people.

### Trust and Transitional Justice

On top of the profile of the post-revolution leadership and linked to it, another specific feature of the transition that can help explain the malaise is the contentious nature of the transitional justice process in Tunisia. Well managed, transitional justice could alleviate the polarisation of Tunisian society as well as the disillusion of citizens with politics and could help restore trust in institutions. “Civic trust” is indeed one of the four aims of transitional justice according to the transitional justice expert and current UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence Pablo de Greiff.

There has been a genuine attempt to establish a transitional justice process in Tunisia over the last few years. As mentioned by Kora Andrieu (2016), former consultant of the UN Development Programme on Civil Society and Transitional Justice in Tunisia, “in Tunisia, soon after the fall of the Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali regime, the transitional justice toolkit was almost immediately adopted and, with the help of an extremely proactive international community, put in place” (p. 264). In the immediate aftermath of the revolution, some commissions were established including a commission of inquiry on human rights violations committed during the demonstrations and a commission of investigation on corruption and embezzlement. In parallel, a decree was promulgated in February 2011 providing for a reparations and rehabilitation scheme for some categories.

A law on reparations was also adopted in October 2011, granting “martyrs and wounded of the revolution” a set of material and symbolic reparations such as public commemoration of 14 January as a new national holiday, creation of a museum of the revolution and changed street names. A Ministry of Human Rights and Transitional Justice was even created in January 2012. A more comprehensive organic law on transitional justice was voted in December 2014, creating a Truth and Dignity Commission (TDC) formed of 15 independent members tasked with finding truth about abuses since 1955 but also addressing issues of reparations, accountability, institutional reform, vetting, reconciliation and arbitration of cases relating to corruption and economic crimes. By 9 December 2016, the TDC had received 62,341 files and carried out 14,828 hearings, according to its website. The argument here is not that there has been a lack of transitional justice efforts in post-revolution Tunisia but rather that the process has not been run in a way that has fostered reconciliation and trust. This is to be related to a series of factors that will be reviewed in the paragraphs below.

First, the transitional justice process in Tunisia was not necessarily run in the right order and was too fragmented. Political leaders after the revolution multiplied the initiatives. This was done without a grand strategy and planning of the steps to be undertaken. Trials and reparations initiatives were conducted without the prior adoption of a comprehensive transitional justice law and, more significantly, without the prior establishment of a list of victims that should benefit from reparations. The fragmented nature of the process also stems from the variety of institutions involved, notably in the process of establishing the list of victims. The National Constituent Assembly, the Ministry of Justice, the Superior Council of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and the National Inquiry Commission on abuses committed from 17 December 2010 to February 2011, have all been involved to some extent in this exercise (Andrieu, 2016).

As numerous and diverse as they could be, the initiatives taken since the revolution have not ended up in a completed and finalised process. Most of the initiatives launched since 2011 did not materialise or generate expected results and most were fraught with loopholes. The mechanism established with the 2014 transitional justice law will take some time to translate into tangible results. The TDC only started operating fully in late 2014-beginning of 2015 and is fraught with internal turf wars.

Finally, the transitional justice process in Tunisia has been too politicised and manipulated by various political forces to the detriment of a sound process. The initiatives taken since 2011 have been rushed or not designed carefully by political leaders driven by electoral considerations. Moreover, in secular quarters, there has been the perception that

transitional justice has been used as a political tool to promote the interests of the Islamists (Andrieu, 2016). The appointment of an En-Nahda Minister at the head of the Ministry of Human Rights and Transitional Justice created in January 2012 was criticised by parts of civil society. Similarly, the decree promulgated in February 2011 granting amnesty and reparations to all individuals who were arrested or condemned for political reasons since 1989 was widely seen as “a way for the ruling Islamist party to reward their troops” (Andrieu, 2016, p. 271).

However, it would be unfair to relate the politicisation of transitional justice only to the “Islamist camp”. Transitional justice has also been perceived as a tool for the RCDists to come back to power in post-revolution Tunisia. The transitional justice debate in Tunisia is now hostage to the economic reconciliation law that was first put forward by the Tunisian President in June 2015. As mentioned earlier, this draft law has triggered an intense and at times emotional debate in Tunisia. In addition to the claim that this draft law was running against the revolutionary goals of dignity and justice, a number of arguments on the institutional coherence of the transitional justice architecture and economic arguments have also been brought forward by those opposing the draft law.<sup>5</sup> Sihem Bensedrine, President of the TDC, argues that the law will not only affect a narrow subset of economic cases but a majority of the commission's work, because corruption played such a central role in the Ben Ali regime and was often tied directly to other human rights violations as well (as cited in Williamson, 2015). This is an argument also brought forward in the report released on 14 July 2016 by Human Rights Watch that also questions the independence of the mechanisms foreseen in the draft bill. Another significant difference between the mechanism put in place by the 2013 law creating a TDC and the economic reconciliation law is that the former foresees that details of the case gathered by the Commission are to be made public while the latter would handle the information obtained and the decisions as confidential.

### Trust and Corruption

While dealing with pre-2011 economic crime and corruption is a key challenge of the overall transitional justice effort in Tunisia and remains largely unaddressed, corruption and economic crime in post-revolution Tunisia is also a major problem. The permanence of a high level of corruption has fuelled disappointment, mistrust and a dominant impression of impunity. The fact that both former Prime Minister Habib Essid (in the

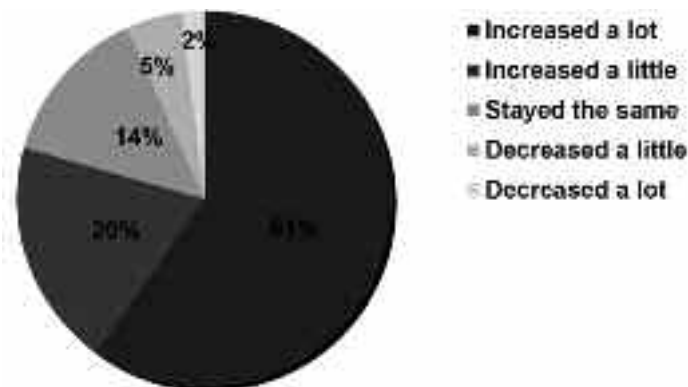
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<sup>5</sup> Pablo de Greiff, Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence of the UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, sent to the government on 1 July 2016 a very detailed analysis of the draft law under the heading “Inquiétudes et difficultés liées aux dispositions de la ‘réconciliation économique’” (de Greiff, 2016). Among other arguments, he regrets the fact that the Commission established by the draft bill would be chaired by a representative of the government (Article 3). He also expresses his concerns about Article 12: “toutes les dispositions relatives à la corruption financière et au détournement de fonds publics mentionnées dans la loi fondamentale no. 53 de l’année 2013, datant du 24 décembre 2013 et établissant la justice transitionnelle et son organisation, sont annulées.” Finally, he expresses his concerns about the conceptual confusion between objectives related to investment and economic growth and the principles of transitional justice. The European Parliament hints at the same idea in its latest resolution on Tunisia when it “(...) notes that national reconciliation and growth should not be contradictory priorities” (European Parliament, 2016).

handover ceremony to the new Prime Minister) and current Prime Minister Youssef Chahed (in a speech delivered in Gammarth on 5 September 2016) said that the fight against corruption was more difficult than countering terrorism, is symptomatic of the scale of the problem.

Figures released by Transparency International confirm the perception of the continuity of corruption phenomenon and its prevalence in the Tunisian economy (see Figure 3). 64% of Tunisian respondents to the Global Corruption Barometer 2015/2016 think that corruption has increased in the last year, and 62% of the respondents think that the government is doing badly in fighting corruption (Transparency International, 2016). According to the corruption index of Transparency International 2014 and 2015, Tunisia scored 38 in 2015 (0=highly corrupt/ 100=very clean); it had scored 42 in 2009, 43 in 2010, 38 in 2011, 41 in 2012 and 2013 and 40 in 2014. In terms of ranking, Tunisia ranked 59 out of 178 countries in 2010 and 76/168 in 2015. The Global Corruption Barometer 2013 shows that only two years after revolution, 81% of the respondents thought that corruption had increased since 2011.

**Figure 3.** Over the past two years, how has the level of corruption in Tunisia changed?



Source: Graph compiled from data collected by the Global Corruption Barometer 2013, Transparency International, 2016.

Asked to identify the most corrupt institutions in 2013, respondents most often mentioned police and political parties (Transparency International, 2013). According to Chawki Tabib, “les deux secteurs les plus touchés par la corruption si on se réfère aux dossiers qui nous parviennent sont : les ministères de l’Intérieur et celui des Finances. Cela s’explique par le fait que les dossiers concernent généralement « la petite corruption », c’est-à-dire celle à laquelle fait face le citoyen quotidiennement et qui impliquent les agents des services de sécurité du fisc et des douanes” (as cited in Belhassine, 2016).



Corruption in Tunisia has several forms. High-level cases involving politicians have undoubtedly contributed to the negative perception. In December 2012, a blogger accused Tunisia's Foreign Minister Rafik Abdessalam of misusing public funds and published receipts from a stay in the Sheraton hotel (Ben Bouazza, 2013). It was also disclosed that the Chinese government had transferred a large sum of money (one million dollars) to a bank account of the Foreign Ministry (instead of being transferred to the Treasury as per the rules). However, in post-revolution Tunisia, high-level cases are arguably not the most worrying. While corruption in pre-revolution times reflected the power of the state system or rather those who were controlling it in a very centralised way, Anouar al-Bassi, lawyer and co-founder of Collectif Transparency 25, argues that corruption increased a lot after the revolution but now symbolises the weakness of the state: "Les hommes d'affaires sont tellement influents que même l'État ne peut rien faire. Ils disposent de réseaux dans les administrations qui agissent pour leur compte. Des dossiers qui disparaissent, des convocations du juge qui arrivent trop tard" (as cited in Bendermel, 2015). Along the same lines, the member of a Tunis-based think tank argued that powerful businessmen related to the ruling political elite were partly in control of the transition and that regaining trust of the citizens would involve very forceful anti-corruption actions against them.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to political high level and corruption cases involving businessmen, indicators point to an increase of petty corruption involving public or private organisations. Petty corruption is sometimes defined as a corruption of "survival" or a way to deal with economic hardship. In March 2015, the Association tunisienne des contrôleurs publics published a study under the title "La petite corruption: Le danger banalisé. Etude exploratoire sur la perception de la petite corruption en Tunisie" that highlights a certain degree of acceptability of the act of corruption, corroborated by survey results showing that 43% of Tunisians see that corruption is a necessity to arrange some transactions or even a custom according to 39%. This study shows – among other interesting results – that 58% of the respondents think that denouncing a case of corruption would not be of any use (Association tunisienne des contrôleurs publics, 2015). This perception of impunity makes the fight against corruption all the more difficult.

There are other factors complicating the fight against corruption. Corruption remains a major challenge in post-revolution Tunisia, despite a number of bodies, commissions or ministries established over the last years and international programmes aiming to support Tunisia in its effort:<sup>7</sup> the Commission d'enquête sur les affaires de malversations et de corruption was established in the aftermath of the revolution, then followed by a Comité national de recouvrement des biens mal acquis existant à

6 EuroMeSCo international workshop organised in the context of this research project, Tunis, 4 November 2016.

7 For instance, \$3,797 million were allocated for the fight against corruption in the framework of the anti-corruption programme of the United Nations Development Programme, with donations from Sweden, United Kingdom and Japan (UNDP, 2016). The South Neighbourhood Anti-corruption Project II - TUNISIA: Combating corruption, money-laundering and terrorism, funded by the European Union and implemented by the Council of Europe, can also be mentioned.

l'étranger, set up in spring 2011 under the Central Bank, the l'Instance nationale de lutte contre la corruption (INLCC) was put in place in November 2011 (replacing the Commission mentioned above) and the Pôle judiciaire et financier in August 2011. But none of these institutional mechanisms could obtain enough results to curb the scourge.

The INLCC is tasked with facilitating the fight against corruption through various means such as proposing anti-corruption policies, establishing general principles, sharing its views on draft laws and regulations, gathering data on corruption, facilitating contacts between stakeholders and disseminating the anti-corruption culture. The INLCC is not supposed to replace existing bodies, especially judicial ones. If it receives information and requests, it is supposed to channel them to the judiciary. By April 2016, there were 9,000 cases, 2,500 cases processed by the INLCC, 60 cases closed by the judiciary. Successive presidents of the INLCC have regularly complained about the insufficient resources of the authority. In December 2014, Samir Annabi, the then President of the INLCC, criticised the lack of structure, staff regulation, organisation and communication as well as budget of the organisation since its creation. He alleged that the "Troika" government had contributed to weakening the INLCC by creating a competing authority: the State Secretary in charge of governance and the fight against corruption. He also identified the hostility of the judiciary and the administration as further difficulties (Gharbi, 2014). In May 2015, before the parliamentary committees, he pointed out major obstacles to the work of the INLCC, including a weak budget (390,000 dinars/y including 220,000 for the rent, i.e. €160,000 including €90,941 for the rent) and the difficulties of the administration to accept the independent status of the authority<sup>8</sup> (Ben Ameer, 2015).

According to Chawki Tabib, his successor, corruption indicators are on the rise. 90% of the cases involve the administration. Appearing before the parliamentary commission for the reform of administration, for good governance, for the fight against corruption, and for the management of public funds, he said that the authority needed financial support of 6.5 million dinars in 2016 in order to have a minimum of equipment and to cover the necessary expenditures to achieve its mission and made a plea for an independent authority. In March 2016, he declared that the anti-corruption policy since 2011 had not sufficiently involved the judiciary, the media and the civil society and said that there was a need to review the legislative framework of the fight against corruption and to adopt laws regarding declaration of assets, illicit enrichment and conflict of interest, and a reform of the administration simplifying procedures and enhancing relations with the citizen (Ben Romdhane, 2016).

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<sup>8</sup> The European Parliament in a recent resolution on Tunisia points out the limited budget of the Instance nationale de lutte contre la corruption and "urges the Tunisian authorities to strengthen its capacity and effectivity and to provide it with all the necessary financial and logistical support to ensure the proper functioning of public administration and the regularity of public procurement" (European Parliament, 2016).

## Democracy in Tunisia: The Letter of the Constitution and the Practice

Fawaz A. Gerges (2014) contended that political contestation would be a distinctive feature of post-Arab Spring politics and that this should be celebrated. It is difficult to read this argument without thinking that it does not fully apply to post-revolution Tunisia and in particular to post December 2014 Tunisia. It seems that a healthy and systemic political contention has somehow been muzzled by an obsession with the idea of political compromise.

### The Collateral Damages of Compromise Politics in Post-Revolution Tunisia

It is true that the revolution has been accompanied by the blossoming of many political parties that can compete freely in elections, thereby contrasting with the Tunisian party system before the revolution whereby one political party was having a de facto monopoly of political power. However, democratic pluralism has been constrained by the overwhelming appetite for compromise that has materialised successively in the Troika government, in the coalition government led by Essid and more recently in the national unity government led by Chahed. In other words, the argument here is that the Tunisian system has successively moved from a monopolistic party system to a chaotic party system with a great number of political parties being created after the revolution and then to an oligarchic party system where some parties, under the banner of compromise, have distributed the power among themselves. The crisis of the political offer and the incapacity of the political parties in Tunisia to adapt to a new context of political opposition largely contribute to the malaise in Tunisia.

The Nidaa Tounes/En-Nahda coalition has left many voters in both camps bitter. It was widely perceived in Tunisia as being imposed from outside to correspond to a certain idea of how the transition should be conducted. Largely inspired by the insistence on the need to compromise and the fear of replicating in Tunisia tensions that had marred the political scene in other Arab countries, the Nidaa Tounes/En-Nahda coalition – but also to some extent the Troika government that preceded it and the national unity government that succeeded it – has not only alienated parts of Tunisian society, it has also limited the potential of the democratic opposition. While this has brought stability according to some analysts and contained the level of polarisation, it has also affected how Tunisians have perceived the democratic game in the first years of the Tunisian post-revolution democracy. The coalition and then the national unity government have absorbed a large number of political forces represented in the ARP and only left room for a very marginal opposition, often pressured and criticised for its alleged unwillingness to compromise. A number of

Tunisian activists and commentators have questioned and second-guessed the very notion of pluralist politics that the democratic consolidation was supposed to facilitate.<sup>9</sup>

Amel Boubekour (2016) speaks of “bargained competition” to characterise post-revolution Tunisia, which she opposes to the term of “pacted transition” that has been used to characterise previous democratisation processes. She acknowledges that this bargained competition has probably “spared the country a major conflagration” (Boubekour, 2016, p. 109) and has put an end to the former authoritarian order. However, she challenges the idea that the taming of ideological conflicts has made the Tunisian transition to democracy successful. She argues instead that power sharing formulas after the revolution have isolated and marginalised revolutionaries, blocked access to politics for other actors and prevented the emergence of distinctive political projects structuring political life. Along similar lines, Nadia Marzouki and Hamza Meddeb (2015) highlighted how compromise in post-revolution Tunisia served objectives of “elite-pacting” and “mutual co-optation” rather than peaceful pluralism and warned against the risks of such a system for Tunisian democracy, including an increasing gap between the society and the political leadership.

Thus, one can argue that the alliance between En-Nahda and Nidaa Tounes has not contributed to clarifying the role of political parties in Tunisia and given the opportunity of Tunisians to associate political parties with clear and stable political programmes. The trust of Tunisians in political parties is very low. According to a survey conducted by Sigma in May 2016, 72% of Tunisians have a bad image of political parties including 44% that have a very bad image (Sigma Conseil, 2016). All in all, it is as if the democratic representation was moving away from real representation of the people and its aspirations. Lise Storm (2014) has depicted the complex restructuring of the party landscape in post-2011 Tunisia and submitted that the consolidation of the representative mandate of political parties as well as of their political programmes was pivotal for the consolidation of democracy in Tunisia. Her analysis points to some elements of continuity between pre-2011 Tunisia and post-2011 Tunisia, including the neglect of the “voice of the citizenry”.

### The Constitution and Its Interpretation

The Tunisian Constitution adopted in 2014 establishes a semi-presidential regime<sup>10</sup> based on separation of powers, in line with the wishes expressed by the Tunisian people during the revolution, eager to put an end to the concentration of powers in the hands of a single person. In the absence of a constitutional court, monitoring the way the Constitution was implemented over the last years is of key importance (M'Barek, 2016).

<sup>9</sup> See for example Marzouki & Meddeb, 2015.

<sup>10</sup> The nature of the regime and the balance of powers was one of the most debated issues within the Constituent Assembly. For more details on the discussions within the Constituent Assembly regarding the nature of the political regime, see for instance: Brésillon, T. (2012, July 30). Which political system for Tunisia? *Nawaat*. Retrieved from <https://nawaat.org/portail/2012/07/30/which-political-system-for-tunisia/>

In a report analysing the Tunisian Constitution, the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung notes that according to the Constitution, it is expected from the President to only play a decisive role in exceptional circumstances and even in this case this role is supervised by the constitutional court (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2014). Some observers have argued that the role the President played since December 2014 had gone beyond the letter and spirit of the Constitution. It has been claimed that the President has derogated in practice from the last sentence of Article 76 of the Constitution that states that the President of the Republic may not hold a political party post while occupying the post of the President. Some of his interventions commenting on the life of the party (including in a televised speech following the terrorist attack on a bus of the presidential guard<sup>11</sup>) and the appointment of his son as leader of Nidaa Tounes have fuelled the perception that President Béji Caïd Essebsi had remained the de facto leader of the political party he created (Nidaa Tounes). The dynamics of the relationships between the President and Prime Ministers since December 2014 and the intervention of the President in government life have been analysed by some experts such as Hamza Meddeb as symptoms of a presidentialisation of the regime. While the Constitution foresees (Article 89) that the President asks the candidate of the leading party or of the electoral coalition that got the highest number of seats within the assembly to constitute a government within a month, it seems that the President has imposed himself as the main actor in selecting this candidate.

Political observers have largely commented on the profile of both Heads and Governments Habib Essid and Youssef Chahed as well as the role of the President in the resignation of the former and the appointment of the latter. Requirements of the Nidaa Tounes/En-Nahda coalition have led to the appointment of an independent and technocratic Prime Minister in 2014 lacking the political authority to impose himself as Head of the Government. President Béji Caïd Essebsi has arguably wanted to reassert his pivotal role even further, with the appointment of a second Prime Minister closer to him politically. President Beji Caid Essebsi has also played a central role in the government negotiations leading to the appointment of all ministers in Youssef Chahed's government and has presided over the first Council of Ministers in Carthage, thereby fully using the ambiguity of Article 93 of the Constitution that reads that "the Prime Minister is the head of the Council of Ministers. The Council of Ministers meets by convocation by the Prime Minister, who sets its agenda. The President of the Republic heads the Council of Ministers, by invitation from the Prime Minister, in the domains of defence, foreign relations and national security relating to the defence of the state and national territory from internal and external threats, and he may also attend other meetings of the Council of Ministers. When he attends meetings of the Council of Ministers, he shall preside over them."

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11 On 29 November 2015, after the terrorist attack against a bus of the presidential guard, President Essebsi made a televised speech where he commented largely on the situation of Nidaa Tounes and the divisions, saying he would intervene as a mediator. This was met with criticism. See Tunisia: Pour le Président de la République Beji Caïd Essebsi, la "paix sociale" participe à la lutte antiterroriste. (2015, November 11). *The Huffington Post Maghreb*.

The way the Constitution has been written uncontestedly requires good and fluid cooperation between the President and the Prime Minister. However, one could argue that the relationship between the President and the Prime Minister has turned into a relationship of submission in favour of the former, rather than equal cooperation. The Constitution seems to make the Head of Government a more prominent figure than the practice of the Tunisian democracy has permitted over the last few years. According to the Constitution and among other tasks, the Prime Minister “sets the state’s general policy... and shall ensure its execution” (Article 91). Mabrouka M'Barek (2016) wrote that repeated removals of Prime Ministers over the last years had weakened the institution. It is worth noting that only a couple of years after the adoption of the Constitution, some have already put forward the idea of amending the Constitution after the next elections in the direction of a more presidential regime, which further fuelled the malaise since the presidential regime continues to be associated with the old regime.

Chapter III of the Constitution dedicated to the legislative power gives to the Assemblée des Représentants du Peuple (ARP) the means and competences to cease being a sole *chambre d'enregistrement* as it used to be over the last decades and to impose itself in the democratic life of the country. The Constitution provides democratic safeguards in order to avoid the domination of the legislative power by one political party and the related government and confers on the opposition a number of rights.<sup>12</sup> Yet, after decades of marginalisation, the ARP is not yet fully playing its role. The lack of resources of the ARP is regularly highlighted by Tunisian<sup>13</sup> and international observers.<sup>14</sup> For comparative purposes, it is useful to highlight that the 2016 budget of the ARP is 33 million Tunisian dinars (MDT), while the budgets of the Presidency of the Republic and the Presidency of the Government are, respectively, 97 MDT and 147 MDT.<sup>15</sup> At the time of writing, members of the ARP had neither offices nor assistants. Another issue of concern, raised by the association *Al-Bawsala* which monitors the work of the ARP, is the persistent absenteeism of Members of Parliament, especially regarding the voting and the commission sessions. Obviously, this trend does not contribute to giving the ARP the key role it should play, while not giving a positive image of MPs either.

## Why Taking into Account the Tunisians' Malaise Matters

There are risks associated with this malaise. One of these risks is seeing Tunisians blaming the democratic system as such for weak performance and for the shortcomings

12 Rights of the opposition include the Presidency of the Finance Committee, the position of “rapporteur” within the Foreign Affairs Committee and the right to establish and head a committee of enquiry annually (Article 60).

13 According to the member of the ARP Mehdi Ben Gharbia, “Ces fonds ne reflètent point le budget qui devrait être alloué à un parlement qui représente le premier pouvoir dans le pays.” Retrieved from <http://www.webmanagercenter.com/actualite/finance/2015/11/28/167250/tunisie-budget-2016-le-budget-de-l-arp-s-elevera-a-pres-de-33-mdt>

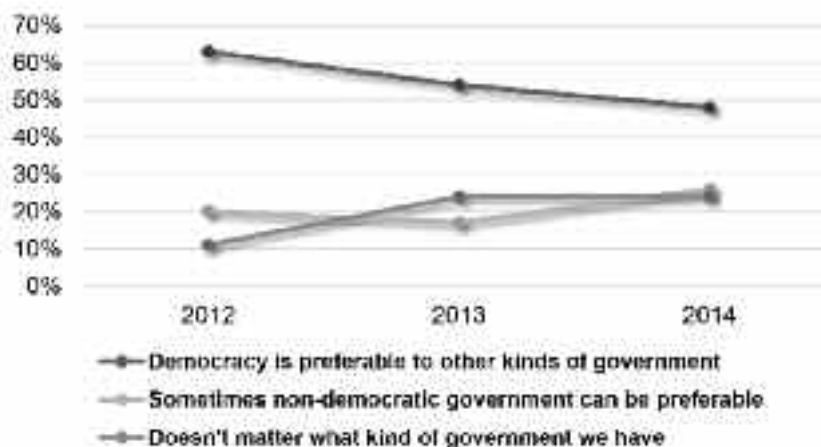
14 See, for instance, the latest resolution of the European Parliament on Tunisia (14 September 2016), which mentions “the lack of means of the PRA, which is hampering its legislative role and slowing down the drafting of the urgently needed new legislation and the reform process” (European Parliament, 2016).

15 Loi de finance 2016 adopted on 10 December 2015 as retrieved from [http://www.finances.gov.tn/index.php?option=com\\_jdownloads&Itemid=721&view=finish&cid=1055&catid=9&lang=fr](http://www.finances.gov.tn/index.php?option=com_jdownloads&Itemid=721&view=finish&cid=1055&catid=9&lang=fr)

of the transition. Some polls show a declining support for the idea of democracy since 2011. According to a poll conducted by Pew Research Center in spring 2014 (see Figure 4), 63% of Tunisians were of the opinion that democracy was preferable to other kinds of government in 2012. This figure went down to 48% in 2014 (Pew Research Center, 2014).

**Figure 4. Support for Democracy Declines in Tunisia**

Which statement comes closest to your opinion?



Source: Graph compiled from data collected by spring 2014 Global Attitudes Survey, Q.19, Pew Research Center, 2014.

In the same vein, another poll conducted by the Arab Barometer showed that the percentage of respondents who said that their fellow citizens were not ready for democracy had increased from 41% in 2011 to 73% in 2016 (Robbins, 2016).

If sustained, this declining support for democracy could lead to renewed instability in Tunisia through at least two channels. First, it could materialise in renewed calls for “restoring order”. If people feel that the democratic gains of the revolution do not offset the costs, the nostalgia for the Ben Ali era could gain further ground and lead to upheavals.

Second, if people perceive they cannot express their protest and opposition through institutional channels, alternative forms of protests, including violent ones, could intensify. The Forum tunisien pour les droits économiques et sociaux (FTDES) has documented the resurgence of violence and mobilisations, a further reflection of the disenchantment and malaise within Tunisian society. Protest movements showing a violent character have been on the rise as have suicides, especially in the age range 26-35 years and in the regions of

Sidi Bouzid, Kairouane and Kasserine (FTDES, 2016). The Director of the Centre d'études maghrébines à Tunis (CEMAT), Larissa Chomiak (2016), argues that “the outbursts of anger and contestation point to the limits of consensual pacts framing formal politics” and that the “weakness of the opposition within Tunisia’s elected parliaments rendered it unable to effectively channel the grievances of marginalised and unemployed populations.” If youths feel misrepresented by both formal politics and civil society fora, the risk is that they would turn to more violent ways to express their anger (Mérone, 2015).

Some observers such as Lina Ben Mhenni have consistently warned against the risks of such a situation (Ben Mhenni, 2016a). Another consequence of this malaise and the disenchantment of youths is indeed the rise of Jihadist-Salafist movements (which the chapter by Stefano Torelli further explores) in Tunisia affecting mostly “the disenfranchised youth” who did not find a place in the post-revolutionary institutional process. The post-2011 period made youths highly vulnerable to the appeal of extremism, especially in lower class neighbourhoods. Ansar al Sharia in Tunisia (AST) became the biggest and most influential Jihadist formation in Tunisia and has been perceived as a movement representing the youth coming from a specific background rather than as a religious group. “AST filled a vacuum left by the political elite in the early stages of the democratisation process, and offered an alternative to many young people who felt abandoned by the politicians and were disappointed with the revolution” (Pétré, 2014). By 2014, Ansar Al Sharia claimed it attracted 70,000 members.

## Conclusions

The malaise in Tunisian society six years after the revolution is real. It is not only linked to the economic and security situation but also to specific socio-political features of the democratic transition. Primarily concerned with the stability of Tunisia and driven by a certain understanding of the success of Tunisian transition, the Tunisian leadership and the international community have not been paying sufficient attention to some aspects such as the growing gap between the political leadership and the society and the growing perception of impunity generated by high levels of corruption and by an incomplete transitional justice process. In this context, quick-win projects, as important as they are on the economic front, could result useful in order to restore a much-needed trust in the political and democratic dimension of the transition. These could include for example forceful actions in the fight against corruption. However, in addition to those quick-win initiatives, more structural efforts are also needed in order to address the mistrust that has gained ground over the last few years. These efforts should continue



to be guided by the goals of the revolution including social justice, dignity and political pluralism. The letter and spirit of the Constitution should be respected. It is important to continue monitoring the balance of powers as foreseen in the Constitution and also to support the development of the Assemblée des représentants du peuple, encourage political parties to step up their efforts and encourage those who have felt sidelined in the transition including youths and Tunisians from the interior to feel empowered, represented and to regain trust in formal politics. Those are tasks not only for Tunisian authorities but also for international sponsors of Tunisia, including the European Union, which should also ensure that their assistance programmes benefit directly – and are perceived as benefitting directly – the Tunisian population, including those who have felt sidelined in the transition process.

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# **Economic Crisis and (Youth) Unemployment in Tunisia: A Danger to the Democratic Transition Process?**

*Isabel Schäfer\**

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\*Associate Senior Researcher, German Development Institute



## Introduction

Since the Tunisian revolution in 2011, the economy has been going through a deep crisis and macro-economic balances have been disturbed. Due to the political and institutional transition process, major economic reforms have been reported. Unemployment remains high, and is one of the most important concerns within the population. The flare-up of social protests in January 2016 has shown that socioeconomic dissatisfaction of the population, in particular in the neglected regions in the interior and south of the country, remains strong and that the democratic transition is still fragile. Many feel that the “goals of the revolution” (dignity, social justice, freedom) have not been achieved, although political and personal freedoms have. But daily life has become even more difficult for many, and those in need or the unemployed do not see an improvement or reward from the revolution.

Tunisia is among those countries that were economically the most concerned by the popular uprisings in 2011, due among other reasons to its export-oriented economic system. The uprisings heavily affected the export industries in Tunisia, such as the export of cables and electrical components for car production in Europe, or the textile sector. The main reasons for problems in these sectors were related to long-lasting strikes and protests, which partially led to a complete halt of the production process. Further important damages occurred for instance in the Tunisian tourism sector, as tourism represents one of the most important sectors of the national economy (about 7.4% of total GDP) and indirectly supports about 473,000 jobs (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2016). Consequently, the already high general unemployment rates (around 13%) increased even more in 2011/2012 (around 18.9%) and then fell to about 15% in 2015.

So far, urgent structural and economic reforms have been postponed. This can partly be explained by the priority of the political and institutional transition, the high number of succeeding governments (the current government of national unity under Youssef Chahed, in office since 26 August 2016, is the seventh since 2011), fearing the implementation of unpopular reform measures. During the electoral campaign for the legislative and presidential elections of 2014, leading to the victory of the secular, conservative-liberal party Nidaa Tounes, most of the political parties promised major economic reforms to lead the country out of the crisis, but the long-awaited reform dynamic did not develop after the building of the first coalition government of Nidaa Tounes with Ennahda, Afek Tounes and UPL in February 2015 under former Prime Minister Habib Essid. Due to the on-going economic crisis, internal party conflicts and

the disappointing socioeconomic results of the Essid government, and on the initiative of President Béji Caïd Essebsi, in August 2016, a national unity government was built in order to overcome party political cleavages and to join forces in the interest of “saving” the Tunisian economy. The new Prime Minister Youssef Chahed declared the “economic state of emergency” in 2016, which also means that the political and the economic transition processes remain fragile.

Therefore, this chapter investigates to what extent the economic crisis, persisting socioeconomic discontent, and (youth) unemployment are endangering the political democratic transition process. The paper argues that the political-institutional transition process has achieved numerous milestones, but among other reasons, missing economic dynamics and reforms, and persistent high unemployment threaten these achievements. The economic crisis is mainly due to the legacy of the Ben Ali era and the turbulences of the revolution, an inadequate economic system, a missing comprehensive and consensual vision about the future model and a lacking determination to reform, but also to the difficult regional context and negative global economic impacts, such as missing foreign direct investments or global competition. High and persistent unemployment is mainly due to missing investments in a productive private sector with qualified jobs for a skilled labour force, restricting legislative framework conditions, and gaps in the education system. All these difficulties lead to a situation where large parts of the society feel unsatisfied and blame “the new state”.

In a first section, the paper analyses the current state of affairs of the economic situation in Tunisia, and its impact on job creation. What elements of change and continuity in the Tunisian economy can we distinguish since 2011? How have the main economic sectors been developing since 2011, and which sectors have a future potential? Who strengthens and who hinders economic reforms? The second section addresses more particularly the challenge of (youth) unemployment. What are the underlying causes of high unemployment and what are the obstacles to job creation? Who is most concerned by unemployment? Which reforms are the most urgent to implement? How can the mismatch between job offer and job demand be coped with? The third section develops some recommendations.

## The Tunisian Economic System: History and Characteristics

Under the Ben Ali regime, the economic growth rates of Tunisia have been more or less stable at about 5% over a decade. Therefore, today in 2016, some political actors (mainly

former RCDists) are beginning to argue that Tunisia was doing much better under the former regime, and are trying to minimise the achievements and value of the democratic transition process. It was a natural process and, after the revolution of 2011, a phase of uncertainty began and growth rates decreased (from about 5% in 2010 to -2% in 2015), but by 2016 the growth rate should start to slowly recover from the shock, which is not yet the case. But according to international finance institutions, cautious predictions announce a slow recovery up to 2.3% or 2.5% in 2017 and 2018. Five variables are particularly important to macroeconomic stability: low and stable inflation, low long-term interest rates, low national debt relative to GDP, low deficit and currency stability.<sup>1</sup> These variables represent major challenges in the current Tunisian economy.

Against the background of the recent developments and challenges in the Tunisian economy, the Tunisian population is asking for a “new social contract” between the state and society. In Tunisia, there has also been a sort of non-voluntary “silent agreement” between the authoritarian Ben Ali regime and the population, as in many other states of the MENA region: the state takes care of the society (e.g. by subsidising food and energy), in exchange for limited political freedom and participation. After 2011, in Tunisia, the society no longer accepts this former “social contract” model. Under the Ben Ali regime, the Tunisian economy and politics were more or less “protected” from external influences (except export industries) by a security state present in all domains of the society and in the economic system, and kept under an artificial bubble cap. Since 2011, the country has been exposed to all kinds of external economic and political influences, while being in a precarious and weak economic and political transitional situation.

Tunisia is one of the rare cases where the political transition process looks rather promising after 2011 (Schäfer, 2015a), even if the “model” character of the Tunisian transition process has been overstressed in recent scientific and political literature (see also the chapter written by Emmanuel Cohen-Hadria in this joint study). From an economic perspective the Tunisian case shares some similarities with other countries in the MENA region, such as the great youth bulge (all MENA countries), being an oil-importing country (like Morocco), having a dominant public sector (all MENA countries), an export-oriented economy (like Morocco), and a close relationship with the European Union (like Morocco). Tourism is one of the central economic sectors (as in Morocco and Egypt), which was heavily touched by the upheavals of 2011, terrorist attacks in 2015, and on-going social unrests and strikes. Cronyism and corruption were deeply inherent to the economic system under the Ben Ali regime (1987-2011). But still in 2014 more than 25% of the firms reported some informal payment to the administration “to speed things up” (World Bank, 2014b, p. 17). Despite the liberal reform programmes

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<sup>1</sup> Macroeconomic stability describes a national economy that has minimised vulnerability to external shocks, which in turn increases its prospects for sustained growth. Macroeconomic stability acts as a buffer against currency and interest fluctuations in the global market; it is a necessary but insufficient requirement for growth and exposure to currency fluctuations, large debt burdens, and unmanaged inflation can cause economic crisis and collapse in GDP. The Reut Institute (2016, December 28). Macroeconomic stability. Retrieved from <http://reut-institute.org/Publication.aspx?PublicationId=1299>

implemented under the Ben Ali regime, in cooperation with the IMF and the World Bank, unemployment continued to increase and people became poorer (Sika, 2012, p. 7). They indirectly contributed to the power stability of the authoritarian regime, and strengthened the wealth and power of a few elites, in this case the Ben Ali-Trabelsi Clan and its supporters.

The Tunisian case is specific in the sense that Tunisia is even closer to the EU than other MENA countries: the EU is the main export destination (about 75% of Tunisian exports). The country has a strong middle class and one of the most advanced education systems in the MENA region. However, the higher the education level, the higher the probability of being unemployed, as the education system has its pitfalls, too (Buckner, 2011). Graduate unemployment is more than twice as high (33.4%) as the average official general unemployment rate (15%). The Tunisian economy is also characterised by strong regional differences and misbalances, and a focus on exports with little added value, concentrated in only a few EU countries. Emigration as a relief against the pressure on the labour market has a long tradition (11% of the Tunisian population lives abroad). Further characteristics are: a comparatively positive business environment, little access to finance, difficult access to electricity for industry, and few ICT infrastructures (Weinmann, 2014, p. 3). Only a few industries or products are competitive on a global level; corruption remains a current pattern in the economic system, and has even increased since 2011.

In the past, after independence in 1956 (from French colonial rule), in terms of a development path for the building of modern industrial sectors, Tunisia followed – as did many other Arab republics – the path of import substitution (Richards, Waterbury, Cammett & Diwan, 2014, p. 24ff). This meant that domestic production should gradually substitute imports from Europe, the nationalisation of private foreign companies, the construction of modern industrial complexes, and the maintenance of high tariff and trade barriers, instead of structural reform programmes. After a brief period of socialist planning experiments (during the 1960s), the country opted from the 1970s onwards for an export orientation, including export-led growth, openness to external trade and foreign investment. Export companies received tax, custom and import duty exemptions as incentives. This policy boosted the domestic economic development but rendered Tunisia more vulnerable to external influences and shocks. Different countries maintained or introduced tariff barriers against Tunisian exports: France maintained trade barriers to Tunisian textiles, Italy to Tunisian olive oil, Libya sent Tunisian workers back home, and Saudi Arabia depressed oil prices. These factors led to an economic crisis in the early 1980s (Weinmann, 2014, p. 20). “The crisis led to a change in political leadership as

well as to an economic policy shift towards economic liberalisation” (Weinmann, 2014, p. 20), and pushed Tunisia to sign structural adjustment agreements with the IMF and the World Bank. During the 1980s and 1990s the economy grew fast, but unemployment was already an important problem.

While in the Gulf states or in the oil-exporting Tunisian neighbour countries Libya and Algeria the rulers traditionally took advantage of high oil prices to quell protests through economic incentives (“autocratic bargain = material benefits in exchange for political quiescence”, Richards, Waterbury, Cammett & Diwan, 2014, p. 412), the Ben Ali regime tried to do so by providing food and energy subsidies. In addition, providing jobs in the oversized public sector were part of the authoritarian bargain (Assaad, 2014; Salehi-Isfahani, 2012). The Ben Ali regime distributed resources along family (Trabelsi clan) and follower lines, and “efficiently” created a network of a corrupt entourage, based on financial incentives and personal advantages. But besides clientelist structures, impeding sustainable structural economic reforms, it is the low degree of regional integration, and the absence of an independent, competitive private sector, integrated into the global market, that hindered and continues to hinder an economic take-off. The central problems of the MENA region (also true for Tunisia) were well known for more than a decade: “insufficient job creation, labour market pressures exacerbated by the youth bulge, the mismatch between education systems and labour market needs, the declining quantity of water and rising dependency on food imports, the continuing housing crisis in urban areas, and the rise of political Islam across the region” (Richards, Waterbury, Cammett & Diwan, 2014, p. 408).

Since 2011, the political context has changed: “street politics” have become more important as a form of political expression, and people demand more of their leaders as they did under the former social contract. This also alters the context of policy-making: new political regimes are emerging, and rulers are compelled to respond more effectively to citizen demands (Richards, Waterbury, Cammett & Diwan, 2014, p. 408), including new perspectives on the political economy of the region. Socioeconomic factors that influenced the social protests in 2011 were, next to crony capitalism, the rollback of the state and the declining welfare regime; in opposition to these factors two groups were alienated by the protest of the poor: formal sector workers and tenuous middle classes (Richards, Waterbury, Cammett & Diwan, 2014, p. 409). Especially in the case of Tunisia, the sudden broad coalition between the poor, mostly informal workers from the country’s disadvantaged centre region, the strong Tunisian middle classes with informal and formal sector workers, youth activists, and the trade unions, enabled the overthrow of the Ben Ali regime. The perceptions of increasing inequality, social insecurity and social injustice

increased the political protest potential and the rise of the revolutionary movement. It was in particular the young generation who was asking for more political freedom, mobility, recognition and perspectives (Schäfer, 2015b). Since 2011, the Tunisian economy has had difficulties recovering from the turbulences of the revolution.

## Current Economic Trends and Crisis in Tunisia

### Economic Trends and Challenges

Mid-term perspectives for the wider MENA region are rather grim, mainly due to political crises and armed conflicts (World Bank, 2015a). This difficult regional context also negatively impacts on Tunisia's economy, in addition to its homemade structural problems.

Low growth rates reflect the missing economic dynamic in Tunisia: since 2011, growth rates have not yet recovered. After the first shock of the revolution in 2011, economic growth broke down (from 5% in 2010 to -2% in 2011), then recovered to 3% in 2012, went down again to 2.3% in 2013 and 2.4% in 2014. It remains fragile: less than 1% in 2015 in reaction to the three terrorist attacks in 2015. But 5% economic growth would be needed in order to create 80,000 new jobs needed every year.<sup>2</sup> Before 2011, the average growth rate was about 5%; since 2011, the average is 1.5%. A slow recovery between 2.3% and 3% is predicted for 2017/2018, provided that there are no further terrorist attacks, social stability increases and structural reforms are implemented (World Bank, 2016b).

Due to low growth and to the government decision to calm down the population by public spending, the debt has increased to about 59% (of GDP in 2016) during the last 5 years (Germany Trade & Invest [GTAI], 2014). Public debt was 51.7% of GDP in 2014, and 53% of GDP in 2015 (African Development Bank Group [AfDB], Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2015a, p. 2). In particular, the payment of the large mass of employees in the public sector asked for an important part of the public budget (from 41% in 2010 to 50% in 2016), which is more than 13% of GDP (Meddeb, 2016). These sums are missing in the public investment budget, which went down from 24% in 2010 to 15% in 2016; and state savings decreased from 21% to 13% in the same period (Meddeb, 2016). Already in July 2015, former Investment Minister Yassine Brahim announced that Tunisia would have great problems to pay its debts. In particular, the

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<sup>2</sup> Interview with young entrepreneur, Tunis, 4 September 2015.

repayment in foreign currencies is a problem. The fiscal deficit went from minus 1% in 2010 to 7% in 2013 and to 4.8% in 2015 (Meddeb, 2016), and might rise to 5.6% in 2016 (World Bank, 2016b). The external deficit is increasingly financed by transfer from the Gulf countries, less by transfer from Europe or North America. The Tunisian Dinar has significantly lost its value since 2011 (1 Euro in 2010 = 1.92 TND; 1 Euro in 2014: 2.29 TND, 1 Euro in 2016: 2.40 TND) (“Marché de changes”, 2014).

The level of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) was already low before 2011, but it has been seriously affected by political and economic turbulences and declined by more than 40% since 2012 to 1.1 bn USD in 2015 (AfDB, OECD & UNDP, 2016, p. 55). Besides oil, gas and phosphate extraction, FDI mainly flow into services, tourism and construction (pro-poor and labour intensive). But further diversification of FDI (in terms of sectors and regions) would be needed in order to create more qualified employment. Foreign investors mainly hesitate to invest in Tunisia because of the unstable regional, security and political context, even though in 2016 the security situation slightly improved. But the terrorist attacks of March, June and November 2015 and March 2016 negatively impacted on the tourism sector and foreign investment. In the Ease of Doing Business Ranking 2017 of the World Bank, Tunisia scored 77th (2017) against 75th (2016) among 190 countries. 92% of the private sector investments are concentrated in the northeast of the country and less than 5% in the southwest and southeast (Mercy Corps, 2012, p. 7). The investment law (code) of 1989 included tax and custom exemptions to local and foreign investors; it was renewed or complemented in 1994, by an investment incentives law that provides further tax reductions, and free rent of state land for large-scale investments with high job creation (Weinmann, 2014, p. 20). Investors were waiting for a signal of security and trust, especially after the announcement that the state debt has reached 53% or even 60% according to other sources. A first draft of the new Investment Law was discussed from mid 2015 and finally adopted in September 2016. The modifications of the law were presented during the international investment conference “Tunisia 2020” organised by the Chahed government in Tunis in November 2016. The conference allowed for the attraction of 6 billion euros of future investments (signed) and a further 8 billion euros investments (announced).

In addition to the revolution-related ups and downs, there are more substantial and structural challenges.

Tunisia was downgraded from an upper middle-income country to a lower middle income country (World Bank, 2016c), has a population of about 11.1 million inhabitants (2016), a GDP of 43.01 billion USD (2015) and a GNI per capita of 3,980 USD (2015) (World

Bank, 2015b). The GDP per employed person is about 20,426 USD (2013) (International Labour Organization [ILO], n.d). Structural challenges arise from the targeted transition from a low-cost economy towards a higher added value economy or innovation- and knowledge-based economy (Altenburg & Lütkenhorst, 2015). This means, for instance, a transition from mass tourism to eco/cultural tourism or from low-cost textile to “haut de gamme”/industrial textile.<sup>3</sup> Some efforts in this respect are currently being undertaken, but this sort of structural industrial change creates new structural unemployment because former skills are no longer needed, and new ones are not yet available (skill mismatch). However, the majority of the production and export sectors continue to be dominated by little added value sectors. This situation induces less profit and less capital to be redistributed or to be reinvested in job creation.

The economic crisis also touches the labour intensive export-oriented sectors (e.g. textile, automobile) and contributed to the negative score of the trade balance (2013: -12.8%; 2014: -13.3% of the GDP) (Institut national de la statistique [INS], 2015). The commercial deficit is 7.3 bn TND. In 2014, exports increased by only 2.5%, while imports increased by 6.4% (INS, 2015). Major imports (2013) are: agricultural and food products (11.1%), energy and lubricants (17.2%), mining, phosphate and derivatives (2.2%), textile, clothing and leather (11.3%), mechanical and electric industries (40.6%), other industries (17.6%). Major exports are: agricultural and food products (9.9%), energy and lubricants (15.2%), mining, phosphate and derivatives (6%), textile, clothing and leather (22.5%), mechanical and electric industries (37.4%), other industries (9%).<sup>4</sup>

Low competitiveness represents a further problem. The decrease of exports is not only due to decreasing demand from the EU in financial-economic crisis, but rather to insufficient or modest competitiveness of Tunisian products, and also to outfalls in the production processes. There is a shortage of industrial products or services in which Tunisia has the potential to become a global player (World Bank, 2014b, p. 20). In the Global Competitiveness Index 2016-2017 Tunisia ranks 95 of 138 countries (GTAI, 2014). This is partly due to missed technological and scientific updating, little use of new products and services, and a modest level of investment promotion efforts.

The high and rising level of the informal sector (Cling, Lagrée, Razafindrakoto & Roubaud, 2012) is estimated at 50% of GDP in 2016. It creates many short time and informal jobs (mostly non-skilled), but no decent or sustainable jobs. The rise of the informal market is due to the uncertain transition phase, but also to the open border with Libya after 2011 (e.g. the increase of black market trade with gasoline, drugs, weapons, health, and food

<sup>3</sup> Some French, Italian and German luxury textile products are produced in Tunisia.

<sup>4</sup> The main agricultural resources are olives, olive oil, grain, tomatoes, citrus fruits, sugar beets, dates, almonds, beef and milk products; main mineral resources are oil, phosphate, iron ore, lead, zinc and salt. Germany Trade & Invest [GTAI]. (2014). Wirtschaftsdaten kompakt: Tunesien. Retrieved from [http://www.gtai.de/GTAI/Content/DE/Trade/Fachdaten/MKT/2016/11/mkt201611222064\\_159420\\_wirtschaftsdaten-kompakt---tunesien.pdf?v=1](http://www.gtai.de/GTAI/Content/DE/Trade/Fachdaten/MKT/2016/11/mkt201611222064_159420_wirtschaftsdaten-kompakt---tunesien.pdf?v=1)



products). Informal trade with Algeria also has a long tradition, as well as falsification and copying of products (e.g. textile, multimedia).

The salaries do not increase in the same way as price levels, a situation which continues to create more social protest potential. Since 2010, the average salary increased by 17%; but the price index for households by 21.5%. Prices for food and beverage increased by 27.2%. Prices have increased the most for hotels (+10.8%), as well as alcohol and tobacco (+9.8%). Further increase of prices concerns food products (+6.9%), clothing and shoes (+6.7%), furniture and household equipment (+5.4%), education (+4.4%), health (+3.6%), transport (+3.2%), leisure and culture (+3%). There is a further increase for housing, water, electricity, gas and other combustibles (+4.9%). Only prices in the communication sector have decreased by 2.9% ("Marché de changes", 2014). The consumer price index in April 2015 was 5.7% ("Marché de changes", 2014). Between 2011 and 2016, the inflation rate was on average 4-5%. In January 2016, the inflation rate was 3.5%, compared to 4.9% in 2015 and 5.5% in 2014, and the Tunisian Central Bank cut its main interest rate to 4.25% from 4.75% to boost economic growth ("Tunisia's annual inflation rate falls", 2016). For large parts of the population, including the middle class, daily life has become more difficult since 2011.

Human development is rather advanced in comparison to other countries in the MENA region. Infant mortality is decreasing: 13 per 1000 live births (2013), life expectancy is at 74.1 years (2014); adult literacy rates are at 89% (male) and 74% (female) (2015) (Transparency International, n.d; World Bank, 2014b; World Bank, 2015b; Central Intelligence Agency [CIA], 2015). The general school enrolment rate is very high (99% of children between 6-11 years old), but poverty remains at about 15% on average, and 32% in certain regions (centre-west, south-west) (AfDB, OECD, UNDP, 2015a, p. 2). The poor and needy population is estimated at 3 million. The social security system is in deficit. The health care system is partially well developed (depending on region and specialisation) but remains in difficulties. The current economic crisis and budget cuts threaten the achievements of the formerly well-acknowledged health system of Tunisia.

Important challenges for the Tunisian economy and politics come from the persistent domestic regional misbalances between the rich capital, northern and coastal areas, and the poorer centre and south. Numerous attempts to decentralise have been made since 2011, but many of them have been half-hearted, not implemented at all or inefficient. Regional development is part of the decentralisation approach. In 2015, more than 50% of the public budget for regional development was blocked. The other 50% has been

invested in regional projects. The state presence in the regions is weak, public and private investments are missing, and a global development strategy for these regions is also missing.

These economic trends illustrate the macroeconomic imbalances and unfinished reform agendas, such as subsidy reform, fiscal reform, business climate improvement, public sector reform or inter-regional equity. They hinder an increase of domestic and foreign investments, and thus sustainable growth. Tunisia continues to spend too much on high civil service wage bills, on distorting and costly energy and food subsidies, and on a predominant public sector. All this spending – at the expense of investment spending – worsens the fiscal deficit and is insufficiently addressed.

In sum, the economic indicators and difficulties described above, such as low growth, inflation, public debt, missing and little diversified foreign and national investments concentrated in the few richer regions, the weight of the informal market, corruption (Tunisia ranks 76 out of 168 in the Corruption Perceptions Index 2015), restrictive investment legislation, an industrial development towards less labour intensive sectors, lead to a situation where job creation becomes more and more difficult and where the majority of the population is unsatisfied.<sup>5</sup> According to a survey of April 2015, 64% of the people are unsatisfied with the manner of problem solving in the country; 73.4% are unsatisfied with the social situation, and 87.3% are unsatisfied with the economic situation (SIGMA, 2015). This explains why the whole transition process since 2011 has been accompanied by numerous strikes and on-going protests in different sectors.

### The Economic Policy Since 2011

Major economic reforms, such as a comprehensive fiscal reform, fostering more fiscal inclusion and justice and re-strengthening spending power, have been postponed so far. This might change with the current government of national unity under Youssef Chahed, in office since August 2016. However, the Chahed government is planning a package of unpopular austerity measures (freeze wages in the public sector, increase taxes, decrease subsidies) for the 2017 budget in order to reduce public spending and raise new revenue to reduce the deficit, taking the risk of provoking new social unrests. Under the preceding six governments, different laws have been adopted (e.g. on public-private partnership, on investment, and on renewable energies), but these laws have been more or less emptied of sense, due to numerous compromises between the political parties, and many related implementation laws (*décret-loi*) that have not yet been adopted (see also the chapter written by Emmanuel Cohen-Hadria in this study). Some of them might

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<sup>5</sup> Tunisia ranks 98 among 157 countries in the World Happiness Report in 2016. Retrieved from [http://worldhappiness.report/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2016/03/HR-V1\\_web.pdf](http://worldhappiness.report/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2016/03/HR-V1_web.pdf). In 2014, 49% of survey respondents evaluate the economic situation in Tunisia as “very bad”, 37% as “bad”, and only 13% as “good”. Arab Public Opinion Survey 2014. Retrieved from <http://arabcenterdc.org/survey/2014-public-opinion-survey/>. On the public opinion and economic situation, see Berman, C. (2016). Tunisia’s economic transition? Popular evaluations of social crisis and reform. Retrieved from <http://www.arabbarometer.org/>

complicate even more the attempts to get out of the economic crisis (Meddeb, 2011; Meddeb, 2016). Despite the new law on investment (in force in January 2017), rigidities in the economic system are still important, and foreign and Tunisian investors still need to overcome numerous obstacles before investing. Economic reforms also need to go hand in hand with political governance reforms such as the decentralisation of the administration, the local participation of citizens, and more transparency. But the process of decentralisation has made very slow progress since 2011. The contentious law on economic reconciliation intends to discharge former economic fraud, corruption and irregularities under the Ben Ali regime with the intention of allocating these funds for investments in the Tunisian economy.

The World Bank highlights, among others, the importance of reducing regulations that restrict the business environment, and increasing competition of firms by abolishing the privileges of former protected, often inefficient firms (World Bank, 2014b, p. 16). Indeed, the lack of competitive pressure, through unfair advantages, does not play in favour of job creation and more productivity. Other observers insist for instance on the importance of financial and economic inclusion (Meddeb, 2011; Meddeb, 2016). In 2016, the banking rate of persons older than 15 years was only 52%. Microfinance and mobile banking could increase this rate up to 75% in a few years, and facilitate micro-credits and reduce the informal sector. Economic inclusion targets the integration of the informal economy into the formal economy, and could facilitate the conditions for young people to create their own start-up. From the entrepreneurs' perspective the priorities of the economic transition should be a reform of the public administration (e.g. customs), fight against corruption, reform of the investment legislation, redefinition of fiscal advantages and the modernisation of the education system including vocational training (Ernst & Young, 2016, p. 13). SME entrepreneurs continue to encounter numerous difficulties creating their own business although they can play such a significant role in job creation and local development (Denieuil & Madoui, 2011).

The debate about the future economic and development model has been going on for more than two years now, but major decisions have not been made so far. In the past, a system of protection, clientelism and unequal distribution of rent benefits was the norm, while market competition was the exception. Tunisia would need at least 5% growth again in order to be able to respond to the challenges in terms of employment, regional misbalances, poverty, exclusion and further problems. So far, the Tunisian development model was mainly based on a cheap labour force, mainly in low quality mass tourism, low quality mass textile, sub-contracting (e.g. in the automotive industry) and in the comparative advantage of the geographic proximity to Europe. But even in the past, 1%

more growth was not able to create more than 15,000 new jobs (Meddeb, 2016). A strong domestic productive sector, with higher added values, is needed. Many observers and politicians tend to blame the informal sector, the contraband trade, corruption and terrorism as the main causes of the economic crisis and unemployment. But it seems to be even more important to define a new and integrated economic, development and employment strategy and to decide upon the investment in future-oriented industrial sectors, which might create a higher number of qualified new jobs. Therefore, it is important to open up to new investors, to facilitate investment conditions and to reduce barriers, and to reduce mechanisms of rentier state mentality or former privileges. But next to missing investments in the domestic productive sector employing a skilled labour force, there is also a need to redefine the social dimension of the economic and development model (Bedoui, 2013; Ben Sedrine & Amami, 2014). A new social policy and constructive social dialogue are necessary for a well-functioning and dynamic economy (Karshenas, Moghadam & Alami, 2014). In addition, certain reforms in the education sector will be necessary in order to address the existing skill mismatch between job offer and job demand, and in order to increase the quality and appropriateness of education.

The 5 Year Plan (2016-2020) defines different priorities in order to reach its objectives, in particular good governance, diversification of the economic sectors, sustainable development and regionalisation. The hope is to regain a certain dynamic of the economy from 2018 onwards. Concrete projects of the 5 Year Plan were discussed during the international Investment Conference “Tunisia 2020”, which took place in November 2016 in Tunis. The 5 Year Plan provides a particular interest to the reduction of unemployment, green economy and sustainable development. The objective is to reach again an average growth rate of 5%, to lower unemployment from 15% to 11%, and to significantly reduce the public deficit. The objective of the energy efficiency plan is to reduce energy consumption in Tunisia by 30% before 2030. Prime Minister Youssef Chahed recently signalled with his presence at the COP22 in Morocco that climate change is an important issue for Tunisia. The Tunisian National Development Plan takes into account climate change and reduction of greenhouse emissions. Tunisia has signed the international conventions (UN Climate Change Convention of 1993, Kyoto Protocol of 2002) and is committed to reduce its emissions under the framework of the Climate Agreement of Paris.

But most of the government strategies proposed so far mainly represent a list of projects. A comprehensive political-economic vision with a long-term horizon is still missing. Large parts of the population and of the political parties are in favour of a mixed economic system, with a stronger private sector than now, balanced with government interventions

to ensure a fairer distribution of wealth. But, so far, the former economic system has not significantly changed and the demands of the Tunisian citizens for fairer access to economic opportunity have not yet been realised (World Bank, 2014b, p. 18). The need to move on from a system based on privileges to one based on competition and competence is widely recognised, but efficient strategies, approaches and tools have not yet been agreed or implemented.

One of the major socioeconomic challenges of the transition process remains high unemployment. Therefore, the following second section addresses the challenge of (youth) unemployment. What are the causes of high unemployment? Who is the most concerned? Where does the skill mismatch come from, and how could it be reduced?

## The Challenge of (Youth) Unemployment

### Challenges of the Labour Market

The Tunisian labour market is marked by strong regional differences between the richer northern and coastal regions, and a poorer centre and south, due to unequal resources, location advantages and weak decentralisation policies. Further important features are the strong public sector, the youth bulge, emigration as a traditional relief instrument for the labour market, high and persistent high level of unemployment, disproportionate level of female unemployment and graduate unemployment.

In 2015, the Tunisian population was about 11.1 million. About 11% of Tunisian citizens live abroad. The annual growth rate of the population was 0.9% in 2014; the average birth rate was 16.9 birth/1000 inhabitants in 2014; the fertility rate was 2.2 children per woman in 2012 (GTAI, 2014). The age structure indicates the high percentages of young population, as in most of the other MENA countries, which is known as the youth bulge. 23% of the total population are under 14 years old; 16% are between 15 and 24; 44.6% are between 25 and 54; 8.4% are between 55 and 64, and 7.9% are older than 65 (World Bank, 2015b). Despite the fact that the annual population growth has decreased from 1.3% in 1990 to 0.9% in 2014, the high percentage of youth population explains the pressure on the labour market (Chaaban, 2009; Chaaban, 2010). Although the rate of new entrants into the labour market has been slowing down, large cohorts continue to prepare to enter the labour market over the next several years (Pierre, 2014). In order to be able to absorb the entire additional working age population, an additional 450,000 jobs would be needed over the next 10 years (Weinmann, 2014, p. 39). But the high

percentage of youth population can also be considered as an economic advantage, in the sense that the demographic dividend or human capital could be capitalised; in return, reformed employment policies would need to include these new labour market entrants into the labour market, and this could lead to higher growth (Pierre, 2014). However, this growth needs to be inclusive and should not be based on short-term populist economic policies addressing legitimate social justice demands (Escribano, 2016).

Unemployment, and in particular youth unemployment, remains one of the most urgent and difficult challenges in terms of social cohesion and economic transition of Tunisian society. The official total unemployment rate is about 15% (15.3% in 2015, 15.2% in 2014, 15.8% in 2013) (AfDB, OECD, UNDP, 2015a, p. 2; ILO, n.d; World Bank, 2015b). The 15% could only be maintained through massive recruitment in the administration and public enterprises (Meddeb, 2016). In 2015, the total number of registered unemployed was about 650,000 (or 800,000 according to other sources) of a total population of 11 million, and an active labour force of about 4 million people (INS, 2013). The estimated number of unreported cases is about 600,000 additional unemployed people. The labour force participation rate is very low: 47.6% (2013) (World Bank, 2016).

Youth<sup>6</sup> unemployment was at 33.2% in 2015, which is more than twice the general unemployment of 15%. Young people are experiencing a double employment crisis as a result of the demographic phenomenon known as the youth bulge (Ortiz & Cummins, 2012). The share of youth who are not in employment, education or training is very high: 25.4% in 2013 (ILO, n.d.). There is little information about this “youth at risk” who lack access to learning opportunities and are jobless and/or inactive (Bardak, 2014). Young Graduate unemployment was at 31.4% in 2014. This corresponds to about 250,000 unemployed graduates.

Female unemployment is higher: for every female worker, there are about 3 male workers (2012); this share in the labour force has not changed over the last 10 years (Weinmann, 2014, p. 29). The number of unemployed female graduates is twice as high as for male graduates. Although the absolute number of female job seekers is smaller (275,000 in 2012) than for male job seekers (420,000 in 2012), the unemployment rate is much higher, and it is still more difficult for women to find a job, due to a shortage of vacancies suitable for female employment (Weinmann, 2014, p. 32). This is particularly striking given the fact that gender equality and women’s rights in Tunisia are progressive (compared to other MENA countries), and the presence of

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6 Youth is a more fluid category than a fixed age group. Here it is defined in line with the UN definition as those persons between the ages of 15 and 25 years. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] (n.d.) What do we mean by youth? Retrieved from <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/youth/youth-definition/>. On definitions and youth values, see Murphy, 2012; Hoffmann & Jamal, 2012.

women in higher education is very high (about 50% of students), and their presence in the economic leadership, as well as in the young start-up scene, is increasing.<sup>7</sup>

About 50% of employment is informal, which often means low productivity, inadequate working conditions, high labour turnover, as well as limited opportunities for investment and business growth (Pierre, 2014). Informal employment also implies lack of possibilities for workers to claim their rights, no social protection, and lost taxes for the state.

The Tunisian labour market is asymmetric: there are about 250,000 unemployed graduates for around 100,000 non-academic job vacancies, mainly in the construction and agricultural sector. This mismatch is due to the great increase (by 46% between 2005 and 2011) of graduates from higher education on the one hand, and an economic system dominated by sectors employing low-qualified labour force on the other (Jouini, 2013, p. 65). This means that there are thousands of unemployed graduates (about 250,000) (“Tunisie. Révision du programme Amal”, 2012) and thousands of open jobs, especially in the construction and agricultural sector (an estimated 100,000 in different sectors, according to UTICA). At the same time, there is a gap of skilled, qualified and motivated craftsmen, hindering a positive comprehensive economic development of Tunisia.

One of the reasons is the “massification” of higher education leading to a situation where too many graduates are overwhelming the labour market, all hoping for a secure job in the public sector. The massification negatively and gradually impacted on the quality of the education system. In addition, the lack of appropriate foundational skills has probably contributed to the employment crisis (Steer, Ghanem & Jalbout, 2014, p. 2). There is a “large but inadequately skilled supply of workers with unrealistic employment expectations; insufficient job creation with an inadequate supply of skilled jobs for educated workers; a weak regulatory framework contributing to high unemployment and widespread informality; as well as limited voice options for worker groups wishing to highlight these problems and agitate for systemic reforms” (Subrahmanyam & Castel, 2014, p. 2). The labour force is not adapting to the requirements of the labour demand (in the formal and informal sector). But another important reason is the missing productive sector, creating sufficient labour demand on the job offer side. The Tunisian economy is dominated by services, mainly tourism, gastronomy, medical or financial services and, increasingly, call centres. About one third of the jobs in the service sector are in tourism (470,000).

Insufficient job creation was already a problem before the Tunisian revolution. Before 2011, an annual growth rate of 4-5% allowed for the creation of 47,000 to 60,000 new jobs per year, facing an additional demand of 90,000 new labour market entrants. This

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<sup>7</sup> See for instance the President of the entrepreneurs' association UTICA, Ouided Bouchamaoui, the PDG of the state-owned train company SNCFT, Sabiha Derbal, or the new Minister of Finance Lamia Boujnah Zribi.

meant that already before 2011 every year a minimum of 30,000 new unemployed came to the labour market. In addition, only 10% of the 60,000 new jobs are qualified jobs (in the private sector) and can offer jobs to the qualified higher education graduates. But among the 90,000 new labour market entrants are about 70,000 university graduates. Thus, the system not only produced more and more unemployment but also multiple frustrations (Meddeb, 2016). The education system continues to produce thousands of additional higher graduates since 2011, while the growth rate went down to about 1.3% (2016).

### Skill Mismatch as a Particular Problem

Alongside economic, demographic<sup>8</sup> and political reasons, educational reasons such as the skill mismatch contribute to the high and persistent (youth) unemployment. Skill mismatch is a gap between the skills provided by the worker and the skills needed for the job (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2015b). The particular pattern of the skill mismatch in Tunisia is the surplus and strong increase of graduates from higher education (by 46% between 2005 and 2011) and an economic system dominated by sectors mainly employing an unqualified or low-qualified labour force (Jouini, 2013, p. 65). A gap between job offer and job demand is “normal” to a certain extent, given the fact that a 100% employment rate can never be reached, because frictional unemployment is a natural part of the labour market. However, if the gap between job offer and job demand becomes too large, labour employment policies have to become active or they have already failed. The surplus of academic graduates or “over-academisation” illustrates how Tunisia became a “victim” of its own ambitious education policy. On the one hand, there are about 650,000 job seekers, among them one third or 250,000 unemployed graduates (2015) (“Tunisie. Révision du programme Amal”, 2012), and on the other there are about 100,000 job vacancies, especially in low qualified jobs in the construction and agricultural sector.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, there is a lack of skilled, qualified craftsmen and technicians.<sup>10</sup> According to a recent survey, 71% of the interrogated enterprises have difficulties recruiting experienced staff, experienced technical officers, and junior executive employees; while 40% of the enterprises estimate they are overstaffed, keeping the staff in the hope of regaining activity (24%) or lacking an effective staff reduction plan (34%), 41% are currently implementing a workforce reduction plan (Ernst & Young, 2016, p. 9). This shows that existing jobs are also in danger and that in addition to a job creation strategy, a job protection strategy is needed.

This skill mismatch negatively impacts on the productivity of SMEs and economic development of Tunisia: because it leads to underemployment, in the sense that a person

8 See Mirkin, B. (2013). Arab Spring: Demographics in a region in transition. Arab Human Development Report. Research Paper Series. UNDP Research Paper Series. AHDR, Regional Bureau for Arab States. Retrieved from <http://www.arabsi.org/attachments/article/4705/Arab%20Human%20Development%20Report.pdf>

9 The number of 100,000 has been circulated by UTICA, but is not based on solid statistical analysis according to economists.

10 Findings from interviews with entrepreneurs, experts and instructors, Tunis, 26 August-16 September 2015.



is employed in a low-paying job that requires fewer skills or less training than the person possesses. Underemployment is the underutilisation of the productive capacity of the employed population.<sup>11</sup> Adaption processes happening during the shift from the primary sector (resource extraction) to the secondary sector (resource processing) and to the tertiary sector (service industry) often lead to structural unemployment, because the qualifications of one sector are not adapted to the other sector, and first need to be transmitted by vocational education (Abraham & Hinz, 2005). Tunisia is in this sort of process right now, shifting from a low-cost economy towards a higher added value economy or innovation and knowledge-based economy, or at least this is the country's objective. There are numerous intervention possibilities to address youth unemployment, such as skills training, entrepreneurship promotion, subsidised employment, employment services, reforms to labour market regulation, training programmes or wage subsidies (Robalino, Margolis, Rother, Newhouse & Lundberg, 2013). The following section concentrates on three possible tracks bridging the skill mismatch between job offer and job demand.

#### **Retraining and Re-profiling of the Current Jobseekers**

In particular, young graduates need more re-training and re-profiling opportunities in order to rapidly adapt to the current needs of the labour market. The job mediator role of the employment agency Agence Nationale pour l'Emploi et le Travail Indépendant (ANETI) could be reformed by providing more resources, and by increasing its consulting tasks (the number of job seekers covered by one ANETI agent is much too high) (Angel-Urdinola & Leon-Solano, 2011; Angel-Urdinola & Leon-Solano, 2013; Angel-Urdinola, Kuddo & Semlali, 2013). The monopoly of ANETI as job mediator can be complemented by private agencies and more specialised retraining centres (professional groups or economic sectors). These retraining centres need to work in close cooperation with the private sector and career centres in universities. So far, the concept of retraining is not very present in Tunisia. The pilot project CORP launched in 2015 can serve as an example (Fennira & Chaar, 2014) as it supports young graduates in finding adequate jobs. Sometimes, only a small or specific additional qualification can reconvert the persons' professional profile (e.g. greening of traditional skills). This matching knowledge and counselling competence of professional intermediators –knowing the current needs of the labour market as well as the profile of the job seekers – is crucial and needed in the current context. At the same time, employers need to develop more specific human resource strategies. Targeted retraining opportunities can strengthen the employability of graduates, and bridge the gap between employer's expectations and graduates' skills. Education for (self-) employment can be part of a new education approach (Jelassi, Bouzguenda Zeghal & Malzy, 2015), as well as the approach of greening jobs and skills (Martinez-Fernandez, Hinojosa & Miranda, 2010). Education

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<sup>11</sup> Underemployed population is a subcategory of employed population and does not appear in official statistics about unemployed persons. ILO (n.d). Underemployment statistics. Retrieved from <http://www.ilo.org/global/statistics-and-databases/statistics-overview-and-topics/underemployment/lang--en/index.htm>

reforms should insist on the quality of education instead of quantity. This can be done by improving teacher's pay and training, by reviewing curricula and including a broader range of competences such as problem-solving learning, communication, and personal and social skill development. Entrepreneurs are looking for autonomous, critically-thinking personalities, equipped with qualified technical skills and soft skills.

### **Enhancing Public-Private Co-Governance of (Vocational) Education**

Public-private co-governance can be further developed by intensified vocational training in enterprises, common curricula development, intensified entrepreneur traineeship commitment, and public support for on-the-job training programmes. Vocational training in enterprises exists but it could be amplified. The development of the dual system ("système en alternance") could help reduce the skill mismatch, as the entrepreneurs are increasingly looking for practically oriented employees.<sup>12</sup> But this system of vocational education within the enterprise relies on the principles of a social market economy, including a socially responsible role of the entrepreneur, and a close cooperation between entrepreneurs and vocational training institutions. And the dual system only works with a system of official and professional certification of the vocational training, professionally and socially recognised (Ostry, 2015). And this is not the case at the moment. Entrepreneurs accuse the vocational trainers of poor quality teaching while the vocational or technical training institutions complain that entrepreneurs do not inform them what they need in terms of competences. Certificates do not exist or are not socially recognised. Some entrepreneurs are ready to invest in the training of their employees, while others do not feel responsible for this.

Common curricula development is very limited but could be very useful, in particular in those sectors with the strongest job creation effects (in terms of numbers) such as the agricultural sector, food processing, construction sector, public services and manufacturing, because they are labour intensive. But these jobs are often not productive, qualified, sustainable or decent, and they do not provide a solution for the high number of graduate unemployed. Economic sectors that could provide qualified jobs in the future are: education, health, ICT (Cava, Rossotto & Paradi-Guilford, 2011), mechanics and electronic industries, automotive industry, administrative/public services, financial services, and specific niches of textiles. Investors in these sectors need to work more closely with vocational schools and technical colleges in order to jointly define the priorities of future curricula, and to avoid further technical and soft skill mismatch.

### **Revalorising of Non-Academic Professions**

This could be improved by higher quality of the vocational training, by credible and official certification assuring quality standards, by public societal recognition campaigns, and by

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<sup>12</sup> The entrepreneur analyses the need of the labour market according to the market situation. The enterprise provides certified vocational training, including practice learning in the enterprise, and theory learning in a vocational training school.

higher salaries. The societal recognition of non-academic professions (e.g. technician, craftsmen, blue collar) is very low in Tunisia. This is also one of the factors why too many students are enrolled in certain disciplines and higher education, although it is well known that this high number does not correspond to the needs of the labour market. An intensified quality control of private sector education should be developed, given the fact that education in the private sector happens more or less uncontrolled.<sup>13</sup> There are great differences between the private providers. Some can contribute to overcoming the skill mismatch, while others will make “a business” of the skill mismatch but not really provide the means to cope with it.<sup>14</sup> A credible and official certification system for public vocational training, in particular in cooperation with the private sector, can help provide more societal and professional recognition, based on regular quality standard controls. Public image campaigns can help improve the image of certain professions or job profiles, for instance in agriculture, construction or craft professions, sectors that are currently looking for a qualified labour force. Another efficient instrument to upgrade the image of these professions would be better salaries.

## Recommendations

### For Tunisia:

In terms of methods, a comprehensive analysis and statistical forecast data of existing, endangered and needed jobs (present and future) would be useful. Therefore, a concerted and coordinated action between the involved actors (ministries, universities, vocational schools, training enterprises, labour market agencies, private sector and entrepreneurs) could help improve the management and the forecast of demand and supply of a qualified and unqualified labour force.

In terms of structural economic reforms, numerous fields are on the agenda, such as implementing anti-corruption measures, investing in innovation and increasing the competitiveness of Tunisian products, fostering private sector development, creating a more attractive investment environment for entrepreneurs, reducing state subventions for food, water and energy, and developing the field of “economy sociale et solidaire.” Market failures continue to impede the emergence of a dynamic private sector and job creation, such as unattractive business environments, energy subsidies, and difficult access to land or credit. Economic reform policies could address the public policy distortion that often benefits a small group of privileged firms in non-labour-intensive sectors. Increasing the motivation for (young) entrepreneurs could help them to create their own business, and intensify the motivation for innovation. There is also a need to address the wage question, and to find

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<sup>13</sup> Interview with instructors and entrepreneurs, Tunis, 31 August 2015, and a representative of a higher education institution, Tunis, 21 September 2015.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with a representative of a higher education institution, Tunis, 21 September 2015.

solutions for the dilemma between low wages, rising food prices and living expenses inciting more strikes and social protests on the one hand, and increased wages pushing foreign investors to transfer their branches to other countries on the other.

In terms of industrial policy or sector development, it could be useful to increase the investment in future-oriented, added value sectors with job creation potential, such as Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), mechanics and electronic industries (automobile, aeronautics), certain niches of textile such as haut de gamme or industrial textile, food processing industry, ecological/cultural tourism, health, education, financial and administrative services and renewable energies (Schäfer, 2016). All these sectors could absorb some of the additional high-qualified labour force. The strongest job creation effects can be reached by investments in the agricultural sector, construction sector, food processing, public services and manufacturing. However, in these sectors a less qualified labour force is required. Therefore, a concerted multilevel investment and job creation policy is needed.

In terms of education reforms, different avenues could prove to be effective: reducing the skill mismatch, increasing the employability of the Tunisian labour force on the world market, developing soft skill and targeted technical skill education. Professional retraining and targeted education measures could reduce the profile gaps between needed qualifications and skills in the private and public sector, and those qualifications and skills offered by the job seekers. Image campaigns in order to improve the image of non-academic professions in the society could increase the interest and societal recognition of these professions. More public-private co-governance in educational matters could improve the quality of vocational training.

In terms of labour market policies, targeted mobility aids and integration allowances could allow for mitigating regional imbalances (e.g. financial or other incentives for those who do not want to work in the interior regions of the country) and encourage employers to employ young graduates with specific support programmes (Broecke, 2012), to recruit the unemployed and those that are not capable of full performance (e.g. inclusion of the disabled). Further start-up incentives could be more effective in reducing unemployment, in particular for low-skilled (Escudero, 2015). The communication and mediation role of public labour administrations and job agencies could be strengthened. Different instruments of the job agency ANETI could be revised in order to reduce time and costs of job seeking processes, such as the employment and counselling services, job boards, business information instruments, job information centres, and digital labour market information instruments. Instruments of private sector companies could also be revised,

such as employer's service, placements on proposition, pre-selections of candidates, or special services for major customers. In other countries, these kinds of services are often paid by contributions of private companies to the job agency.

#### For the EU:

Tunisian expectations of the EU continue to be high, in particular given the fact that about 75% of the Tunisian economy is turned towards the EU. In terms of general economic cooperation, the EU should continue and intensify its support in: encouraging more FDI; encouraging private sector development; integrating the Tunisian economy in the global market; contributing to a solution of the Libyan conflict (as Libya is one of the most important economic partners of Tunisia); encouraging social and solidarity economy initiatives ("économie sociale et solidaire"), green economy and innovation.

In terms of the planned signing of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA), the EU should consider facilitating the access of Tunisian products and services to the European market, and accompanying the future free trade agreement with additional social and economic measures (e.g. support for the Tunisian MSME, support for the Tunisian labour force and working conditions; support for vulnerable groups, protection of fragile economic sectors and enterprises). The objective should be to foster sustainable growth in Tunisia, in order to anticipate future social conflicts. The current version of the DCFTA is not yet adapted to Tunisian needs, and does not yet respond to a sustainable and "fair trade" approach. The access to the European market could be facilitated through the dismantling of non-tariff barriers, the free circulation of people (in particular of professionals and students, but also of the labour force in services), and the flexibility of certain certifications that rather serve to protect the European market from non-EU services and products than to develop the Tunisian economy. The EU could help Tunisia upgrade its agriculture in terms of certain techniques, training and adaptation to European norms. The potential of agriculture in the interior regions could be better exploited by refocusing support towards labour-intensive Mediterranean products, for which Tunisia holds great potential (World Bank, 2014b, p. 20). Access for Tunisia to the EU's structural fund could bring forward Tunisian urban and regional planning, and scientific research and innovation. Simple free trade alone will not help to solve any economic or political challenges in Tunisia, but might rather reinforce them. A global, structuring and socially responsible approach is needed.

In addition, the EU should not repeat the same mistakes with regard to neoliberal labour market reforms, which were implemented in some European countries (e.g. Germany), where official unemployment rates were reduced at the expense of the employees, by

the explosion of limited labour contracts, the expansion of the low-pay sector, and the increasing number of mini jobbers and part-time employees living in socially precarious conditions.

## Conclusion

Despite positive development indicator rates, human development remains an important challenge in Tunisia, especially in terms of political governance, social inequality, corruption and transparency, as well as poverty in the interior regions. The demographic challenge continues to be significant: the large young population is heavily concerned by youth unemployment. The matchmaking between unemployment, education and the private sector could be improved by reviewing and adapting higher education and vocational training curricula, by increasing the number of sectors in the productive economic structure using a qualified labour force, and by revalorising the image of non-academic professions.

The challenge is to create sufficient qualified jobs that are able to absorb the large mass of higher education graduates. Therefore, the ancien régime system of privileges, rigidities, clientelist structures and networks needs to be overcome.

Different instruments and policy reforms could reduce the skill mismatch between job offer and job demand: rebalancing the number of jobs between public and private sectors, investing in industries employing a qualified labour force (e.g. telecom, services, education, health, finance, renewable energy), re-investing in the quality of school, university and vocational education, and reducing territorial misbalances.

Tunisia currently continues to implement its former liberal and (social) market oriented policy but there is still no comprehensive economic-political vision for the future. Reformed economic and social policies should include the adaptation of the developed social protection schemes. A new social contract needs a new agreement between the different actors involved (tripartite dialogue between government, employers and workers), and a new balance between private sector development, job creation, social rights and the protection of the existing jobs.

The interconnectedness between the political and the economic remains strong. The social and economic pressure and tension endanger the fragile political transition process of the young Tunisian democracy, while at the same time the fragile political and

security situation contributes to the economic crisis. However, the Tunisian revolution broke up entrenched and corrupt structures and initiated a new dynamic in the debate about the future economic and development model and the future of the social protection systems.

Among the most urgent measures in terms of re-boosting the Tunisian economy are growth-enhancing structural reforms in areas such as the new investment code, public bank restructuring and fiscal reforms, which could also help to rebuild external and fiscal buffers. Therefore, a coordinated economic, financial and monetary policy is needed. Public investment is urgently needed in order to re-launch job creation and to reduce the important regional inequalities. Tunisia will continue to have to rely on financial, economic and political support from international donors and partners but could also sustain the small but growing potential of the “Economie sociale et solidaire” from below and thus social inclusion. Despite all the numerous existing challenges described above, Tunisia has important economic potential, especially in terms of human capital, and in terms of a young and dynamic society looking for new perspectives.

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## **From Persecution to Government - Ennahda's Claim to Power\***

*\*\*Cengiz Günay, \*\*\*Sherin Gharib*

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\*\*Cengiz Günay, Senior Researcher, Austrian Institute for International Affairs

\*\*\*Sherin Gharib, Researcher, Austrian Institute for International Affairs

## Introduction

Islamist movements emerged in reaction to colonialism. The main goal was to preserve religion and culture and to prevent Western influence. Islamist agency in the political field can be roughly divided into two trends. The accommodationists, who have sought to function within the political and economic system, and the revolutionary groups, which have proposed an alternative to the incumbent system and have rejected universalistic claims and discourses as expressions of Western imperialism.

The accommodationists, representing mainstream Islamism in turn can be divided into two major trends: the *Ikhwani* trend, represented by the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), and the post-Islamist political parties represented by Turkey's AKP. The major difference between the *Ikhwan* and the AKP, but also Ennahda in Tunisia, is that the latter two have successfully transformed their movements into political party organisations while the former has struggled with the differentiation between political party organisation and the da'wa. The AKP and Ennahda have undergone a process of professionalisation which entailed the separation of the movement and its da'wa activities from the political organisation. In the case of Turkey's AKP and Ennahda, integration with the system entailed a certain de-ideologisation and the marriage with neo-liberalist economic conceptions.

Asef Bayat (1996) refers to the growing adaptation of Islamist political actors to universal discourses and paradigms as "the post-Islamist turn". After a phase of resistance and oppression, most mainstream Islamist movements have been trying to merge Islamist conceptions with global, universalistic discourses, concepts and ideas. As Islam and its practice are no longer threatened by authoritarian, top-down secularisation policies, religion is not put in the foreground and its role is being limited and tends to be re-secularised (Bayat, 1996, p. 45). This does not mean that they have abandoned Islam but have rather adapted their ideological methods and rhetoric to the challenges of a neoliberal globalised Muslim world.

The Ennahda party in Tunisia can be seen as a major representative of liberal Islamism. Founded in 1981 by Rachid Ghannouchi, the party gradually developed into one of Tunisia's major opposition movements. Since the beginning, Ennahda has chosen integration with the system over revolutionary change. Banned and persecuted by President Ben Ali, after a major success in controlled and manipulated elections, the party made a decisive comeback to the post-revolutionary political arena. Although Ennahda was not a driving force in the protests which led to Ben Ali's demise, it has been one of the major beneficiaries of his departure. Among a large number of new platforms

and parties, Ennahda emerged first in the elections to the Constituent Assembly in 2011. Ennahda's moderate Islamist messages converged with the call of Tunisia's growing but politically and culturally neglected socially conservative Arabophone Tunisian middle class. The claim of championing middle class interests entailed ideological moderation and adaptation to the system.

Ennahda was the major partner in the so-called Troika government, including two secular coalition parties, and after the October 2014 elections Ennahda became part of a coalition government with Nidaa Tounes and two minor partners. Since August 2016, it has been part of the national unity government. After conflicts and splits within the Nidaa Tounes faction, Ennahda has again represented the largest group in parliament.

Ennahda's claim to power irritated the urban bourgeoisie. Despite the party's moderation in rhetoric and policies – Ennahda refrained from more ideological Islamist positions such as the implementation of the Sharia, compromised on the new Constitution, continued the country's pro-Western economic and foreign policy and finally renounced Islamism – critics see Ennahda as a sheep in wolf's clothing. To many representatives of the Tunisian establishment the rise of Islamists seemed to put the power architecture, the economic order and the secular character of the post-colonial Tunisian state at risk. While Ennahda's claim to power challenges the privileges of the established elites, many among the poor as well as Islamist revolutionaries see Ennahda as a conformist system party, not to say the representatives of the old regime in different clothes.

This chapter deals with the transformation of Ennahda since the beginning of the Tunisian transition. Applying a Gramscian perspective, it argues that Ennahda's participation in economic and political power structures has represented the completion of a passive revolution. Gramsci refers to the integration of the bourgeoisie in a 19th century Western European context into the incumbent system as a passive revolution. The integration of the leadership, albeit without popular participation, avoided revolutionary change. As a consequence, the aristocracy lost its economic privileges but avoided extinction (Tuğal, 2009, p. 32).

In Tunisia, Ennahda's early claim to participate in the system helped tame more revolutionary Islamist circles. Ben Ali's fall opened new opportunities. Ennahda's participation in the post-revolutionary system has been a major factor in safeguarding the survival and continuity of the order. Neither the Ennahda leadership nor the secular elites were interested in reforming the authoritarian state apparatus and rebuilding institutions.

The article argues that political polarisation in post-revolutionary Tunisia around questions of identity (religious versus secular) has mainly overlaid the ongoing struggle over participation in the post-revolutionary economic and political game. Ennahda has represented the worldviews and economic interests of an emergent middle class that has aspired for a piece of the cake, whereas the established secular elites (although internally all but unified) have fought for the protection of their supremacy.

However, participation was at the price of ideological coherence and put the support of the grassroots at risk. Ennahda has not only compromised on most of its Islamic ambitions but also on social reform issues. After five years of participation in power, under the surface inner-party tensions have risen.

The paper proceeds as follows: it first analyses the post-colonial opportunity structures that supported the emergence of an Islamist movement. It then highlights the emergence of Ennahda as a professionalised political party organisation and analyses the challenges the party has faced, and their effects on its strategies and policies. The paper then deals with the post-revolutionary era and Ennahda's inclusion in the political and economic system. As Calder (2011) highlights, democracy is very much about the inclusion of groups in the democratic process. Although Calder is rather concerned with the question of the inclusion of incoming groups as migrants in the demos, his thoughts can be also applied to the question of how and under which terms political incomers such as Ennahda are included in the political system. Calder emphasises that inclusion necessitates a process that comes close to assimilation. It requires that the "includees" demonstrate their credentials by adapting to terms over which they had no influence (Calder, 2011, p. 187). One could also define the includees' endeavour to become a part of the "system" as an active process of integration. This paper argues that the adaptation to liberal and neoliberal paradigms has been a necessary precondition for Ennahda's inclusion in the system and participation in power. However, integration with the hegemonic system has not necessarily entailed its members' departure from Islamic beliefs or tenets, but rather the divergence from strictly ideological conceptions and more flexibility and pragmatism in political behaviour. Despite a comparably smooth transitional process, Ennahda's integration into the power structure has not been without tensions. Ennahda's rise has disturbed the country's established power architecture and the networks that have infused state and society and it has entailed internal tensions. The paper concludes with an analysis of the changing relations between Ennahda and the broader Islamist constituency and questions whether the "passive revolution" can be successful in the long term if more radical elements cannot be bound to the party.

## The Post-Colonial State and its Relations with Religion and Religious Movements

Habib Bourguiba has been considered the architect of the post-colonial Tunisian state. Ruling the country from 1956 to 1957 as Prime Minister and then from 1957 to 1987 as President, Bourguiba has strongly shaped the post-colonial era and the authoritarian structure of the state. His rule was characterised by state-led modernisation and authoritarian top-down secularisation policies. Bourguiba's objective was to transform Tunisia into a modern nation state, modelled on the Western ideal. France, the former colonial power, served as a source of inspiration for the Tunisian administrative and judicial system. The Tunisian state is highly centralised; all strings were pulled together in Tunis. In Bourguiba's pyramid-like multi-storey system, political command channels flowed top-down and centre-outward (a basic matrix that was extended and replicated in every corner of the country, in every part of the system) (Erdle, 2010, p. 69). Political decisions were exclusively taken by the Bourguibian elite in the capital. A tight hierarchical power system helped to keep potential independent power centres that might have challenged authority at arm's length.

Bourguiba was also inspired by the French concept of *laïcité*, although its implementation in Tunisia was in a softer form. Religion was to be pushed back from the public space. The regime banned the wearing of veils in public buildings and universities. Religion classes in public schools were cut down to a single hour a week, and private Qur'an schools were dissolved. In spite of the propagation of Tunisian nationalism, President Bourguiba created an elitist school system with French as the major language of education. Even religion teachers were required to be able to teach in French (Stepan, 2012, p. 99.) At the same time, Zaytouna, Tunisia's renowned institution of Islamic teaching, was transformed into a French-inspired secular University of Tunis. In the era before independence, Zaytouna was not only limited to Tunis but had branches across Tunisia.

Similar to Kemalism in Turkey, the Bourguibian regime was not per se anti-religious, but it rather considered the influence of religious authorities, tendencies, movements and traditions as an obstacle to the country's modernisation and advancement. Bourguiba's restrictive policies faced comparably little resistance, due to his role in the country's struggle for independence.

Bourguibism was less an institutionalised political system, but rather stands for a political style which included authoritarian secularism, modernism, elitism, gradualism and

pragmatism. This has also encouraged a certain ambiguity in the formulation of the Constitution. Article 1 of the 1957 Constitution states: “Tunisia is a free, independent and sovereign state. Its religion is Islam, its language is Arabic, and its type of government is the Republic”. Under Bourguiba and Ben Ali, the practice was that Tunisia as a society was considered to be Muslim while the state was defined as secular. Today, some Islamists interpret it in a different sense.<sup>1</sup>

From the 1970s, similar to other countries in the Muslim world, Tunisia experienced a growing wave of Islamic revival. A new religious consciousness and cultural conservatism were not necessarily political, but it indirectly supported the rise of different Islamist movements. Most of the emergent Islamist groups have been – in varying degrees – inspired or even supported by different external forces or events, such as the Iranian Revolution (Allani, 2009, p. 258). Islamists replaced the leftist groups as the major challengers of the authoritarian regime. The Islamic revival experienced in many countries of the region, often paralleled the regimes’ departure from state-controlled modernisation and industrialisation policies and the introduction of neoliberal programmes.

## The Birth of Liberal Islamism in Tunisia

The story of Tunisian Islamism is strongly linked with the person of Rachid Ghannouchi. In 1970 Ghannouchi and a group of young sheikhs began to publish the Islamic review *al-Maarifa* (the Consciousness). In contrast to the country’s established religious class, they were mainly laymen trained in secular professions. Different from the ulema of the renowned Zeytouna, who were part of the urban bourgeoisie, they mainly originated from the country’s underdeveloped peripheral provinces in the south and the so-called West Bank (the border region to Algeria)<sup>2</sup> Members of this group around *al-Maarifa* had returned from studies in the Arab world (Damascus and Cairo). Many among them were disappointed by the failures of Arab socialism and nationalism. In the review’s first issue they stated that its purpose was to promote “their exile and the exile of their religion” in the face of authoritarian top-down modernisation and secularisation policies (Boulby, 1988, p. 590).

Influenced by the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, Ghannouchi and others established in 1972 the *Jamaa al Islamiyya* (“Islamic Group”). The Jamaa was a clandestine organisation that mainly thrived among students, most of them stemming from Tunisia’s economically neglected areas. The motivation was to preserve Islam, which they perceived to be under threat, and break the hegemony of leftist intellectual debates.

<sup>1</sup> Authors’ interview with Tunisian scholar, University of Manouba, Tunis, 1 December 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Authors’ interview with Michaël Béchir Ayari, Tunis, 6 November 2016.

While in the beginning the Jamaa provided space for intellectual exchange, the group later became politicised. Similar to other countries in the region this generation of Islamist activists were strongly shaped by the conflict with leftist youth on university campuses. Much of the political strategies, tactics and rhetoric were influenced by those of their leftist counterparts. Many of the Islamist activists were doctors, lawyers, teachers and theologians. In 1981 members of the Jamaa decided to form the *Mouvement Tendance Islamique* (MTI). Rachid Ghannouchi and Abdelfattah Mourou played a crucial role in this process. The formation of the MTI meant a clear choice for political activism in opposition to the authoritarian Bourguibian modernisation policies.

The MTI was also the Tunisian expression of a popular Islamic revival, which from the 1970s seized on most parts of the Arab and Muslim world. The MTI carried the Islamist movement beyond the mosques and university campuses. The movement's major objective was the renovation of an Islamic consciousness and the promotion of Islamic ethics among youth (Allani, 2009, p. 258-260). In the early 1980s, the MTI split into three currents. The first one focused on cultural reform within Islam based on the Islamic understanding of Zaytouna. The second one devoted itself to da'wa activities or armed violence and the third one, which was the larger group, was committed to political activism and formed the Ennahda party in 1989 (Cavatorta & Merone, 2013, p. 867).

## The Struggle for Inclusion in the System

The formation of Ennahda signified a major strategic decision. It indicated a clear commitment to participation in the system and the renunciation of any revolutionary change. At the same time, it was a clear choice for political activism over religious agency. This stood in radical contrast to the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood (MB) which, after its rehabilitation under President Sadat in the 1970s, had chosen to position itself more as a moral arbiter and a political adviser to the regime. The MB operated as a movement, tolerated by the regime and did not form a political party organisation. The question of whether to form a political party and run in elections or remain a clandestine movement which is active in Islamic agency at the grassroots has been long discussed within the MB. While the older guard had been more cautious, a younger generation of Muslim Brothers who had been activists at university campuses pushed for political activism. The Egyptian Brothers only decided to form the Freedom and Justice Party after President Mubarak's fall. However, while the MB had been able to develop a broad network of welfare and charity organisations as well as informal networks within society, Ennahda has been lacking the structures and functions of a coherent social movement.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Informal networks are rather based on personal relations of Ennahda members (authors' interview with Emna Ennaifer and Mariem Masmoudi, Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy (CSID), Tunis, 8 November 2016).

Kitschelt (2006) highlights that transition from movement to party entails important changes in the institutional setting in which political entrepreneurs operate. Professionalisation entails important decisions on roles, contributions, the organisational structure and a chain of command, but also on collective preference schedules such as party programmes (Kitschelt, 2006, p. 278). In other words, professionalisation usually broadens the objectives of collective mobilisation but at the same time limits the radius of action of the individual political entrepreneur (Kitschelt, 2006). Nonetheless, despite its early decision to transform the movement into a professional party organisation, Ennahda has also had problems in defining the boundaries between the political mission and al-da'wa. Ennahda's President Rachid Ghannouchi and its Vice-President Abd al-Fattah Mourou are generally referred to as sheikhs and until the last party congress held in 2016, they used to preach in mosques and speak on religious issues.

Ghannouchi and Mourou's strategic move to form a political party was a reaction to the changes that had occurred in Tunisia at the end of the 1980s. Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali's so-called "medical coup", which removed the ageing Habib Bourguiba, had opened new opportunities. Ben Ali first presented himself as a reformer. He initiated the controlled political and economic pluralisation of the system. The stimulus for political liberalisation also lay in Ben Ali's need to build up support and international legitimation. In view of growing Islamic sentiments in society, Ben Ali also adopted a more pragmatic approach towards religion and its public expressions. He pursued a two-track policy; he allowed Islamic expressions more room, but at the same time claimed the monopoly of the state to interpret and defend what is considered to be true Islam. In contrast to Bourguiba's ambition to push the social influence of religion back, Ben Ali "embraced Islam" (Haugbolle, 2015). However, the rehabilitation of Islam remained only symbolic. Religious activities were only tolerated as long as they did not cross the regime's interests.

Ennahda was ready to participate in a rigged game and did not openly challenge the hegemony of the regime. Instead it hoped for change through integration. The regime denied Ennahda's participation in elections but allowed some of its members to run as independent candidates. Their electoral success frightened the regime. Islamists had become the major challengers of the authoritarian regimes. They successfully replaced leftists as the champions of social injustice and the voice of societal sectors, marginalised by crony capitalism. Islamist candidates succeeded, despite manipulations and gerrymandering in parliamentary elections, and they dominated professional syndicates.

The reaction to the regimes' imminent loss of control over the political arena was harsh repression. In Tunisia, Ennahda's activities were banned in 1991 and its members



persecuted. The regime's harsh stance towards Islamists was strongly influenced by the Algerian experiences. The landslide victory of the Islamist FIS (the Islamic Salvation Front) in 1990 in the first round of the parliamentary elections had threatened the survival of the regime. In consequence, the second round of elections was cancelled and the FIS banned, resulting in a long-lasting civil war.

During most of the 1990s, the Tunisian regime hardly distinguished between moderates and militants, they were both persecuted and imprisoned (Marks, 2012). Repression gained another dimension after 9/11. The Tunisian regime supported the US-led "War on Terror", which also functioned as a legitimising tool for the crackdown on the moderate Islamist opposition (Louden, 2015).

The crackdown on Ennahda had a long-lasting effect on the party and its organisational structures. Islamist progressives representing the urban wing within Ennahda left the party. While most of the leadership went into exile, other members were either imprisoned or operated in secrecy. The exiles in turn can be divided into two major factions: those who lived in the United Kingdom, such as Ghannouchi and Said Ferjani, and others who went to France. At the same time, a network of Ennahda members continued to exist in secrecy. According to Said Ferjani, these clandestine networks also included members of the higher state administration, such as the former governor of Sfax.<sup>4</sup>

Despite harsh oppression, Ennahda did not radicalise but rather sought contact with the regime as well as cooperation with other opposition groups. In 2005, the party sought an alliance with secular Tunisian parties. Together they formed an alliance called "18 October". The group issued documents and manifests outlining a shared democratic vision for a post-Ben Ali Tunisia (Guazzone, 2013, p. 43). This alliance lasted until Ben Ali's fall in 2011. At the same time, Michaël Ayari from the International Crisis Group holds that contacts between the Ben Ali regime and Ennahda intensified after 2006 when the last Ennahda member was released from prison.<sup>5</sup> In the period after 2006, Ennahda was torn into two camps: those who opted for reconciliation with the regime and hoped for the rehabilitation of its members and those who rejected any cooperation with the Ben Ali regime.<sup>6</sup>

Cavatorta and Merone (2013) suggest that exclusion, repression and social marginalisation have supported a moderate course within Ennahda and enabled the adoption of global liberal discourses on democracy and market economy (p. 858). Both authors hold that the experiences with oppression transformed Ennahda and

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4 Authors' interview with Said Ferjani, Tunis, 9 November 2016.

5 Authors' interview with Michaël Béchir Ayari, Tunis, 6 November 2016.

6 Ibid.

made it ready for the post-Ben Ali period. Said Ferjani argues that Ennahda's ideas in regard to democracy have been influenced by the experiences in exile. Exile in European countries, such as France and the UK, enabled the Ennahda leadership to learn about the functioning of Western democratic institutions.<sup>7</sup>

Despite harsh repression, Ennahda was able to grow into Tunisia's major opposition movement. However, the party could not make use of the regime's weakening in the early 2000s. Ennahda was not able to develop its personal networks into a strong movement that could challenge the regime from within Tunisia.<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, Ennahda did not play any part in the revolution of January 2011, when mass protests led to President Ben Ali's demission on 14 January. Ennahda did not kick off the protests, nor was the party a driving force once they unfolded. However, as the country's best organised opposition movement, Ennahda was able to take advantage of and benefit from President Ben Ali's fall. Only two weeks after Ben Ali's flight, Rachid Ghannouchi returned from exile in London, on 30 January 2011. Ghannouchi quickly set out to reorganise the party and make it ready for political participation. The party was legalised by the interim government on 1 March 2011 (Basly, 2011). After being forced to operate underground for almost 20 years, Ennahda was eager to "return" to Tunisian politics.

In the elections to the Constituent Assembly on 23 October 2011, Ennahda won a landslide victory. The party obtained 37.04% of the total votes and gained 89 seats in the Constituent Assembly (Haugballe & Cavatorta, 2012, p. 20). While the secular camp was divided into varying leftist and liberal parties (none of them could exceed 10%), Ennahda was able to emerge as the first party across the country.<sup>9</sup> Despite this impressive electoral victory, Ennahda fell short of an overall majority. In order to be able to form a government, it had to form a coalition with other political forces found in two leftist parties: Ettakatol and CPR (Congress for the Republic). A coalition with secular/leftist parties also reflected Ennahda's gradualist understanding of political agency. Generally, one can hold that the strategy of integration entails gradualism and is opposed to any radical or revolutionary change processes.

Cooperation with secular and even leftist forces has been part of Ennahda's long-term strategy of "smooth integration". As early as at the movement's second congress in 1981, leading members had declared that the major political objective, the overthrow of authoritarian rule, would require the unification of forces and a broad coalition with other opposition parties (Allani, 2009, p. 260). After the revolution, Ennahda was eager to reassure the establishment that it is not interested in radical change. Rachid

7 Authors' interview with Said Ferjani, Tunis, 9 November 2016.

8 Authors' interview with Michaël Béchir Ayari, Tunis, 6 November 2016.

9 With the exception of Sidi Bouzid where Aridha Shabia, a party formed by an ex-Nahdoui, emerged first.

Ghannouchi declared prior to the 2011 elections for the Constituent Assembly that, even if the party won an overall majority, it would seek a coalition with other political (secular) forces in order to guarantee stability and cooperation (Marks, 2015). Marks (2015) holds that statements such as “our priority is to participate... one party should not govern alone. A party alone cannot face these [transitional, post-authoritarian] challenges” highlight the party’s gradualist character. Guazzone (2013) argues that gradualism has also later shaped Ennahda’s behaviour in government (p. 41). However, an inclusive rhetoric and the emphasis on cooperation with different forces of the political spectrum should not be misunderstood as a reservation to power but has rather represented a cautious strategic positioning that has certainly been influenced by the party’s own experiences as well as those of sister parties and movements in Algeria, Egypt and Turkey. As Adnan Hasnawi says, it has been part of the party’s strategy to survive.<sup>10</sup>

## The Passive Revolution and Its Effects on the Power Architecture

Five years into the Arab uprisings, despite severe socioeconomic problems (see chapter written by Isabel Schäfer in this joint study) and a general political malaise (see chapter written by Emmanuel Cohen-Hadria in this joint study), Tunisia has represented the only “Arab-Spring country” that has undergone transition from authoritarian to democratic parliamentary rule. However, Tunisia’s transition and stability has been at the price of substantial reforms and the radicalisation of relatively large parts of unemployed youth. Hence, rather than a revolution in its true sense – a fundamental change in government, type of rule, elites and economic ownership – changes in Tunisia can be better termed as a passive revolution.

Antonio Gramsci (2005) takes up Cuoco’s expression of a passive revolution to describe a “revolution” without a “revolution”. While in a revolution, political and economic structures of a society are fundamentally changed through popular bottom-up mobilisation, a passive revolution rather helps maintain the continuity of the political and economic structures. “In a passive revolution, an inchoate bottom-up mobilisation is ‘absorbed’ into existing political and economic structures. However, absorption is not simply incorporation; it entails a thorough remaking of certain policies and dispositions, even if the overall structures remain the same” (Tuğal, 2016, pp. 23-24).

Developments in post-revolutionary Tunisia – the period since 2011 – confirm the assumption that Ennahda’s participation in power has had the effect of restoration through a passive revolution.

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10 Authors’ interview with Adnan Hasnawi, Tunis, 8 November 2016.

The so-called Jasmine Revolution in January 2011 removed the Ben Ali clan, but not the economic system nor the power apparatus and clientelistic networks that have infused the state and its institutions. Apart from social, economic and political factors that pointed at turmoil, Ben Ali had become internally weakened by the question of his succession. Jebnoun (2014) holds that only dysfunctional intra-regime dynamics had made the outcome of the popular uprisings possible (Tuğal, 2016). The dynamics behind Ben Ali's departure are particularly important as they have significantly shaped the political arrangements of the post-Ben Ali era.

Such periods of a "passive revolution" are defined by successive waves of small reforms, implemented from above. The aim is to restore the weakened order. The old classes "are demoted from their dominant position to a governing one, but they are not eliminated, nor is there an attempt to liquidate them as an organic whole; instead of a class they become a 'caste' with specific cultural and psychological characteristics, but no longer with predominant economic functions" (Gramsci, 2005, p. 115).

Amel Boubekeur (2016) describes the post-Ben Ali order as a "bargained competition" between Ennahda and the old classes (represented by Nidaa Tounes). Nidaa Tounes has been dominated by the techno-bureaucratic elites who owed their economic and social status mainly to the Bourguibian era. The older generation of this elite, educated in Francophone elite schools, were the driving force of national development under Bourguiba. The mafia-like behaviours of the Ben Ali regime and the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a few with close informal connections to the presidential palace had also marginalised the old Bourguibian state class, which was nevertheless still culturally influential and economically represented the upper middle class.

The "bargained competition" in the post-Ben Ali era has been about the negotiation on the terms of the (re-)integration of both groups into the political order; the old elites represented by Nidaa Tounes and the lower middle class represented by Ennahda (Boubekeur, 2016, p. 108). What Ennahda and Nidaa Tounes shared was that they had not played a part in the events leading up to Ben Ali's removal. Both feared being marginalised by revolutionary turmoil. Accordingly, Ennahda and Nidaa Tounes have been mainly interested in "normalising and consolidating" their inclusion in the post-Ben Ali order. Their interests and energies to reform the authoritarian state apparatus or build new institutions remained low (Boubekeur, 2016).

The attempts to come to terms with the Ben Ali era (such as the establishment of the National Fact-Finding Commission on Abuse, The Fact-Finding Commission on

Corruption and Embezzlement, and the High Commission for the Realisation of Revolutionary Goals, Political Reforms and Democratic Transition – the Achour Commission) failed. Neither Ennahda nor the representatives of the secular camp were interested in accounting for the past, reconstructing the state or building new institutions.

One can hold that “bargained competition” based on elite consensus guaranteed a relatively smooth transitional process and the consolidation of democracy but it was at the price of the maintenance of authoritarian power structures, institutions and organisations. In other words, the post-revolutionary power-sharing agreement among the elites guaranteed the integration of the secular elites and of the Islamists into the system. But as both sides have feared being repressed by the other, the bargain has been also characterised by high polarisation and competition over political resources (Boubekeur, 2016, p. 108).

### **Inclusion in the Hegemonic System: Seeking a Piece of the Cake for the Middle Class**

Ennahda has not aimed to overturn existing structures. Instead, it has sought gradual change through inclusion in the system and participation in power. As Calder (2011) notes, the terms of inclusion are usually imposed by the “includers” rather than the “includees”, and will pre-date the transition towards inclusion itself (p. 187). In other words, to be included is, at least to this extent, to be assimilated (with individuals and institutions) rather than consulted on the terms of inclusion (Calder, 2011, p. 187). In many ways, Ennahda’s economic policy strategies have reflected this process. Once in power, the party has continued the policies of the previous era. This has entailed strong cooperation with the IMF and the EU. Said Ferjani holds that “the international order helps develop Tunisian democracy, this is why we are not against the IMF”<sup>11</sup>

Despite some initiatives to deepen regional integration with neighbouring countries and extend economic relations with Turkey and Qatar and other countries of the Muslim World, Europe in general and France in particular have continued to be the country’s primary trading partners. Yet, at the same time, initiatives promoting Islamic banking and finance or appeals to social justice, anti-corruption measures and calls for morality have aimed at giving neoliberal programmes an Islamic stamp.

Pious neoliberalism, as Dalacoura (2016) calls it, is not about state welfare, but “turning the individual into a responsible and entrepreneurial ‘subject’” (p. 65-66). In that regard

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11 Authors’ interview with Said Ferjani, Tunis, 9 November 2016.

social justice is not understood as something “to be implemented ‘from above’ by God or the state or even Islamist groups, with God’s blessing of course, the individual himself or herself will attain the position they deserve” (Dalacoura, 2016, pp. 65-66).

The party’s reference to Islamic morality combined with the emphasis on entrepreneurship has reflected the worldview of an emergent Arabophone and socially conservative middle class, the backbone of the Ennahda electorate. The divide between an Arabophone lower and a Francophone upper middle class goes back to Tunisia’s selective and competitive education system. While French was maintained as the language of higher education and of elite schools, Arabic was supported at the lower levels of the education system in order to expand public education and literacy rates. The outcome of these policies was a schizophrenic system in which Arabophone mass institutions for the “rank-and-file” have co-existed with Francophone elite schools for the “best-and-brightest”. The expansion of public education for an Arabophone majority while at the same time maintaining an elite system for a Francophone minority strengthened a hidden cultural and class bias in the education and labour system. Language became an instrument of social apartheid (Erdle, 2010, p. 81). Some of the leftist parties were so deeply embedded in Francophone elite culture and detached from the grievances and needs of a growing mainly Arabophone social class that they even neglected campaigning in Arabic.<sup>12</sup>

The representatives of the urban pious middle class had long felt sidelined by the Francophone elites, particularly when it came to access to the important and powerful state apparatus and state-controlled enterprises. The middle class has been traditionally based on traders, craftsmen, self-employed people and junior bureaucrats. Whereas under Bourguiba as well as under Ben Ali the regime long considered the middle class as its social basis, as a consequence of economic liberalisation policies this segment of society had become economically and politically marginalised. In this atmosphere of political marginalisation, to many Islamic conservatism had offered a refuge. Haugbolle and Cavatorta (2015) see an increase in Islamic activism as a major factor behind Ennahda’s rise into the country’s largest opposition movement. Accordingly, Islamic activism centred on social activism rather than politics led to the establishment of informal local networks, on which Ennahda could later fall back. For example, Ennahda gained broad-based support due to its activities, such as the organisation of mass-marriages and mass-circumcisions for economically poor people.

In other words, Ennahda was able to successfully present itself as the voice of a pious middle class and as the champion of social justice. To many of them, Ennahda

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12 E.g. Ettakol in the 2011 elections.

represented an untainted alternative. Ennahda's call for a stronger presence of Islam can be interpreted as the call of broad segments of society for morality and justice.

In its first years, the Ennahda-led government tried to keep a balance between reassuring foreign investors and Tunisian business circles and responding to calls for more social justice. "The combination of respect for private property and free enterprise with charity and anticorruption stances, and broad appeals to 'social justice', has allowed Islamist movements to seek simultaneously the support of middle-class and poorer constituencies" (Dalacoura, 2016, p. 64).

Ennahda has been important for the inclusion of formerly excluded members of the pious middle classes into the hegemonic system. This has also had a geographic dimension as many of the representatives of the pious middle class stem like most of representatives of the Ennahda leadership from the country's south. In that regard, Ennahda also successfully played off the cultural and economic disparities between Tunisia's rich coastal regions and the economically underdeveloped southern and western hinterlands.<sup>13</sup> However, it is also important to note that regional ties also play a crucial role within Ennahda. The leadership around Ghannouchi is dominated by people who have their origins in the country's south.

## Dynamics Inside Ennahda

In comparison with other Tunisian political movements, Ennahda has the strongest party organisation. Party congresses are held on a regular basis and there are ties between party leaders and supporters (Marks, 2014, pp. 1-10). The leadership is represented in the executive office. Strategic discussions and debates are taking place within the Shura Council (Consultative Council), according to some Ennahda members, in a rather democratic way. The Shura Council can be seen as an inner-party parliament. Since its early days, the party organisation has encompassed a broad coalition of different Islamist and conservative groups and persons ranging from moderates to the more radical. However, few of the discrepancies over differing positions or other ideological fault lines within the party are reflected outward.

Despite fora where discussions take place, Ennahda can be rather defined as a "persons-driven organisation." Rachid Ghannouchi, often referred to as *sheikh* represents a strong leader. Ghannouchi has not attained any public post, but he is the grey eminence behind Ennahda ministers. Ghannouchi has also directed the informal networks that have helped

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<sup>13</sup> While most of the political and bureaucratic elites of independent Tunisia stem from the coastal areas, Tunisia's poor hinterland is characterised by scarce job opportunities and rural exodus. Bourguiba and Ben Ali neglected these regions, as they were considered to be oppositional. Neither state-led modernisation policies nor economic liberalisation, tourism or industrialisation seized these regions and transformed social and economic structures.

Ennahda come into power and that certainly play a crucial role in maintaining its power. He was also interested in gaining control over the vast state apparatus by placing intimates in political posts. The case of the appointment of his son in law as foreign minister was a case in point for Ennahda's marriage with the hegemonic system and the nepotism which infused it.

As mentioned above, in the run up to the 10th party congress debates on the question of whether the party's executive board should be elected or appointed by the party leader can be seen as one of the few instances when the broader public became aware of dissonances within the Ennahda leadership.

Certainly, regional ties play a crucial role. There seems to be a rivalry between the representatives of the south and those stemming from the country's north.<sup>14</sup> However, generally, tensions focus little on ideological issues but rather revolve around political ones (Marks, 2014, p. 1). In 2012 some debates on ideological orientations occurred. Although the party leadership was cautious to present itself as a conservative democratic party, representing the world views of pious Muslims, ideologists within the party pressed ahead with calls for the implementation of the Sharia. Contradictory messages in regard to Islamist ideological demands have reflected divergent views within the party and can be seen as an expression of growing inner-party tensions between moderates and ideologists, but at the same time they also often served as an element to address the expectations of more radical segments within the Islamist spectrum and to keep them in line with the party. After its victory in the 2011 elections, an internal draft demanding the inclusion of Sharia (Islamic law) into the Constitution as the "source among sources" of legislation was circulated. In March 2012 thousands of Islamists took to the streets demanding the inclusion of the Islamic law in the Constitution (Pickard, 2012). Similarly, demands for alterations in the *Code du Statut Personnel* (CSP, the personnel status code) – which stipulates equality of men and women and religious minorities before the law, became heatedly debated. Statements by Ennahda politicians contesting the equality of men and women triggered protests of women's organisations. They found the support of the trade unions and opposition parties.

There are also some divergent tendencies within the party in regard to economic policies. Whereas those among the leadership who had been exiled to London are considered to be culturally more conservative, but in economic terms open to neoliberal approaches – they are more acquainted with the banking and financing sectors – those who had lived in France are seen as the leftist current within the party. It appears that in comparison to the former expatriates, those who had spent years in Tunisian jails have been more

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14 Authors' interview with Michaël Béchir Ayari, Tunis, 6 November 2016.



consensus-oriented. The struggle for balancing out the expectations of an ultra-conservative ideological segment and the attempt to integrate into the hegemonic system by appeasing the secular elites, turned into a litmus test for the party's survival. As a consequence of Ennahda's long history of oppression, its leaders and supporters feel solidarity and, despite their differences, they are "bound by blood and tears" (Yadh Ben Achour as cited in Marks, 2014, p. 9). They share common experiences of "decades of harassment, imprisonment, and torture, and having been blacklisted from employment by the former regime" (Marks, 2014, p. 9).

In the parliamentary elections 2014 Ennahda lost votes and Nidaa Tounes emerged as the strongest force. This can be traced back to the fact that Ennahda had failed to find solutions for the urgent socioeconomic problems. Its promises to create jobs and to achieve an economic growth could not be kept. During its rule, Ennahda focused on the constitution drafting process and disregarded development issues (McCarthy, 2014).

In future, Ennahda has to cope with some challenges. On the one hand, the party's orientation and structure is dependent on few leading personalities and a generational conflict is also becoming more imminent. Ennahda is trying to include younger professionals in its cadres but the main decisions are still taken by a smaller circle consisting of members of the older generation. Ennahda will need to develop a stronger organisational structure, also on the local levels.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, the party has to overcome the feeling of being constantly under surveillance and its tendency towards defensive behaviour connected therewith (Marks, 2014, p. 13). Marks also highlights that the professionalisation and internalisation of democratic values requires the party's "mode of victimhood" to be overcome (Marks, 2014, pp. 13-14).

## Ennahda – A Centre Party?

Said Ferjani holds that Ennahda wants to be a centre party, as the middle class is positioned in the centre. The gradual shift from ideological Islamism to the socially conservative centre entailed adaptation to a neoliberal global economic system and a process de-ideologisation. This means less ideological and more pragmatic and flexible approaches to political issues. In many ways this also influenced political behaviour (Brown & Hamzawy, 2010).

Asef Bayat (1996) defines the departure from ideological Islamist concepts and constructions and the adaptation to global discourses as a post-Islamist turn. However,

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<sup>15</sup> Authors' interview with Emna Ennaifer and Mariem Masmoudi, Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy (CSID), Tunis, 8 November 2016.

this did not mean that Islamist actors lost their belief in Islamic politics. “It rather entails the analysis that the focus shifted from legal and purely political issues to moral and behavioural ones” (Günay, 2008, p. 326). The claim of authenticity, a central element of Islamist movements, has been increasingly made in the field of morality. This has certainly been connected with the effects of globalisation which supported the “shift from an interest in macro-politics, based on ideological conceptions and collective action to engagement in micro-politics driven by pragmatism and individual initiatives” (Mosaad Abdel Aziz, 2003, pp. 23-24). In the case of Ennahda, despite de-ideologisation the party still remains affiliated to Islam, it has – in the words of Ghannouchi – moved towards “Muslim Democracy” (Ghannouchi, 2016), or as Said Ferjani puts it: Ennahda is “living in the ‘post-Islamist’ era” (“The ‘End of Islamism’ and The Future of Tunisia”, 2016). Ferjani holds that “Ennahda has to be in tune with universal values, you cannot build a democracy outside the universal framework of democracy.”<sup>16</sup>

At the 9th party congress, held in 2012, the question of whether religion and politics should be separated and the movement divided into a da’wa association and a political party was heatedly debated but could not be solved. The pressures on Ennahda after the assassinations of two prominent opposition leaders, resulting in the resignation of Prime Minister Ali Laarayedh, triggered a process of critical self-evaluation. The outcome was a further step towards de-ideologisation and towards more pragmatism (Merone & De Facci, 2015, p. 58). De-ideologisation and the adoption of neoliberal visions has also reflected the changing constituency of mainstream Islamism. Whereas Ennahda had first represented the world views of the petty bourgeoisie, craftsmen and shopkeepers with provincial cultural backgrounds, the party developed into the voice of an emergent, culturally conservative, middle class. One can conclude that ideologically Islamist claims such as the establishment of an Islamic state have been increasingly replaced by claims of social conservatism.

The 10th party congress held in May 2016 confirmed this process. The party proclaimed that it renounced Islamism. In a statement published by the journal *Foreign Affairs*, Rachid Ghannouchi (2016) argued that Ennahda no longer accepts the label of “Islamism – a concept that has been disfigured in recent years by radical extremists.” He adds that ideological debates are not necessary anymore, in particular as “the state no longer imposes secularism through repression, and so there is no longer a need for Ennahda or any other actor to defend or protect religion as a core part of its political activity” (Ghannouchi, 2016).

Larbi Sadiki (2016) rightly highlights that this statement has left many Ennahda supporters with the big question of whether Bourguiba “has been right all along?” (p.

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<sup>16</sup> Authors’ interview with Said Ferjani, Tunis, 9 November 2016.

11). While some observers see it as an opportunistic move, others are questioning how Ennahda could abandon its original vision that “Islam and politics belong to an organic sphere” (Sadiki, 2016, p. 11). However, Ennahda's renunciation of Islamism should be rather seen as an expression of its pragmatic approach to politics. This does not involve a departure from Islamic tenets, but rather from ideological conceptions that have proven to be impossible to implement through electoral gains. Ghannouchi's (2016) words that “of course, as Muslims, the values of Islam still guide our actions” are proof of the shift of Islamist approaches into the sphere of everyday life and culture. This can also be interpreted as a convergence with conservatism.

The renunciation of Islamism not only aimed at reassuring the established elites in the country, but also Tunisia's Western partners. Their support and financial assistance are considered to be fundamental to the future success of Tunisian democracy. Ennahda, being in power since 2012, is well aware of the importance of having the West in general and the Europeans in particular on its side. The question that arises is whether Ennahda has indeed abandoned Islamist ideology and whether the change in the rhetoric of the leadership is reflected in the lower levels of the movement. Driessen (2012) highlights that inclusion strategies do have an effect that goes much beyond the behaviour and discourse of the leadership and the members of the movement, it has an effect on the whole structure of the political and religious structure of society as such (pp. 171-172). Certainly, Ennahda's strategic decision was also connected with structural changes, such as the rise of Islamist extremism in Tunisia and the military coup in Egypt, which deposed the Muslim Brotherhood. Monica Marks (2015) highlights the disappointment within Ennahda about the Muslim Brotherhood's mismanagement and the fear that the coup in Egypt might also have effects on Tunisia.

While Ennahda's strategic positioning aims at sending out a message to the influential secular bloc in Tunisia, which since Nidaa Tounes' electoral victory in 2014 has regained the upper hand and also to foreign partners, the renunciation of Islamism will certainly not help reach the ultra-orthodox and extremist Islamist elements within society.

While Ennahda's integration with the dominant system (economic and political) helped gain and maintain the support of the middle class, its compromise-oriented policies failed to absorb the lower classes. In particular, the urban poor and young people in the cities, but also in economically poor areas such as Gafsa, have strongly criticised Ennahda. To many of them Ennahda has only represented the continuation of the old system (Dalacoura, 2016, p. 75). In the context of Turkey, Tuğal (2009) highlights how in its early years of rule the AKP had been able to absorb elements with more radical tendencies into the system. “During

the (first) five years of AKP rule, Islamist street action came to an end. The ratio of people who said they want an Islamic state decreased from around 20% throughout the 1990s to nine percent in 2006” (Tuğal, 2009, p. 7). A major difference between the AKP’s early years and Ennahda is that the AKP had been able to create a feeling of awakening and advancement, even among those who were not the primary beneficiaries of the party’s economic policies. However, the “absorption of mobilisation worked only for a while” (Tuğal, 2016, p. 26). “The Turkish model was at least temporarily successful in appeasing large sections of the urban poor; but the dissatisfaction of the new middle classes is fatal beyond the boundaries of Turkey, since their boring life is what the model holds in store for the imagined future of these strata across the region” (Tuğal, 2016, p. 21). As Italy’s experiences in the 1920s and Turkey’s recent developments dramatically demonstrate, a passive revolution, meaning the integration of the leaders of the anti-thesis into the thesis, does help maintain the incumbent order but as the changes do not satisfy the revolutionary potential within society it might lead to undemocratic forms of governance. In the case of Tunisia, the challenge from the right wing (Jihadism) might bring down Islamic liberalism and be used as a legitimising tool for the return of more authoritarian political arrangements.

## Losing the Ultra-Orthodox Spectrum

In the wake of President Ben Ali’s fall, a large number of Islamists emerged on the surface. Many of them had been forced by the old regime to exist, operate and recruit underground. The most prominent group are Salafists. Salafism is not a monolithic movement but rather consists of a number of different ultra-orthodox sheikhs, who have their own following and their own associations. Although they might differ in their details, their common aim is to restore the purity of early Islam. They thereby refer to the time of the prophet and the early generations of his followers (Salaf). This does not imply a simple return to the past but rather aims at freeing Islam from historical deviations, distortions and alterations and at restoring an idealised pure and pristine Islam. Salafism mainly evolved around illegal mosques, which are not controlled by the state authorities.

In the days after the Jasmine Revolution, Salafists first caught public attention when members of the movement challenged secular practices through provocative activism. Examples were an assault on an art gallery in Tunis or a sit-in of Salafist students at Manouba University in Tunis. In order to make their protest more visible, some activists even brought down the Tunisian flag in front of the building and replaced it with a Salafist

one. Salafist activism gained broad media coverage in and outside Tunisia. Ennahda's first reactions to a rather aggressive appearance of Salafists was placating.

Ennahda sought to accommodate and absorb Salafists. Salafists were perceived as natural allies. It was hoped that these ultra-conservative groups would complement Ennahda's lacking da'wa movement. The early strategy of accommodating Salafists should be also assessed against the background of growing political polarisation between Ennahda and the secular/leftist camp. In light of a perceived resistance from within state institutions and powerful secular elites, strengthening the Islamist spectrum seemed to give Ennahda a stronger hand in the competition over resources and influence. Ennahda hoped to lead a broad coalition against the representatives of the old order, the common enemy of Islamists of all shades.

Different Salafist formations emerged after President Ben Ali's fall. However, none of them could enter the Constituent Assembly in the 2011 elections. The interim government had denied legal recognition to most of the Salafist formations due to security concerns. However, the Ennahda-led government annulled the regulation that forbids religious parties. In consequence, a number of smaller Salafist parties became licensed (Hizb al-Tahrir, Jabhat al-Islah, Hizb al-Asala, Hizb al-Rahma, Hizb al-Amen, Hizb Tayyar al-Mahaba) (Faath & Mattes, 2014, p. 8). The most important one is Jabhat al-Islah (Islamic Reform Front), which was licensed in March 2012. An Ennahda member explains: "We have encouraged them to request legalisation. The simple fact that they request authorisation from the prime minister implies that they see the law as a positive thing. They will eventually accept the rules of the game. Their radical projects will be thwarted. They put forward political programmes that are contrary to the reality of Tunisians today. Political integration will dilute their radical discourse" (International Crisis Group, 2013, p. 30).

Ennahda has regarded itself as the vanguard if not only legitimate representative of pious Muslims, but the party leadership believed that the inclusion of Salafists in the political system would lead to their moderation. Hence Ennahda regarded itself as a transformer of the Islamist sector. Instead of alienating Salafists the party aimed to drag Salafists into the democratic political spectrum and prevent their further radicalisation. The experiences of Ennahda members with authoritarian oppression also influenced in the beginning their mild attitudes towards Salafists. Ennahda did not want to be accused of "censoring the Muslim voice" (International Crisis Group, 2013, p. 31). For Ghannouchi and his advisers, it is the use of violence that constitutes a red line. "We will not judge people according to their opinions. Those who take up arms confront the state, but not everyone who has

got a beard is a Salafist. Karl Marx also had a beard. It is the passage to the act itself which constitutes a red line, not the expression of ideas," said Lotfi Zitoun, political adviser to the government (Mandraud, 2012).

Critics held that there has been a division of labour between Ennahda and the Salafists. While the party aims at portraying itself as a moderate Islamic party that can assume governmental responsibility, the Salafists are functioning as a complementary ideological bottom-up movement that implements Islamist tenets at the grassroots and makes Islam more visible in the public space. From a secularist perspective, Ennahda's gentle stance towards Salafists seemed further proof of the party's Islamist agenda and its organic bonds with extremists.

While having sympathies for Salafists, Ennahda politicians have often attained a patronising attitude in regard to Salafists, referring to them as "children" who need to be educated and disciplined. Ennahda's plans to reopen Zaytouna as an institution of religious teaching can be also interpreted in this light.<sup>17</sup>

Ennahda's patronising attitude also reflected a generational gap. While the older generation of the lower middle class generally supported Ennahda, Monica Marks (2015) highlights that many of their children, particularly those in the poorer urban areas, supported Salafist groups. Marks (2015) quotes young Salafist Jihadists who stated that "Ennahda's 'bishwaya bishwaya' (slowly, slowly) approach often seemed patronising and paternalistic."

Ennahda's accommodating and conciliatory policies could not help absorb more radical elements. But the rise of Jihadist-Salafism not only challenged Ennahda but also some of the Salafist parties that had emerged since President Ben Ali's fall. Torelli, Merone and Cavatorta (2012) point to the fact that those Salafists who had joined the institutional game tended to represent the older generation (p. 148). They could hardly reach the young generations of more radical Islamists and address their needs and sorrows.

Fahmi (2015) holds that many young Islamists were also further disappointed as Ennahda failed to implement Sharia as a source of legislation. "In addition, young Salafist Jihadists are incensed that Ennahda sought reconciliation with the symbols of the former regime by agreeing to participate in a coalition government with the Nidaa Tounes party, which includes, together with secularists, members known for being close to the old regime. Some Salafist-Jihadist voices explicitly accused the Ennahda movement of being a US satellite, deviating from the path of the Islamic project and attempting to please Western countries, even at the expense of Islam and its provisions" (Fahmi, 2015).

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<sup>17</sup> During the rule of Bourguiba and Ben Ali, al-Zaytouna was sidelined for a long time and the whole Islamic spectrum oppressed in order to achieve a strict separation between state and religion. Ennahda strongly believes that this oppression together with the weakening of religious education led to poor knowledge of Islam in general and pushed young Tunisians to join Wahabi-inspired Salafist movements. In particular, youths living in marginalised areas, suffering from personal disorientation, feel attracted to extremist preachers on the internet and finally decide to join radical movements (Marks, 2015, pp. 5-6). According to Ennahda, the revival of al-Zaytouna is of great importance, and it should again be allowed to pursue educational tasks (Marks, 2015, pp. 5-6).

The assault by Salafist groups on the American Embassy in Tunis in September 2012 constituted a turning point in Ennahda's policy towards them. The assault proved that Jihadists had gained the upper hand within the Salafist movement. Compared to its population, Tunisia has the highest percentage of foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq. As Ennahda was under pressure, and accusations of being an ally with radical groups increased, the party decided to isolate Salafists and to ban Ansar al-Sharia, which was responsible for terrorist attacks.

Jihadist-Salafist strongholds are the Greater Tunis area and Bizerte in the north of Tunisia, Kasserine in the east as well as Ben Gardane in the south. These are mainly poor areas. In locations such as Ben Gardane, a town not far from the Libyan border, radical Islam has overlapped with long-existing informal networks involved in smuggling (Colombo, 2016). Similarly, Kasserine can be counted among the country's poorest regions. Kasserine in turn is situated close to the Algerian border. Its location has made the town a convenient refuge for extremists on both sides of the border. Here again the absence of the government, few economic prospects, poverty and informal transnational networks, often based on smuggling, have provided a breeding ground for the rise of radical Islamism. Colombo (2016) holds that a closer analysis of hotbeds of Jihadism reveal that there "is an overlap of multiple layers of marginalisation and exclusion as a consequence of decentralisation and the lack of a sense of belonging to the state, even after the revolution" (p. 112).

Ennahda's harsh stance against Islamist militants, its rejection of informal economy and the renunciation of Islamism highlight that Ennahda has chosen integration with the system over the struggle for unification within the broader Islamist spectrum.

## Conclusion

Although it did not play any active role in the revolution that led to President Ben Ali's fall, the Ennahda party can be defined as its major beneficiary. Ennahda's success in the elections and its later participation in different governments are the result of a long-standing struggle, defined by moderation and adaptation. From its early days, Ennahda set out to participate in elections as a political party. This entailed a process of professionalisation but also de-ideologisation, meaning the departure from strict ideological tenets and a more pragmatic and flexible approach to political issues. Cavatorta and Merone (2013) argue that the regime's repressive policies and the party's exclusion had a moderating effect on the party and its members. In any case, Ennahda's

adaptation to global paradigms and discourses resonates with similar developments in other countries. Asef Bayat (2005) refers to this phenomenon as “post-Islamism”. The core spirit of his interpretation of the term refers to the metamorphosis of Islamism. Bayat (2005) highlights that the “appeal, energy and sources of legitimacy of Islamism get exhausted even among its once-ardent supporters” (p. 5) and that Islamists (and he is referring to mainstream Islamists) have “become aware of their system’s anomalies and inadequacies” (p. 5), which made it more open to criticism and questions. This does not mean that post-Islamism is anti-Islamic or secular, but that it rather entails the marriage with global discourses on democracy, human rights and neoliberal market economy.

Considering the failure of other examples where post-Islamist protagonists met with liberal democracy such as Turkey and Egypt, Tunisia’s Ennahda party carries the torch of liberal Islamism.

In contrast to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Ennahda made a clear decision for political activism and against da’wa activities and, in contrast to Turkey’s AKP, Ennahda has – so far – made clear that its reference is parliamentary democracy.

In post-revolutionary Tunisia, the party has positioned itself as the voice of the interests of an emergent new urban middle class. This has supported the shift in focus from ideological Islamist conceptions to social conservatism as well as the adoption of neoliberal economic positions. The party’s focus has lain on promoting stability rather than change. Its policies have guaranteed the maintenance of existing power structures. Ennahda’s inclusion in the system has guaranteed a smooth transition process at the price of any substantial reforms in the economic and social spheres.

This paper argued that the inclusion of Ennahda has had the effect of a restoration of the system through a passive revolution. While the revolutionaries have been marginalised, Ennahda has been part of a bargained competition with the establishment.

Ennahda’s adaptation to the system has been completed with its denunciation of Islamism. Ayari holds that this can be interpreted as a claim for full power.<sup>18</sup> The renunciation of Islamism can be seen as the removal of the last obstacle to full integration and equality with the opponents.

However, despite the departure from Islamism, the party has the image of an underdog movement, and the attachment to a conservative notion of Islam is an identity-establishing factor within the party and with its constituency.

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<sup>18</sup> Authors’ interview with Michaël Béchir Ayari, Tunis, 6 November 2016.



In its attempt to adapt to the system and appease the establishment and foreign partners, Ennahda has failed to absorb the poor and large parts of the youth. Both are groups with hardly any hopes for the future. In the long run, Ennahda risks becoming normalised as a system party and losing attraction for large parts of society that feel marginalised.

Ennahda has increasingly come under pressure from emergent ultra-orthodox and extremist Islamist groups. Ennahda's early attempts to appease radical Islamists through a more tolerant and sympathetic rhetoric and stance failed as young Tunisian Salafists proved to be revolutionaries susceptible to violent extremism. In view of stagnant economic developments (see the chapter written by Isabel Schäfer in this joint study) and the wanting results of the revolutions (see the chapter written by Emmanuel Cohen-Hadria in this joint study), radical and extremist groups that promise an alternative to the existing system have gained fresh momentum. While a more moderate course and integration with the incumbent system legitimises Ennahda as a democratic but conservative Islamic party, at the same time this strategy has threatened to lose control over the deprived youths in the suburbs of Tunis, the economically underdeveloped regions in the south and central Tunisia. Salafist and more radical Jihadist groups have been particularly successful among urban youths. Not only have economically poor youngsters been attracted by radical and ultra-orthodox tendencies, but the children of the Arabophone middle-class have also provided a fruitful ground for recruitment. Many of them socialised in a conservative setting – their parents have often supported Ennahda – these young people have often felt disappointed by the wanting results of the revolution. They regard Ennahda as the continuity of the old regime in new clothes. Ennahda's integration with the post-revolutionary power architecture has made the party a classical system party in their eyes.

To sum up, developments in Tunisia point to the challenges facing moderate post-Islamist parties. These parties have put ideological conceptions aside and have adapted their organisation, political processes and behaviour to democratic procedures and market economy. Economic disparity, few instruments to direct economic development and growing polarisation are factors that have weakened liberal Islamist messages and seem to open an arena for extremist tendencies.

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**Radicalisation and Jihadist Threat in Tunisia:  
Internal Root Causes, External Connections  
and Possible Responses**

*Stefano M. Torelli\**



The political transition process that started in Tunisia in 2011 continues to move forward, albeit against many obstacles. Among the major challenges to the stability of the country and to the consolidation of democratic institutions and practices, terrorism is definitely the most worrisome. The Jihadist threat jeopardises Tunisian security and the country has to adopt new strategies to combat it. Among the objectives of the new counter-terrorist strategies there is certainly that of adapting to new forms of Jihadism. To do this, it is essential to understand the factors and processes that led to the radicalisation of hundreds of young people. This has to be done from both the tactical/operational and ideological points of view. In the first instance, in order to better frame the evolving strategies and objectives of Tunisian Jihadist movements it is necessary to implement an effective response from the point of view of repression. However, it is even more important to intervene on the level of prevention. To do this, the contexts in which new forms of violent extremism arise must be understood and the causes identified, so that action can be taken before the processes of radicalisation occur. Finally, there is a need to focus on de-radicalisation programmes too, to recover and reintegrate into society individuals who have previously chosen the path of extremism. In implementing a comprehensive anti-terrorist strategy, an increased coordination effort between all the stakeholders is required. On the operational level, the army, the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of the Interior should coordinate with other economic and social ministries. At the political level, there is a need to clarify the responsibilities of the two major institutional actors, the Presidency of the Republic and the Prime Minister. The constitutional framework does not clearly establish the prerogatives of these two figures, thus creating a deadlock. Moreover, under this kind of institutional balance, the important issue of counter-terrorism is likely to be blocked due to any institutional clashes. Thus, the political contingency influences the effectiveness of the government action. Tunisia has to face all these challenges in order to deal with a constantly changing threat, which has deep roots in the socioeconomic context of the country. The chapter first analyses the evolution of the Jihadist threat in Tunisia, retracing the three phases that characterised the origins and development of home-grown terrorism. In the second part, it aims to give some policy indications on possible measures to be taken to fight terrorism.

## Introduction

In the spring of 2013 a series of attacks in the area of Jebel Chaambi began, which caused the deaths of dozens of National Guard and Security Forces members. Between April and the end of 2013, at least 20 soldiers were killed in several attacks, including eight in an ambush on 29 July 2013.<sup>1</sup> This particular episode, in which the victims were brutally assaulted by the militants, has shocked public opinion and this led the government

<sup>1</sup> Between 2013 and 2015, even before the attacks against the Bardo Museum and the tourist resort in Sousse, almost 100 members of the Tunisian security forces were killed in attacks, especially on the border with Algeria. For more details about these attacks, see the website *Inkyfada*, at <https://inkyfada.com/maps/carte-du-terrorisme-en-tunisie-depuis-la-revolution/#yearBilan>.

to react to the wave of unprecedented violence in the country. These violent incidents came after two years of confrontation between the transitional authorities and a new generation of young Salafists that emerged after Ben Ali's fall.<sup>2</sup> Faced with this escalation of violence, in August 2013 the government has reacted by banning the Salafist movement Ansar al-Shari'a in Tunisia (AST), classifying it as a terrorist organisation. From then on, a new phase of confrontation between the authorities and Jihadist groups started. This study will try to understand the causes of the radicalisation process in Tunisia and the context in which a Salafist movement gradually turned into a Jihadist one. The analysis goes further and is not focused just on AST, as this organisation was banned in 2013. Thus, other drivers of radicalisations will be identified. These have to do with the internal political, social and economic context, as well as with external influences that contributed to the rise of the Jihadist ideology and the first manifestations of violence within Tunisia.<sup>3</sup>

## Radicalisation: A Conceptual Analysis

Before starting the discussion about radicalisation in Tunisia, it is useful to specify what is intended by "radicalisation", as the term has been widely used in literature, but not always with the same meaning. It is important to note that radicalisation does not automatically mean "terrorism" and that not all radicalised individuals eventually turn into perpetrators of terrorist attacks. Radicalisation here is referred to as the process of developing extremist ideologies and beliefs,<sup>4</sup> rather than terrorism itself. This distinction is crucial because there is no evidence that all the radicalised people in Tunisia (and elsewhere in the global arena) eventually choose to become terrorists. However, on the other hand, it might be easier for a radicalised individual to become a terrorist than it is for an individual who had not undergone a process of radicalisation. In other words, radicalisation is seen as the first step towards the actual perpetration of terrorist attacks, whereas it is rare that a person will choose to become a terrorist without having undergone a process of ideological radicalisation before. As some scholars have highlighted, there is no unique definition of "radicalisation".<sup>5</sup> The main distinction is between the ones that intend radicalisation as

2 Few comprehensive studies have been conducted on Tunisian Salafism since the fall of Ben Ali. However, the issue is being more closely studied. Among the most important studies so far are: Merone, F., & Cavatorta, F. (2012). Salafist movement and sheikh-ism in the Tunisian democratic transition. Working Papers in International Studies. Centre for International Studies. Dublin City University; Torelli, S.M., Merone, F., & Cavatorta, F. (2012). Salafism in Tunisia: Challenges and opportunities for democratization. Middle East Policy, 19(4), 140-154; International Crisis Group. (2013a). Tunisia: Violence and the Salafic challenge. Report Middle East and North Africa Report, N. 137; Gartenstein-Ross, D., Moreng, B., & Soucy, K. (2014, February). Raising the stakes: Ansar al-Shari'a in Tunisia's shift to Jihad. The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism. See also Wolf, A. (2013, January). Tunisia: Signs of domestic radicalization post-revolution. CTC Sentinel, 6(1), 1-4.

3 For a comprehensive study on the radicalisation process in Tunisia, see also Fahmi, G., & Meddeb, H. (2015). Market for jihad. Radicalisation in Tunisia. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Retrieved from [http://carnegieendowment.org/files/CMEC\\_55\\_FahmiMeddeb\\_Tunisia\\_final\\_oct.pdf](http://carnegieendowment.org/files/CMEC_55_FahmiMeddeb_Tunisia_final_oct.pdf)

4 See also Borum, R. (2001). Radicalisation into violent extremism I: A review of social science theories. *Journal of Strategic Security*, 4(4), 7-36. Retrieved from <http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1139&context=jss>

5 For a comprehensive discussion on radicalisation, see also Schmid, A.P. (2013, March). Radicalisation, de-radicalisation, counter-radicalisation: A conceptual discussion and literature review. ICCT Research Paper, The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism. Retrieved from <https://www.icct.nl/download/file/ICCT-Schmid-Radicalisation-De-Radicalisation-Counter-Radicalisation-March-2013.pdf>

the violent act itself, and those that mean the pursuit or acceptance of changes in society and state, which could undermine the democratic principles. In this sense, radicalisation is seen as a danger for democracy itself. This meaning could also be accepted in the following analysis, as what is meant here by radicalisation is an anti-systemic process aimed at destabilising the democratisation process started in Tunisia after the fall of Ben Ali. Therefore, in this analysis the distinction between violent radicalisation and non-violent forms of radical thinking is not important, as what is crucial is the attitude (or the behaviour) more than the violent action per se. Indeed, the presence of radicalised individuals, even if not automatically violent, represents a concern for the authorities and could undermine the process of democratisation, should these individuals choose to embrace terrorism instead of remaining quiet. For this reason, radicalisation will be seen as a change in thinking, as this is seen as the first step towards the actual perpetration of terrorist attacks. Another important distinction is between individual and collective radicalisation. In the first case, we are talking about single persons that, for different reasons (economic and social disparities, marginalisation, poverty, ideological and political reasons), undergo a process of radicalisation that brings them close to anti-systemic positions. These episodes are to be debated case by case, as there is no common pattern of individual radicalisation. The definition of collective radicalisation is conferred on particular political or social organisations that radicalise as a group as a reaction to repressive or exclusive politics. As will be debated, in Tunisia we are mostly witnessing cases of individual radicalisation rather than collective. As for the reasons behind radicalisation, the literature makes a distinction between two main kinds of radicalisation processes: political radicalisation (often connected to group radicalisation) and social radicalisation (connected to individual radicalisation).<sup>6</sup> In Tunisia, both processes are present but the majority of the case studies are to be defined as cases of social and individual radicalisation, more than of political radicalisation.

### The Premise: Jihadist Salafism Trying to Institutionalise?

Since its appearance in 2011, AST has been at the boundary between the so-called quietists and political Salafists on the one hand and the traditional Jihadist movements on the other hand.<sup>7</sup> Its emergence has to be directly linked to the process of political liberalisation that has begun in the aftermath of Ben Ali's escape to Saudi Arabia. The new political landscape has allowed all political and social powers to be represented in the public space. On the other hand, the new climate of national reconciliation led to the

6 According to the radicalisation theory literature, the radicalisation arising from socioeconomic factors, differently from the type caused by political (as repression) factors, represents a dynamic that is individual, not collective. This kind of radicalisation seems to mainly involve the younger population and is caused by social and economic factors such as urbanisation, unemployment, population growth, poverty and social exclusion. See in particular Ashour, O. (2009). *The de-radicalization of jihadists. Transforming armed Islamist movements*. London-New York: Routledge. In general, for the discussion about the radicalisation and moderation of Islamist political movements, see also Jilian Schwedler, J. (2007). *Faith in moderation: Islamist parties in Jordan and Yemen*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

7 For a classification of Salafist movements, see Wiktorowicz, Q. (2006). Anatomy of the Salafi movement. *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 29 (3), 207-239.

amnesty granted to many political prisoners by the first transitional government, including Islamist militants arrested in previous years. In this context, the radical manifestations of Islamism also emerged, among them AST. Although this movement has been classified as a terrorist organisation by both the Tunisian government (August 2013) and the US Department of State (January 2014), it was initially a Salafist movement devoted mainly to activities of da'wa and social interest. In this context, its main activities in Tunisia focused especially on two directions: preaching and proselytism (activities related to tarbiyya, or "education") and all the activities that can be traced to what has been called "Islamic welfare", such as support for needy families, the organisation of convoys carrying food and medicines and relief for people affected by natural disasters. However, to make it a movement sui generis if compared to traditional Salafist group classifications, there were at least two factors. On the one hand, the nature of its leadership: indeed, the founder and leader Abu 'Ayyadh (whose real name is Sayf Allah Ben Hassine), who reportedly died in a drone attack in Libya in 2016, was a former Jihadist who fought in Afghanistan after the US intervention in 2001. He was among the founders of the al-Qa'ida-inspired movement Tunisian Combatant Group (TCG) and he was finally arrested in Turkey and deported to Tunisia on charges of terrorism (Torelli, 2013a). On the other hand, AST has always maintained a double strategy and, to some extent, a dual nature: while in Tunisia it dedicated itself to social activities and da'wa, at the same time it endorsed the global Jihad and it felt fully within the global Jihadist ideology. This was evident from AST's symbolism and ideology of reference, as well as from the frequent references to Jihad in Iraq, Syria and even Myanmar. While, at first, the Ennahda-led government tried to include AST within the legal political framework and AST itself evaluated the possibility of institutionalising, it eventually took another path.

AST's positions vis-a-vis the Tunisian government have gradually radicalised in part as a consequence of Ennahda's democratic stance within the framework of the Tunisian political transition, and in part as a direct result of the institutions' attitude against it. AST was the protagonist of the incidents in September 2012, when a group of Salafists attacked the US embassy in Tunis and four militants were killed in the subsequent clashes. The event marked a change in tactics for the movement, because for the first time AST had targeted a Western symbol and clashed directly against the Tunisian security forces (International Crisis Group, 2013a). Since the beginning of 2013, Ennahda changed its attitude towards the Salafists and opened a new phase of confrontation. Political opportunism has in part contributed to forge Ennahda's strategy. The Islamic party seems to have realised that winning the trust of the citizens who do not naturally belong to its electoral basin could be even more important than the consensus' consolidation among Islamic conservatives. The Egyptian example was a warning: sharpening the confrontation/clash with secularists could lead to loss of credibility

and, consequently, of power (Marks, 2015). In May 2013, the then-Prime Minister Ali Laarayedh passed to the phase of confrontation with AST, by banning its annual meeting, which was held in Kairouan. Whether or not its intentions were genuine, the Islamic party seemed to have realised that such a hard confrontation between itself and the secular opposition could not only block the institutional transition, but also be detrimental to its political purposes. It is worth mentioning that in 2013 two opposition leaders, Chokri Belaid and Mohamed Brahmi, were killed. These acts of political violence deeply shocked Tunisians, while the opposition called for the dismissal of the Ennahda-led government. Therefore, for Ennahda to publicly condemn AST would be a tactical move aimed at recovering trust among citizens. On the other hand, this has led to an open confrontation with the Salafists, who have gradually lost all confidence in Ennahda and in Tunisian institutions, feeling persecuted and marginalised.

From its point of view, Ennahda was facing a dual challenge. First, it had to convince the Tunisians that it was not involved in any act of violence that the country has been witnessing. Second, as a government party, it had to ensure citizens about the territory's protection and the security within their boundaries. Detecting and combating the alleged terrorists should have been the first step in this direction. In this context, the accusations of AST being behind major acts of violence in the country found a place. By officially designating AST as a terrorist movement, Ennahda's leaders wanted to distance themselves from Salafism and to reassure citizens about having identified the enemy to fight (Marks, 2014). In this context, AST members had three different options: to accept the new situation and abandon politics; to "emigrate" to countries where they could still fight for the ideological utopia of a new "Islamic order"; to stay in Tunisia and promote violent Jihadism. The Jihadist vanguards active in the area of Jebel Chaambi and coming from Algeria served as a catalyst for those who decided to revolt against the Tunisian authorities. At a later date, the global rise of the so-called Islamic State would have to attract more young Tunisians, thanks to their presence in and influence on Libya too, just at the border with Tunisia. Meanwhile, a process of radicalisation was beginning to involve hundreds of individuals as a reaction to the social, political, economic and cultural marginalisation that has excluded part of society from the transitional process (Merone, 2016).

### **The First Stage: The "Algerian Connection" and the Internal Drivers for Radicalisation**

Since the spring of 2013, Tunisia has been affected by a series of attacks against security forces and the National Guard, especially in the area of Jebel Chaambi, on the border

with Algeria. Although the Tunisian government has singled out AST as responsible for the repeated attacks, it has not provided clear evidence of the direct involvement of the Salafist movement in the terrorist activities in Tunisia (Torelli, 2013c). In addition, the features of some attacks give the impression that other Jihadist groups are operating in the country. What was the origin of these groups? The assumptions, in this case, appear to be substantially two. On the one hand, there is evidence of infiltration of Algerian Jihadist elements in Tunisia: this would be confirmed by the arrest of some Algerian nationals at the border with Tunisia, but also by the kind of operation conducted, which resembles those of the Algerian Jihadists during the 1990s civil war. It is worth noting, in this regard, that in June 2014 for the first time al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) claimed responsibility for an attack conducted against the house of the Interior Minister Lotfi ben Jeddou in the city of Kasserine (Tajine, 2014). The Tunisian government has deployed an increasing number of forces in order to fight Jihadism, but attacks have continued since then, reflecting these groups' elusiveness. Between 2012 and 2013, the authorities declared they had identified a new Jihadist cell called Uqba ibn Nafa'a, but in the following months the group was no longer mentioned, nor has any attack been ever claimed by this alleged Tunisian Jihadist movement, although some sources have accused this elusive group of being responsible for the 17 July terrorist attack on the Jebel Chaambi in which 15 Tunisian soldiers were killed. The second hypothesis – which does not exclude the first one – is that there would be individual Tunisians that have gradually radicalised, becoming part of the local Jihadist networks. In this case, it is possible we are facing forms of so-called personal Jihad.

In fact, despite claims by the Tunisian government, initially the direct relationship between AST as a movement and Jihadist cells operating on the Jebel Chaambi has not been proven. On the contrary, what seemed to emerge was rather the creation of a network of contacts with Jihadist groups already operating in Algeria, with particular reference to AQIM. There are several elements in support of this argument. Firstly, the geographical proximity between Algeria and the limited area in which the attacks have occurred; secondly, the tactics used by Jihadist cells recalled those used by Algerian fighters during the Algerian civil war; finally, many combatants on Jebel Chaambi were Algerian, as confirmed by the Algerian intelligence, who warned the Tunisian authorities about the border infiltration attempts. Therefore, it is legitimate to imagine that, at this stage, the appearance of Jihadism in Tunisia was actually due to external infiltration attempts, rather than to internal causes and AST did not play a primary role.

However, the evolution of the Jihadist threat has followed a path directly influenced by domestic factors too, which contributed to the radicalisation of hundreds of young

Tunisians. This has changed the landscape of the Jihadist movements operating in the country. The final effects of this process emerged with the two attacks in March and July 2015 on the Bardo Museum in Tunis and against tourists at Sousse, but this has come through a long process. This process was triggered by two different factors, the first specifically political and the other socioeconomic. On the one hand, the continuous actions of repression – often preventive and indiscriminate – against Salafist members has inevitably led to an increased polarisation, helping to radicalise even further individuals who were not directly linked to Jihadist networks (International Crisis Group, 2016). On the other hand, the government's ineffectiveness in addressing and resolving the serious socioeconomic disparities again caused the discontent of a generation that, after having personally contributed to Ben Ali's fall, found itself marginalised again.<sup>8</sup> The process of exclusion of AST leaders – who have moved into neighbouring Libya, where in the meantime several Jihadist groups began to operate – has also led to less control on the basis of the movement, whose members have dispersed and have made different choices. Among them, some allegedly continued to profess the Salafist ideology while not resorting to violent methods, others have abandoned activism and, finally, some have embraced the Jihadist ideology, radicalised and joined the active Jihadist cells in Tunisia. In this case, what occurred was the so-called process of “radicalisation through exclusion”, which involves the radicalisation of individuals as a reaction to their exclusion from the political and social arena.<sup>9</sup> In this way, the government's policies could also have contributed to escalating the tensions. Many young people have approached the most violent groups in response to a political and institutional system that has rejected them. Different, but with similar results, is the process that has caused the radicalisation of hundreds of young Tunisians as a reaction to the ineffectiveness of the government regarding the conditions of backwardness in part of the country. In this regard, it is no coincidence that some areas of Tunisia (with particular reference to central and western regions, such as Kasserine, the area of Ben Guerdane and some peripheral areas of Tunis) are the most affected by the phenomenon of radicalisation (The Soufan Group, 2015).

The process of radicalisation in Tunisia has become increasingly alarming to the point that Jihadism has become a domestic phenomenon and began to affect not only the outermost areas but also urban centres. After AST was dissolved and was declared a terrorist organisation, other movements have emerged. Initially, the major and apparently the more organised was the Brigade Uqba ibn Nafi. According to some sources, this is a sort of “branch” of AQIM in Tunisia and according to local intelligence sources it has been driven directly by an Algerian militant, Abu Sakhr Lokman. With time, Uqba ibn Nafi has been able to take advantage of the discontent of the youngest and most marginalised

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, World Bank. (2014). *The unfinished revolution: Bringing opportunity, good jobs and greater wealth to all Tunisians*. Washington, DC: World Bank Group. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/658461468312323813/The-unfinished-revolution-bringing-opportunity-good-jobs-and-greater-wealth-to-all-Tunisians>

<sup>9</sup> See in particular Ashour, O. (2009). *The De-radicalization of Jihadists. Transforming armed Islamist movements*, Routledge: London-New York. In general, for the discussion around the radicalisation and moderation of Islamist political movements, see also Schwedler, J. (2007). *Faith in moderation: Islamist parties in Jordan and Yemen*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

groups, becoming increasingly characterised as actually “Tunisian”. However, compared to other organised groups in other countries such as Egypt or Libya, the kind of Jihadism that appeared in Tunisia seems to be the more “individual”. In fact, individuals or small cells seemingly disconnected with each other perpetrated several violent incidents connected to radical Islamism. In other cases, both in Tunis and in other parts of the country, the security forces have carried out arrests and raids against suspected terrorists, confiscating weapons and ammunition, but it was difficult to draw a common thread that, beyond the ideological aspect, would combine these individual cases together. Therefore, we can say that the kind of Jihadism who was born in Tunisia is different from the one that emerged in other post-Arab Spring contexts, because it is a phenomenon that affects the individual aspect, rather than the collective sphere of a single organisation. One example in this regard is that against a very large number of people who, once radicalised, have gone to fight to Syria, Iraq and Libya, the most active Jihadist group in Tunisia, Uqba ibn Nafi, is probably composed by only a few hundred, if not dozens, of people.

The emergence of this kind of Jihadism poses relevant safety issues for the Tunisian authorities, since it is more difficult to face and prevent terrorist actions organised by individuals or small isolated cells. An interesting dynamic to be studied in order to understand the phenomenon of radicalisation of individuals who turn to Salafist Jihadists concerns the simultaneous dismantling of AST's structure in Tunisia. In fact, the on-going attacks against security forces on the border with Algeria and Libya have been occurring even after AST's designation as a terrorist organisation and the campaign of repression against Salafists by the government. AST's lack of legitimacy and its subsequent disappearance from the public space led the leadership to have less control over their members, some of whom have gradually turned into Jihadists. In this case, the actual element of novelty and transformation if compared to the first months of AST's activity is the fact that some Salafists have experienced Jihadist practice (while AST was Jihadist in its background ideology and symbolism, but not in concrete actions). Moreover, they turned from supporting Jihad just outside Tunisia to bringing it within Tunisian territory, even if this process cannot be attributed to AST as a movement but rather to out-of-control individuals. This sort of “individual radicalisation” is often the result of disillusionment caused among certain sections of the younger population, who feel marginalised from the transition, despite having contributed to the previous regime's fall.

Furthermore, it is worth mentioning the existing connections – this trend has already been observed in the Sahel region by AQIM and other Islamist groups present in Mali such as MUJAO Ansar al-Din – between local crime dedicated to the illegal drugs,



weapons and goods trafficking, and Jihadist cells. This occurs both at the border with Algeria and with Libya. The networks built around the relationship between smuggling and guerrilla Jihadists provide a means to obtain financing and, at the same time, grouped to exercise a form of control over a given territory (International Crisis Group, 2013b; International Crisis Group, 2014). This aspect seems to be correlated to two factors: the on-going economic crisis, as new illegal business is taking root, and the regional security crisis. Therefore, Libya is becoming a new safe haven for regional Jihadist groups, even from Tunisia itself (Torelli, 2014a).

## The Influence of Libya and IS: The Transition to the Strategy of Terror

From 2014 onwards, another factor has contributed in a fundamental way to the development of new networks of Jihadism in Tunisia and, consequently, to the adoption of new strategies and tactics of action by radical Islamist groups: the deterioration of the situation in neighbouring Libya (Varvelli, 2015). After the ban against AST, some sources reported that its leadership settled in Libya, where other Salafist-Jihadist organisations already operated. In particular, the AST leader Abu 'Ayyadh seemed to have found refuge in Libya. From there, he would have tried to reorganise the movement in order to resume operations more effectively in Tunisia. At the same time, Tunisia has always had structural problems related to existing connections between groups dedicated to organised crime and other illegal activities related to the informal economy, both to its western borders with Algeria and to the eastern borders with Libya, particularly in the area of Ben Guerdane. On the other hand, several sources have reported the possibility that local criminal networks could exploit the Tunisian porous borders. In this context, they had the opportunity of creating direct links with Islamist organisations, finding an activity of common interest in arms trafficking. Throughout 2014 and 2015, a substantial number of Tunisians who until then decided to go as foreign fighters to Iraq and Syria have shifted their destination to the nearby Libya. At the same time, Libya was witnessing an unprecedented expansion of local Jihadist groups and, above all, of movements related directly to Islamic State (IS), which in 2014 began to establish its own cells on the southern shores of the Mediterranean. The so-called "Libyan connection" was definitely the external factor that has influenced more than others the creation of the substrate required for the further radicalisation of individuals that have just been radicalising in Tunisia between 2013 and early 2015. The on-going relationship between Tunisian and Libyan Jihadist networks, along with the penetration of IS ideology in Tunisia, led to the attacks in Tunis and in Sousse. The latter marked the shift to the tactic of indiscriminate attacks against civilians (for the most Western citizens) in urban

areas and aimed at hitting the heart of the Tunisian economic system by identifying the tourism sector as its favourite target.

At this point, the issue of the internal competition within the Jihadist field itself between al-Qa'ida and IS also arises. While the episodes of Jihadism that occurred up to 2015, even in their extreme violence, had chosen to only hit targets linked to the political and institutional landscape, the attacks of 2015 differ in goals (Western tourists and civilians indiscriminately) and in where they occurred (urban centres and coastal areas). At first glance, at least two elements could substantiate that IS is influencing the Tunisian Jihadist scene more than al-Qa'ida does. First, the fact that for the first time by the end of 2014 IS claimed responsibility for the murders of the two political opponents Chokri Belaid and Mohamed Brahmi (killed in 2013) through a Tunisian militant currently in Iraq. Second, the fact that for the first time IS later claimed another suicide attack on a bus carrying security forces that occurred in November 2015 in downtown Tunis, which killed 12 policemen. The evolution of the situation in Libya has contributed to accelerating this process. The partial dismantling of Tunisian cells linked to IS in Sabratha, 100 kilometres from the border with Tunisia, has raised concerns that IS-linked Tunisian fighters could soon return to Tunisia. The Tunisian town of Ben Guerdane, close to the border with Libya, has become the focus of several attacks by Libyan-trained Tunisian militants. In March 2016, a group of at least 60 Jihadists attacked the town, targeting an army barracks and the homes of military officers. Thirty-six militants were killed in the battle that followed, along with seven civilians and 12 members of the security forces (Torelli, 2016). Just days before the attack a captured militant, Mohamed Ben Mohsen Ben Mohamed al-Gharbi, revealed Tunisian Jihadists were developing a plan to use about 200 fighters in conjunction with car bombs to capture Ben Guerdane and proclaim a new Islamic State province in Tunisia. This is an important change in Jihadist strategy in Libya and shows the direct involvement of IS-linked cells in Tunisia, which had until now only seen infiltration from al-Qa'ida-linked groups.

## Conclusion: A Jihadist Threat Influenced by Wrong Policies?

These considerations lead us once again to analyse the root causes that have pushed thousands of young Tunisians to embrace the ideology and practice of Jihad. At the basis of this process of radicalisation there are structural reasons that concern the strong disparity between the urban areas and the peripheral ones, along with the age-old scourge of a labour market unable to satisfy the demand of the young generations. The frustration and the despair that led thousands of Tunisians to endorse the Jihadist

ideology and to reject the institutional system to the point of turning against it by resorting to terrorist attacks have worsened over the last few years. Paradoxically, the misplaced hopes for change have exacerbated the internal conflict, helping create more discontent.

The transition from 2011 onwards has certainly had the merit of giving a new political and institutional structure to the country through the adoption of a new Constitution, the holding of democratic elections, the inclusion of most of the political parties, the direct participation of civil society and the dialogue between the various stakeholders. However, at the same time, this stage seems to have entirely missed the real socioeconomic issues that were at the very foundation of the riots that caused the fall of the previous regime.

Against this background, what contributed to further raise the level of conflict has been the response of the Tunisian authorities to the terrorist threat. In this case, too, the Tunisian government showed a relative myopia in providing exclusively short-term and security-driven responses, without addressing the socioeconomic long-term causes of radicalisation. The summary arrests, the abuses in prison, the proclamation of the state of emergency and the entire structure of the new counter-terrorism law, are all examples of a strategy that has not been able to combine the need to give an immediate response to the terrorist threat and to take action at a structural level in order to remove the root causes of radicalisation.

## Recommendations

Against this background, some recommendations are given to Tunisian social and political actors and authorities, as well as to the foreign partners, such as the European Union.

- **A more comprehensive counter-terrorist response is needed.** Tunisian response to terrorism cannot only rely on repression. As the new provisional counter-terrorist strategy outlined by the National Commission for the Fight against Extremism and Terrorism stated, the state should react to the terrorist threat guided by four pillars: prevention, protection, prosecution and response. Military action could be useful to fight the effects of radicalisation, namely the violent activities, but it cannot prevent the radicalisation, nor address its root causes. This means that, alongside a security-drive response, Tunis has to take action on different levels. Where radicalisation has been caused by socioeconomic marginalisation, as is the case of western Tunisia for example, the government has to implement new social development policies. Where it has been caused by political marginalisation, a new

dialogue with the radical (when not overtly violent) elements is necessary in order to recompose the cleavages and to avoid new waves of radicalisation. Generally speaking, there are a series of stakeholders that should take part in the definition of the national counter-terrorist strategy. These are representatives of civil society, youth associations, unions and the Ministries of Finance, Economy, Youth and Sports, Religious Affairs, Women and Family, Education, Employment and Cultural Affairs. A more coordinated action between these stakeholders will be the most effective way towards the implementation of a multidimensional counter-terrorism strategy.

- **Overcome the disputes between the Presidency and the Prime Minister.** The 2014 Constitution represents a historical achievement for contemporary Tunisia, but at the same time it has generated confusion about the roles of the President of Republic and the Head of the Government. The very concept of “national security” is not explicitly mentioned in the text, as both the two officials have a role in the security strategy. While the President is the head of the armed forces, the government could act without the Presidency and the Prime Minister could form committees on security. This institutional “confusion” becomes an obstacle when the Presidency and the government are from two different political parties. In this case, the institutional competition could have detrimental effects on the effectiveness of the counter-terrorist strategy.
- **Empower the army.** While the need to forge a new strategy that goes beyond the repression level has been reiterated, it is important to empower the army too. Under Ben Ali, the army had been relegated to a secondary role if compared to the internal security forces depending on the Ministry of the Interior. Since the then-President Moncef Marzouki took office in 2012, the army has been assigned a more important role. The public spending allocated to the Minister of Defence has risen and, from the qualitative point of view, there is a process of modernisation of army equipment. Nevertheless, there is still competition between the army and the internal forces, such as the police and the national guard, especially when the authorities conduct counter-terrorism operations in the border regions. In order to be more credible and effective, the army needs to recover its public image. This should go hand in hand with better coordination between the army and the internal forces.
- **Concentrate the military and political efforts on the border regions.** The evolution of the Jihadist movements in the region teaches that the border areas are among the most exposed to the potential threat. As the situation in Libya continues to be very unstable and hundreds of Tunisian foreign fighters are reported to be active

in Libya, there is a growing concern that Tunisia could be negatively affected by the Libyan crisis. The attempt to take over the city of Ben Guerdane by a group of dozens of Tunisian militants from Libyan territory has been a clear example of the level of threat existing in that area. Also in this case, the military response should be accompanied by a more structural development plan. Local grievances are directed against the institutions, incapable of improving living conditions in the peripheral regions. This has to do with the root causes of radicalisation: if local communities perceive they are abandoned by the institutions and all they witness is the military presence, then the anti-government sentiment could grow and this could lead to more radicalisation.

- **Distinguish between violent extremists and non-violent Salafists.** A high level of polarisation characterises the new social and political context. In this context, it is important to make distinctions between different kinds of Islamist political activism. Not all Muslims are committed to political activities; not all “political Islamists” are Salafists; finally, not all Salafists are violent Jihadists. There is an urgent need to isolate the most radical elements among the Islamists, but at the same time this goal cannot be achieved through an indiscriminate reaction against the Islamists. In the last two years, authorities have arrested thousands of people and cases of abuses and tortures were also reported. The government arranged for the ban on dozens of associations and organisations and for the closure of dozens of mosques, especially in the aftermath of the two terrorist attacks on the Bardo Museum and in Sousse in 2015. These kinds of actions should be avoided, as they could help create the perceptions of a new authoritarian government. The Jihadist movements could easily exploit these opportunities to incite the disenfranchised part of society to revolt against the institutions.
- **Keep religion and politics separated, but with a new regulation.** Religion and politics should be separated and religious precepts should not interfere with public life. Nonetheless, a new regulation framework should be put in place. Indeed, the religious arena should not be completely left to uncontrolled self-proclaimed religious authorities, as the risk is that radical imams could take advantage of this vacuum. An important percentage of the new radicalised youth has been lured via this kind of “informal recruitment” inside radical mosques. In most cases, the local radical “imams” did not have a proper religious training and have been indoctrinated via Internet, or other radical leaders. The government, through the action of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, should promote a national programme aimed at training the religious authorities and controlling their activities. Political actors should help achieve this

objective. An important role has to be played by the Islamic party Ennahda. Once entangled in social and religious activism too, in its 10th Congress (May 2016) Ennahda announced that it would abandon the religious discourse in order to fully commit to political activity. While this move could be a good one in terms of institutionalisation of the party, the risk is that a social vacuum could be created, which the extremist and radical elements could exploit to recruit new followers.

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# EuroMeSCo

Comprising 106 institutes from 32 European and South Mediterranean countries, the EuroMeSCo (Euro-Mediterranean Study Commission) network was created in 1996 for the joint and coordinated strengthening of research and debate on politics and security in the Mediterranean. These were considered essential aspects for the achievement of the objectives of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.

EuroMeSCo aims to be a leading forum for the study of Euro-Mediterranean affairs, functioning as a source of analytical expertise. The objectives of the network are to become an instrument for its members to facilitate exchanges, joint initiatives and research activities; to consolidate its influence in policy-making and Euro-Mediterranean policies; and to disseminate the research activities of its institutes amongst specialists on Euro-Mediterranean relations, governments and international organisations.

The EuroMeSCo work plan includes a research programme with four publication lines (EuroMeSCo Joint Policy Studies, EuroMeSCo Papers, EuroMeSCo Briefs and EuroMeSCo Reports), as well as a series of seminars, workshops and presentations on the changing political dynamics of the Mediterranean region. It also includes the organisation of an annual conference and the development of web-based resources to disseminate the work of its institutes and stimulate debate on Euro-Mediterranean affairs.

## IEMed.

The European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed), founded in 1989, is a consortium comprising the Catalan Government, the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation and Barcelona City Council. It incorporates civil society through its Board of Trustees and its Advisory Council formed by Mediterranean universities, companies, organisations and personalities of renowned prestige.

In accordance with the principles of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership's Barcelona Process, and today with the objectives of the Union for the Mediterranean the aim of the IEMed is to foster actions and projects which contribute to mutual understanding, Exchange and cooperation between the different Mediterranean countries, societies and cultures as well as to promote the progressive construction of a space of peace and stability, shared prosperity and dialogue between cultures and civilisations in the Mediterranean.

Adopting a clear role as a think tank specialised in Mediterranean relations based on a multidisciplinary and networking approach, the IEMed encourages analysis, understanding and cooperation through the organisation of seminars, research projects, debates, conferences and publications, in addition to a broad cultural programme.



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The Finnish Institute of International Affairs is a research institute whose mission is to produce high quality, topical information on international relations and the EU. The Institute realizes its aims by conducting research as well as by organizing domestic and international seminars and publishing reports on its research and current international issues. The Institute also publishes a journal, *Ulkopolitiikka* (Finnish Journal of Foreign Affairs).

The purpose of the research carried out by the Institute is to produce focused information of a high standard for use by the academic community and decision-makers, and in public debate. The Institute maintains active international contacts in its activities and its researchers participate in public debate by writing articles for newspapers, periodicals and specialist journals.

The Institute was established by the Parliament of Finland in its centennial plenum in June 2006 and the Parliament also provides the Institute's basic funding. The Institute is autonomous in its research activities and is governed by a nine-member board, assisted by an advisory council and a scientific advisory council.