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The Tunisian Transition: Torn Between Democratic Consolidation and Neo-Conservatism in an Insecure Regional Context

Isabel Schäfer

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Introduction

The “Arab Spring” of 2011 has not only provoked the fall of different autocratic regimes, new political conflicts and civil wars, and the resurgence of certain “old” conflicts, but it also challenges the debate on democratisation, transition or transformation processes in the countries of North Africa and the Middle East.

Until recently, the theoretical debate mostly concentrated on explaining the absence of transformation, supporting notions of the so-called “Arab exceptionalism” or “Arab resilience” to democratic reforms (Huntington, 1996; Bellin, 2004; Hinnebusch, 2006; Pratt 2007). While some analysis considered the chances for democratisation in the Arab world (Anderson, 2006), the majority of the scientific literature concentrated on explaining the mechanisms that authoritarian regimes had developed to stay in power, to endure international pressures and to suppress or co-opt popular dissent (Heydemann, 2007; Ottaway & Choucair-Vizoso, 2008; Gandhi & Lust-Okar, 2009; Cavatorta, 2010). However, the recent popular uprisings, inducing the fall of some of the most resilient and long-lasting regimes in the MENA region (such as the Ben Ali regime in Tunisia, Mubarak regime in Cairo, Gaddafi regime in Libya, and Saleh regime in Yemen) challenge these theoretical theories, even if in some of these countries counter-revolutions followed the fall of the former regimes. The uprisings of 2011 showed that these regimes were less resilient than thought, and could actually be overthrown within a few days or weeks.

Since the uprisings of 2011 the notions of “transformation” and “transition” are widely employed and often in an indistinct manner. Transformation means “change” or transformation from one political system or regime to another, including profound political, economic, social and cultural changes within the society. Transformation does not automatically mean a regime change towards democracy and pluralism (Merkel, 2010).¹ The notion of “transition” is often put equal on terms with “transition to democracy” (O’Donnell et al., 1986), even though the authors distanced themselves from a normative understanding of implied democratisation.² In this paper, “transition” is understood in a comprehensive manner, as a process of change with an open end. The notion of transition has a more dynamic character than transformation; transformation happens over years and decades; a transition from one regime or government to a new system can happen in a few days, as the Tunisian example has shown, even if the administrative body or security sector for instance were not carried along by the transition dynamic. With regard to the political class, one can even speak of a kind of neo-conservative turn, in the sense of a potential comeback of ancient regime structures and networks. Reforms can generate political, economic, cultural or social change, transition or transformation. They can bring forward pluralism, political participation or the respect for fundamental rights and freedoms. The theoretical “democratisation debate” should be revised in the light of

1 On the notion of transformation, see: Merkel, W. (2010). *Systemtransformation*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

2 On the notion of transition, see: O’Donnell, G., Schmitter, P. C., & Whitehead, L. (Eds.) (1986). *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.

the “Arab Spring” and its aftermath, but this is not the intention of this paper, which focuses instead on the current and on-going transition process in Tunisia. The Tunisian transition consists of different contradictory, multifaceted dynamics and movements that might tear the society apart, or create an even stronger resilience towards external radicalised pressures.

The newly emerging Tunisian political system needs to be considered in the context of the current developments in the wider MENA region. In the international political and scientific debate on the “Arab Spring”, the Tunisian case has often been cited as a “model” of peaceful and successful transition. This paper rather considers the Tunisian transition as a very particular and unique case, and not as a “model”. Compared to other (failing or not failing) states in the MENA region, it is indeed the only country where a comprehensive process of democratic consolidation is taking place so far. The hitherto success of the Tunisian transition results from the particular constellation of the Tunisian case, including the constructive combination of different factors such as a strong civil society, strong middle class, low level of armament, consensus-oriented tradition, high level of education, or the absence of violent ethnic conflicts. All these factors suggest that the perspectives for a long-term democratic transformation process look positive but the challenges remain multifaceted. The paper assesses the different phases and achievements of the transition process (in section 1), before looking at the challenges, difficulties and future perspectives (section 2).

Major Phases and Achievements in the Tunisian Transition Process

Tunisia has achieved major milestones on its way to establishing a democratic system. Amongst these milestones are the building of the three reform commissions right after the Tunisian revolution in 2011, the foundation of a new political party landscape, the first free elections in October 2011 (after 23 years of the Ben Ali regime), building the legitimate basis for the National Constituent Assembly (NCA) in November 2011, the adoption of the new constitution in January 2014, and last but not least the first free legislative elections (October 2014) and presidential elections (November/December 2014). The abolition of the emergency law in March 2014 was a further milestone.³ The role of the civil society has been very important throughout the whole process. All these milestones have come about in a peaceful context. There have been some incidents of political violence though (especially in 2013), and two brutal terrorist attacks (Bardo, Sousse/El-Kantaoui 2015), but compared to the developments in other countries of the region, especially in Libya or Syria, the political transition in Tunisia has been relatively calm, non-violent and participative (although about 338 people died during the revolution, and about 2,200 people were injured).

After the Revolution – Building Reform Commissions

After the Tunisian revolution and the fall of the Ben Ali regime on 14 January 2011, a new and unknown political and social dynamic spread in the country. The number of newly created civil society organisations and new political parties exploded. More than 100 political parties were founded and legalised. The same was true for the media sector. The number of new magazines, newspapers and TV channels rapidly augmented; freedom of the press increased tremendously, and the media sector became more critical, independent and free. Right after the revolution, the official governmental functions were transmitted to interim Prime Minister Mohamed Ghanoucci, and to interim President of the Parliament Fouad Mebazaa. This transition government (in office from 17 January 2011 to 27 February 2011) announced as one of the first steps to guarantee a comprehensive freedom of the press and information, and the release of all political prisoners (about 500).⁴ But due to political tensions and protests, another transition government took office (27 February-13 December 2011) under Béji Caid Essebsi, who was the last transition Prime Minister before the elections of October 2011.⁵

Alongside the transition governments, three reform commissions were set up in 2011, with the task to politically and institutionally prepare the ground for the first free elections

³ The emergency law had been in force since January 2011 and accorded to the police and army particular rights, such as arresting or shooting any suspicious person without any warrant of arrest.

⁴ During the Tunisian revolution about 11,000 prisoners (all categories) escaped, and about 3,000 were conditionally released in the course of 2011. Under the Ben Ali regime, Tunisia had the highest per capita prison population of any Arab country in the Middle East and North Africa, with 31,000 prisoners and a total population of 10.5 million inhabitants. The treatment of prisoners was one of the darkest aspects of the human rights picture under Ben Ali. <http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/02/04/tunisia-prison-visit-ends-20-year-ban> (24 February 2015).

⁵ An analysis of the after-revolution phase can be found in Zemni, S. (2015). The Extraordinary Politics of the Tunisian Revolution: The Process of Constitution Making. *Mediterranean Politics*, 20(1), pp. 1-17.

of the National Constituent Assembly (NCA). Step by step, the electoral law was changed, and the preparations for the elections started. In particular, Yadh Ben Achour played an important and constructive role in this critical and fragile phase by leading the Haute Commission nationale pour la réforme politique (Higher Political Reform Commission of Tunisia), which became a sort of transitional parliament, by calming down heated debates and political conflicts. The Commission nationale d'établissement des faits sur les affaires de malversations et de corruption was chaired by Abdelfattah Amor, and the Commission nationale des faits sur les abus durant la dernière période by Taoufik Bouderbala.

Major challenges in this first transition phase were: the social pacification of the society, the credibility of the new institutions and new political leaders, the continued presence of foreign enterprises and investments, and the return of tourism. The expectations of the society were very high: after the fall of the old regime everything should change for the better from one day to another. Right after the revolution, most of the “revolutionaries” expected and hoped for a sudden improvement of their daily life and material situation, a new job, a decrease in food prices. Many citizens were hoping for more justice too, and a punishment of former plagues. At this point of time, people demonstrated for so long, until no more members of the former single party Rassemblement constitutionnel démocratique (RCD) or members of former governments (under Ben Ali) would be part of one of the transition governments.⁶ Anger and disrespect were strong, and tolerance toward former regime members and collaborators was very limited. This attitude changed later on, along with the slowly growing disappointment with the lack of tangible results of the revolution.

A New Political Party Landscape

Since January 2011, the emerging political party landscape has been very dynamic. About 107 new political parties were accredited after the revolution; eight already existed before.⁷ Different party coalitions and alliances were built, split up again, reconfigured, and changed their names, objectives and strategies a number of times. The pluralisation of the political party landscape is definitely a democratic milestone of the Tunisian transition process, compared to the (almost) single party system before, with the RCD as the only party capable of acting. A formal party pluralism had existed since 1988, but in reality under the “ancient regime”, only a few pseudo opposition parties were allowed (e.g. Parti de l'unité populaire [PUP], Union démocratique unioniste [UDU], Mouvement des démocrates socialistes [MDS]). In addition, a few real opposition parties (e.g. Ettajdid, Forum Démocratique pour le Travail et les Libertés [FDTL], Parti Démocrate Progressiste [PDP]) existed, but were facing repression. None of the existing parties at the time could have won any elections.

⁶ The court of justice dissolved the single political party RCD in March 2011.

⁷ M'Rad, H. (2014). *Tunisie: De la Révolution à la Constitution*. Tunis: Nirvana, p. 44.

In a first phase after the revolution, there was a tendency of great fragmentation into numerous small parties and alliances. In January 2011 all political parties forbidden until then were legalised. In a second phase, some smaller parties disappeared or joined other parties, and some political forces became more evident and visible. In 2015, the party landscape includes parties of a great ideological spectrum, from far left to far right as well as religious parties. These major currently existing political forces are described below.⁸

Major political factions

Neo-conservative parties

The new central political party in this faction is Nidaa Tounes, founded in 2012 by Béji Caid Essebsi, is a neo-conservative party and defines itself as a political movement in the tradition of Habib Bourguiba, close to the Doustour movement. Party Leader Essebsi was already active in politics under presidents Bourguiba and Ben Ali (during the first years of the regime). It brings together a great mixture of people, whose main common ground is the interest to weaken the Islamist movement, to return to law and order; it addresses the concerns of the liberal middle class. The party can mobilise the local networks of former RCD members and followers. Under its umbrella, former regime representatives and followers gather together with economic liberals, some trade unionists (e.g. Tayyeb Baccouche) and intellectuals (e.g. lawyer and women's activist Bochra Ben Hamida). The success of Nidaa Tounes can be explained by the wish of the majority of the population for more stability and security after agitated phases in 2013, but also by the negative experiences that had been made with the Ennahda-led Troika government (2012-2013). In 2014, even some leftist and liberals called to vote *utile* for Nidaa Tounes – all united against Ennahda. Finally, this strategy worked for the party, which became the major political force and won the legislative and presidential elections in 2014. The Initiative nationale destourienne (Al Moubarada) (National Destourian Initiative) defines itself as a centrist political party. It was founded in 2011, but came out of the former RCD party. The party leader is Kamel Morjane, former Minister of Defence and Foreign Affairs under Ben Ali. The party merged with different smaller parties in 2014, and won 3 seats in the new parliament.

Islamist parties

Right after the revolution, the Ennahda party (or Ennahda Movement), founded in 1981 but officially forbidden under the Ben Ali regime, was one of the first political parties to receive an official accreditation in March 2011. The objective of Ennahda is the Islamisation of Tunisian society and of the political system, the promotion of Islamic values, and the implementation of the Sharia in a mid- or long-term perspective. The party's

⁸ State of affairs in autumn 2014.

strategy is tactical and pragmatic, and ready to compromise. Ennahda is well organised, and has a large network of members and followers throughout the country. The network of mosques is used as an efficient tool of mobilisation of large parts of the population in all regions of the country. In addition, the party receives financial and political support from Ennahda members living abroad (e.g. Great Britain, France) and from like-minded Gulf countries (especially Qatar). The success of Ennahda is explained by its credibility as opposition movement to the former regime.⁹ Ennahda also presents itself as the party of the excluded and disinherited. Ennahda politicians speak the language of the common people, another factor explaining its popularity. However, the party was also accused of buying votes through the distribution of money and presents, at in the different elections. Internally, the party consists of different wings, including ideological hardliners and power-oriented pragmatics. The latter wing is considered to be “moderate”, pragmatic and “Islam-Democrat” oriented (e.g. Hamadi Jebali, although his discourse became harder after the Ennahda coalition with Nidaa Tounes), and represents about one third of the party members. The ideological hardliner wing is ready to use violence and brutal methods in order to achieve its political goals. A third wing is ideologically and politically close to the Salafist movement, more present within the party base, and represented by politicians like Habib Ellouz or Sadok Chourou. The Choura Council represents an internal party forum for debating and deciding the party’s positions and strategies. Party leader Rashid al Ghanoushi tries to keep control over the different currents. The electoral campaigns changed from religious and national identity issues in 2011 toward more socioeconomic issues in 2014. The party base was and still is upset about the coalition with Nidaa Tounes.

Next to Ennahda, the Salafist movement is also part of the Islamist political spectrum. At the moment of the revolution, the Salafist movement was rather small (about 200 members). In the aftermath, the movement became stronger and arranged an agreement with Ennahda, including Salafist support for Ennahda during the first elections in 2011. The ultra-conservative Salafist movement is ideologically close to and supported by Wahhabite foundations from Saudi Arabia. The objective is the creation of an Islamic State and the imposition of Islamic law (Sharia). The Salafist movement is divided into a reformist current (ready to participate in the parliamentary system) and a radical Jihadist current. Salafist parties, however, did not take part in the elections for the NCA in 2011. The first Salafist party in Tunisia, Hizb-ut-Tahrir (Party of Liberation), did not receive a party accreditation for the 2011 elections, but was legalised in July 2012. However, this party still rejects democratic rules and elections as a tool of alternation. It calls for the Caliphate, uses the same flag as the Islamic State (IS), and plans to install the centre of the Caliphate in North Africa. After the terrorist attack in Sousse 2015 by a radical

⁹ In February 2013, despite the political crisis after the murder of Chokri Belaid, according to an opinion poll by SIGMA, Ennahda stayed in first position with about 37.7% of potential votes in the next elections. According to the same poll, Nidaa Tounes would receive 34.6% (CPR: 3.5%, Ettakatol: 1.7%).

Islamist, the party came under stronger political pressure and might be forbidden by the authorities. Observers fear that the party members will go underground then and further radicalise. Three Salafist parties were created and officialised afterwards: The Front de la réforme, Jabhat Al Islah (Islah Front), under Mohammed Khoja, was officialised in 2012, and claims to respect democracy and the civic nature of the state.¹⁰ The party's objective is to encourage observance of Islamic values, but by democratic means. The Parti de l'authenticité (Hizb Al Asala) is led by Mouldi Moujahed; the Parti de la miséricorde (Hizb Arrahma) was legalised in July 2012 and is led by Said Al Jaziri.¹¹

Shifting from the Secular Left towards the Islamist faction?

The Congrès pour la République (Congress for the Republic, CPR) is a centre republican party, founded in 2001 by Moncef Marzouki, forbidden under the Ben Ali regime, and re-legalised in March 2011. The ideological orientation is Arab-national. But the party also brought together a large number of dissidents from Nahda living abroad (e.g. Lotfi Zeitoun, Slim Ben H'Miden, Imed Daimi – current secretary general of the CPR). Party leader Marzouki, a former human rights activist of the Ligue Tunisienne des Droits de l'Homme (LTDH), became the first president of the new Tunisia in December 2011; he was designated after a long dealing process between Ettakatol, Nahda and the CPR. The CPR participated in the first Troika government (2012-2013), but lost many members, ministers, MPs and followers, mainly because of its coalition and rapprochement with the Islamist party Ennahda, but also because of internal conflicts. The secretary general left the party in the ANC period, as well as 17 of 29 members who joined other parties or founded new parties (e.g. Wafa). The exercise of political responsibility in the government, in the NCA, and the performance of the Presidency actually weakened the party. Initially founded as an opposition party to the ancient regime, the major party objective was the overthrow of the Ben Ali regime; today the party's objectives are, among others, an anti-neoliberal economic policy and opposition toward the IMF's and World Bank plans for Tunisia. Marzouki experienced increasing unpopularity and progressively approached Ennahda. After his failure in the presidential elections 2014, he founded a new Mouvement du peuple des citoyens.

Secular Left

The Front Populaire (Popular Front), founded in 2012, is an extreme leftist party, and brings together 12 small parties, most of them former communist parties: Marxists, Arab nationalists, and left extremists, although most of them avoid strong militancy. The party leader is Hama Hammami, a popular communist, already active in the opposition under the Ben Ali regime. The assassinated opposition politician Chokri Belaid was an

¹⁰ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/05/11/us-tunisia-salafis-party-idUSBRE84A0QO20120511> (18 February 2015).

¹¹ Allani, A. (2012). L'islamisme et le salafisme en Tunisie. In: <http://www.righttononviolence.org/mecf/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/allani-presentation-fr.pdf> (18 February 2015).

important member, and especially efficient in bringing the different ideological groups together. Members and followers are mainly workers and intellectuals. The second opposition politician Mohamed Brahmi, founder of the People's Movement, assassinated in July 2013, was temporarily an important member of the Front Populaire (in 2013) and a member of the NCA. A further party member, Mohamed Belmufti, died during a solidarity demonstration for Mohamed Brahmi in July 2013 (killed by tear gas). The death of these respected politicians actually led to a rise in the popularity of the party, too, and a greater electoral success in 2014 than in 2011. The Mouvement du peuple (People's Movement) was legalised in 2011 and is a socialist, secularist, and Arab nationalist party. It was temporarily a member of the Front Populaire (see above), and split up and merged different times. The former leader, Mohamed Brahmi, was assassinated in 2013. The party stands for "freedom, socialism and unity", and is close to workers' groups.

Ettakatol is a social-democrat party, founded in 1994 by Mustafa Ben Jaafar, who became the president of the NCA in 2011.¹² His party was one of the rare and real opposition parties (Forum démocratique pour le travail et les libertés [FDTL]) existing under the Ben Ali regime, and represents an alternative to the traditional left. The party struggles for social equality and socially just economic growth. The party also lost many members, ministers, NCA members and followers because of its participation in the Troika coalition government with Ennahda (10 of 20 NCA members left the party). Ben Jaafar was in favour of a strategic dialogue with Ennahda and its inclusion in the new political party system, for avoiding its political marginalisation and potential radicalisation. For strategic reasons he also cooperated more closely with Nahda than with the CPR, and was ready to accept the first version of the constitutional draft, largely dominated by Nahda proposals. However, in the end, thanks to his integrative and inclusive approach, he played a central role in bringing together the different political factions within the NCA, and in succeeding with the final adoption of the new constitution.

Afek Tounes (Tunisian Aspiration), founded in 2011, stands for a liberal economic and societal programme. The party leader is Yassine Brahim. The party won 4 seats in the NCA, and 8 seats in the new Assembly of the Representatives of the People (ARP). It represents itself as a modern, secular, westernised minority party, centre-conservative-liberal, and as a young political force. Its programme includes detailed plans for a fiscal reform. Further objectives are the support of individual entrepreneurship, the creation of new jobs, and the defence of fundamental rights. Members and followers come from the liberal upper and middle class and the intellectual elites. After a relatively small electoral success in 2011, Afek Tounes founded in April 2012 a party alliance – the new "Republican Party" – together with the former Parti Démocrate Progressiste (PDP) of

¹² Ben Jaafar, M., & Geisser, V. (2014). *Mustapha Ben Jaafar. Un si long chemin vers la démocratie. Entretien avec Vincent Geisser*. Tunis: Nirvana.

Nahijb Chebbi, Al Joumhour (the Tunisian Republican Party) and other centre and social-liberal parties. The objective of this party alliance was to build a democratic force of the middle class and the political centre. But the party alliance broke apart again in August 2013. Afek Tounes continued on its own, and the Tunisian Republican Party continued under its old name Al Joumhour (Republican Party). The Party defines itself as the continuity of the former PDP, and stands for social liberalism, liberalism, social democracy and progress. The current party leader is Maya Jribi, but Nejib Chebbi is still part of the leadership.

Al Massar (the Democratic and Social Voice), founded in 2012, is the result of a fusion of the former Ettajdid Movement, the Tunisian Work Party (PTT) and independents from the former Modernist Democratic Pole (PDM). In the NCA, al Massar held 5 seats, then 10, because of the following affiliation of five other NCA representatives. Al Massar also became a member of the alliance Union for Tunisia. It represents a centre-left political party of and for the elites, including many university teachers, professors, intellectuals and artists.

Courant Démocratique, Attayar (Democratic Current) was founded in 2013; the current leader is Mohamed Abbou, a former deputy minister in charge of public administration reform and governance in the Hamadi Jebali government, who left the CPR. The political orientation of the party is pan-Arabism. However, it maintains a close relationship with the CPR and Nahda. Currently, Attayar is part of Moncef Marzouki's recent initiative called Hiraq Chaab al Mouatinoun (People of Citizen's Movement). The party's objective is the creation of an Arab federal state, uniting the Arab states, freed from dictatorship. The party won 3 seats in the new parliament.

New Populists

The Union Patriotique Libre (Free Patriotic Union, UPL), founded in 2011 by the populist entrepreneur Slim Riahi, won 2 seats in the NCA, and was rather successful in the legislative elections of 2014 (with 16 seats it is the third strongest party in the new parliament). The party is extremely populist, for example in terms of anti-terrorism combat, and has the objective to facilitate investment conditions for large economic projects. Party leader Riahi made his fortune in Libya where his parents lived in exile during the times of the Ben Ali regime. He maintained close relations with Gaddafi's son Saif al-Islam. Tayyar al-Mahabba (Current of Love), founded in 2013, came out of the former Al Aridha Chaabia Party, also called *Pétition populaire pour la Liberté, la Justice et le Développement* (Popular Petition), founded in 2011 by the entrepreneur Mohamed

Hechmi Hamdi. Hamdi lives in Great Britain, campaigns for the socioeconomic development of Tunisia, and is politically close to Ennahda. He is also the founder of the Arab television channel Al Mustaquilla, based in London; his discourse is rather populist. His party had a surprising electoral success during the elections for the National Constituent Assembly in 2011 (26 seats). Given the fact that the party leader is not very present in Tunisia, that there is no real political party structure, and that the party members have rather different agendas, the party lost a lot of voices in the elections of 2014 and won only 2 seats.

Current opposition parties

Among the opposition parties, which are not represented in the current parliament, there are: the Democratic Forum for Labour and Liberties (Ettakatol), Destourian Movement, Justice and Development Party, Maghrebi Republican Party, Pirate Party, Popular Unity Movement, Popular Unity Party, Reform Front Party, Social Democratic Path, Social Liberal Party, Tunisian Pirate Party, Unionist Democratic Union, Voice of the People of Tunisia, Wafa Movement, and Al-Watan Party.

The new multiparty system continues to be fluid and in motion, but represents the major important political and historical currents of Tunisia: liberal reformism, Islam, and the left, as well as secondary currents such as pan-Arab nationalism and Baathism, liberal nationalism in the tradition of Bourguiba, communism, Marxism, and ecology (M'Rad, 2014, pp. 151-153). The wide spectrum of new and old political parties illustrates the significant pluralisation and fragmentation of political currents, political personnel and leadership that took place after the fall of the Ben Ali regime.

Elections of the National Constituent Assembly (NCA) in October 2011

The elections for the National Constituent Assembly took place on 23 October 2011 in a free and fair manner. The number of political parties had decreased by then, and only 77 of 115 decided to take part in the elections.¹³ Organised by the Independent Election Committee (ISIE), under the responsibility of human rights activist Kamel Jendoubi, the results of the elections surprised in different terms: the first surprise was the overwhelming success of the Islamist party Ennahda with about 41% of the seats, and 89 seats out of 217 in the National Constituent Assembly (NCA), which corresponds to 37% of the total number of votes.¹⁴ The second surprise was the low turnout of voters with about 51.7% of the registered voters. Among the 7,569,824 of voting age only 4,123,602 were registered to vote, and only 3,702,627 actually voted on 23 October. Finally, the electoral success of

13 M'Rad, H. (2014). *Tunisie: De la Révolution à la Constitution*. Tunis: Nirvana, p. 45.

14 This means that about 1,500,000 people voted for Ennahda, which relativises their success in terms of total number of voters.

M'Rad, H. (2014). *Tunisie: De la Révolution à la Constitution*. Tunis: Nirvana, p. 51.

Moncef Marzouki's CPR and Hechmi Hamdi's Al Aridha Party were not expected in the run-up to the elections. The ANC was initially elected for one year and had the ambitious plan to finish the drafting of a new constitution within one year. Finally, the NCA continued to function, alongside its task of constitution drafting, as a de facto transitional parliament until the end of 2014, when the first new parliament and a new President of the Second Republic were elected. The NCA officially met for the first time on 22 November 2011. Moncef Marzouki was elected by the NCA as Interim President on 12 December 2011, and stayed in office until the end of 2014.

Members of the ANC (217 seats) in 2011

Political Party	Number of Seats
Ennahda	89
Congrès pour la République (CPR)	29
Al Aridha/Petition populaire	26
Ettakatol	20
Parti démocrate progressiste (PDP)	16
Independents	8
Pôle démocratique moderniste (PDM)	5
L'Initiative (former RCD, Hizb Al Moubarada)	5
Afek Tounes	4
Parti communiste des ouvriers de Tunisie (PCOT)	3
Al Badil Al Thawri	3
Mouvement du peuple/Courant populaire	2
Mouvement des démocrates socialistes	2
Union patriotique libre (UPL)	1
Parti unifié des patriotes démocrates	1
Parti républicain maghrébin	1
Parti de la nation culturel et unioniste	1
Parti de la lutte progressiste	1
Parti démocrate-social de la nation	1
Parti du Néo-Destour	1
Parti de l'équité et de l'égalité	1
Total number	217
Voter turnout	51.7%

At the end of the NCA's working period in 2014, the configuration and party distribution of the NCA looked very different. Some parties disappeared, some were newly created, and some NCA members left their parties and joined others.

The representation of women in the new institutions has increased since 2011.¹⁵ In the NCA, about 27% of the members were female representatives. Among the 49 NCA

15 Schäfer, I. (2014). Zur Bedeutung der neuen Verfassung Tunesiens für die Rechte der Frauen. Online Publication, Universität Gießen/MIB HU Berlin, in: www.mib.hu-berlin.de.

female members, 42 were Ennahda party members, and 7 women members represented the leftist, secular wing. The Vice-President of the NCA was a woman: the French-Tunisian Ennahda member Merhezia Labidi-Maiza (constituency Paris 1).

Succeeding Governments, Political Crises, Reform Process (December 2011-January 2014)

As a result of the NCA elections a first coalition government was formed in December 2011. The so-called Troika government included Ennahda, the Congrès pour la République (CPR) and Ettakatol. President Marzouki officially appointed Hamadi Jebali (Ennahda) as Prime Minister on 24 December 2011. Given the fact that Ennahda was the majority party at this point in time, most of the key ministries were given to Ennahda members (except the Ministry of Defence). Both coalition parties (CPR and Ettakatol) lost a lot of party members and followers because of their coalition with Ennahda; this coalition option had not been explicitly communicated during their electoral campaigns. In particular, many young members and followers of Ettakatol were disappointed with this decision. They had fought during the revolution for more freedom, rights, social equality and professional perspectives, and felt betrayed by the party leadership, being too indulgent in their eyes of Ennahda politicians and their political objectives. The leftist and smaller progressive parties, many of them united under the umbrella of the Pôle démocratique moderniste (Democratic Modernist Pole, PDM), did not have the electoral success they had expected. Many were shocked by the success of Ennahda.

The first ruling period of Ennahda was finally rather short (December 2011-January 2014).¹⁶ However, during this time period Ennahda tried to hinder reforms instead of pushing them forward, for instance in the justice and security sector. The party occupied major positions at important locations in the administration, media, education system and other sectors with its own people, according to political party-related criteria, and not according to competence. Within the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Social Affairs responsible officers were replaced, and in local administrations new Ennahda governors were nominated. In May 2012, for instance, 82 judges were replaced without any justification (Bauchard, 2013, p. 6). A Ministry of Transitional Justice and Human Rights was newly created and appointed to Samir Dilou (Ennahda); but the government was actually accused of continuity of repression. Only the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stayed more or less as it was, and was not touched by Ennahda's personnel policy. The Ennahda-led Troika government was also criticised for being too indulgent with radical actions of ultra-conservative Salafists, while confrontations between other demonstrators

¹⁶ Hamadi Jebali government: December 2011-March 2013; Ali Larayedh government: March 2013-January 2014.

and the police often ended with brutal repression from the police side. Further critical attacks targeted the government's lack of efficient decision-making in terms of important economic and financial reforms, and of good governance. The Ennahda government was criticised for "sustainable deformation by a religiously oriented pseudo-democratic societal model" (Braune, 2012) and, last but not least, accused of corruption and cronyism. All these factors resulted in a phase of stagnation and blockade of the political and economic decision-making process. On the other hand, parts of the Ennahda party showed increasing willingness to negotiate and to compromise with its governmental coalition partners, and later on in the process of constitution-making (see 1.5.).

In the course of 2012 and 2013, a certain polarisation between an Islamist majority and the liberal secular opposition grew within the NCA and within the wider Tunisian society. Among the liberal opposition, one can distinguish a regrouping around two poles: a centre-republican pole and a leftist-liberal pole. After the assassination of Chokri Belaid on 6 February 2013, belonging to the leftist-liberal pole, and a well-known public critic of Ennahda, Ennahda came under increasing political pressure. Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali proposed to establish a new "technocrat government".¹⁷ In addition, a Conseil des sages was built, including about 16 personalities, with an average age of 80+, supporting the Islamist movement, but also some representatives of important Tunisian families, such as Ahmed Mestiri and Yadh Ben Achour, as well as General Rachid Ammar as an observer (Bauchard, 2013, p. 10). Until this moment, Hamadi Jebali as head of government and Rashid Ghanouchii as head of the Ennahda party successfully shared their tasks. But Ghanoucci and the Conseil de la Choura did not support the idea of a "technocrat government", and wanted to keep the control of power and the key ministries exclusively for Ennahda. Hamadi Jebali resigned on 19 February 2013 after his proposal was not implemented. Finally, Ali Larayedh (former Minister of the Interior, Ennahda) formed a new government in February/March 2013, a mixture of external experts and party members, which was considered as a concession by Ennahda and Ghanoucci towards the opposition. But the secular opposition remained very sceptical and mistrustful towards Ennahda. The political crisis became even stronger in 2013 (after the assassination of Mohamed Brahmi in July 2013 and the protest of 60 NCA opposition members), so that at the beginning of 2014, and after the mediation efforts of the "National Dialogue", Ennahda voluntarily withdrew from power, and a "technocrat government" under Mehdi Jomaa (former Minister of Industry, impartial) was officially appointed on 29 January 2014. The Jomaa government remained in power for about one year (until 31 December 2014).

Besides these political crises and increasing economic difficulties, the different governments were constantly criticised for not dissolving the so-called "Leagues of the

¹⁷ "Technocrat" in this context meant: the ministers should have the necessary professional expertise for the sector concerned, they should not have had any responsibilities under the Ben Ali regime, not be a party member, and not run for the next legislative elections.

Revolution". These leagues were spontaneously created during the revolution, but more systematically after the revolution, with the support of Ennahda, which used them for controlling the population; in 2013, there were still about 80 leagues.¹⁸ The leagues use arbitrary violence in order to threaten and frighten the population, on the pretext of securing the objectives of the revolution. The dissolution of the leagues was demanded by the civil society several times, and promised by several politicians, including Hamadi Jebali, but not implemented.

At the same time, in this phase between 2011 and 2014, and despite the aforementioned difficulties and crises, a certain number of political reforms have been implemented and political freedoms generally increased. In addition, reforms in the fields of justice, education, the economy and fiscal law have been implemented since 2011. New legal and financial frameworks have been established for the new administrations and bodies, especially in the fields of audio-visual communication, supervision of justice, combating corruption, anti-torture measures, external control of public funds, and transitional justice.¹⁹ And despite the difficult political context in 2013, important measures in relation to rule of law and fundamental rights were adopted. These measures include:²⁰

- The establishment of an Instance nationale de prévention de la torture et d'autres peines ou traitements cruels, inhumains et dégradants (National Association of Torture Prevention) in October 2013 by the National Constituent Assembly. This measure is part of the obligations of the Protocole facultatif der Convention contre la torture et autres traitements cruels, inhumains et dégradants, which was signed by Tunisia in June 2011 (60th state that signed).
- A new law on the establishment of an Instance provisoire pour la supervision de la justice judiciaire Preliminary (Committee for the Supervision of Judiciary Justice, IPSJJ). This instance is supposed to contribute to strengthening the independence of the judiciary.
- The Instance nationale de lutte contre la corruption (National Association Against Corruption) could no longer work in 2013, and was replaced by the Conseil supérieur de lutte contre la corruption.
- In August 2013, the Tunisian government classified the radical-Islamist group Ansar Al-Sharia as a "terrorist organisation". This was an important step towards a clear demarcation by Ennahda from radical groups within the broader Islamist movement. Further small reforms were implemented in the fields of evaluation of fiscal policy, rationalisation of control of public funds, as well as in the modernisation of public accounting systems.

¹⁸ Bauchard, (2013). *Tunisie, An III de la révolution*. Note de l'Ifri. Paris: Ifri, p. 13.

¹⁹ European Commission/High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (2014): *Neighbourhood at the Crossroads: Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2013*, Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions, Brussels, 27.3.2014, JOIN (2014) 12 final, and Annex.

²⁰ Ibid.

These kinds of reform steps encouraged international donors to continue supporting the Tunisian transition. For instance, in 2014 the EU defined, in cooperation with the Tunisian negotiation delegation, the following priorities in the new ENP Action Plan for the upcoming years: guarantee of human rights and freedom of press and of expression; guarantee of respect of women's rights; implementation of torture prevention mechanisms; implementation of the mobility partnership; reform of the security sector; additional reforms in favour of an independent judiciary, economic reforms and reforms of public funding.²¹ Besides the EU, numerous other external actors and donor programmes have supported Tunisia even more intensively since 2011.

Despite the aforementioned political difficulties, further domestic and regional ups and downs, the constitutional activities of the NCA continued step by step. And despite very difficult and long debate processes within the NCA, on every single article, the constitutional process went on, and came to a constructive and inclusive result with the adoption of the new constitution in January 2014.

Adoption of the New Constitution in January 2014

One of the most important milestones of the Tunisian transition process certainly was the adoption of the new constitution on 27 January 2014, combining a civic state with Islam as state religion.²² 200 of 216 NCA members voted in favour of the constitution (12 against, 4 abstentions), which guarantees fundamental rights and freedoms, human rights, freedom of faith, gender equality, and introduces new rights, such as the right to a proper environment. The Sharia is not mentioned in the constitutional text, and does not represent a source of law. The constitution was officially and solemnly celebrated in the NCA on 7 February 2014.

The constitution is the result of a long process of controversial debate about the character of the new political system and the societal order. Different views between the moderate-Islamist Ennahda parliamentary group and the different liberal-secular oriented factions rendered the decision-making process arduous. Contentious issues included: the civil character of the state, the importance attributed to the Islamic religion in the constitution, the conditions of a vote of no confidence, and the guarantee of the political impartiality of educational institutions.²³ In the beginning of the constitutional process, Ennahda asked for the Sharia to be mentioned in the constitutional text, and defined women and men as "complementary" and not as "equal". After the deterrent developments in Egypt where the Muslim Brothers

²¹ Ibid.

²² The Constitution of the Tunisian Republic. This unofficial translation was prepared by UNDP, and reviewed by IDEA, in: www.idea.int/www.constitutionnet.org (19 February 2015).

²³ Schäfer, I. (2014, March/April). Meilenstein der Mäßigung. Tunesiens Verfassung ist verabschiedet, sie muss sich aber noch bewähren. *Internationale Politik*, pp. 31-37.

despite and after their electoral success and the transitory Mursi Presidency were declared a “terrorist organisation” in 2013, Ennahda changed its political strategy and became more open to political compromise. Finally, the Sharia is not mentioned as a source of law, and the constitution became a sort of compromise between a secular and religious oriented society model. Actually, the article on freedom of faith (Art. 6) is progressive in comparison to many other constitutions, while Art. 21 guarantees gender equality before the law. However, Art. 7 defines the family as the “nucleus of society and the state shall protect it”, and thereby opens up possibilities of interpretation in favour of male family patriarchs (e.g. in the domain of adoption and divorce law).²⁴ On the other hand, the progressive Art. 46 provides important “women’s rights” in terms of equal representation. The categorisation of a polarisation process between a secular and a religious faction within the political spectrum (and within the wider society), does not however take into account that the lines between these two poles are very fluid. For instance, different Ennahda NCA members have also pleaded for more freedom rights. In sum, the compromise on the constitution can be considered as a historical, progressive and symbolic achievement for all involved political factions, as well as for the Tunisian political transition process.

In the new political system of the 2nd Republic, the role of the President of the Republic is reduced, due to the negative experiences with the former presidential system, instrumentalised by Ben Ali. While Ben Ali saw himself above the constitution, he also used it as a tool for extending state power and directing the institutions of state in his favour (Pickard, 2014, p. 136). The new constitution strengthens the role of the Prime Minister and of the Parliament: the Assembly of the Representatives of the People (ARP). The objective is to share the executive power between the President and the Prime Minister in order to avoid a potential autocratic consolidation of power. The number of presidential terms is limited to two (five years each). A new Constitutional Court – responsible for controlling the constitutional right of future legislative reforms and protecting the separation of powers – will be established. This new court, replacing the former Constitutional Council, is meant to be an equal player to the executive and legislature (Pickard, 2014, p. 137).

However, even if the political system has a stronger Parliament and Prime Minister as before, the power balance of the dual executive (President, Prime Minister) will depend on the political personalities holding these offices. As one can already observe with the presidential mandate of Beji Caid Essebsi (Nidaa Tounes) that the presidential power actually overshadows the role and competences of Prime Minister Habib Essid (Nidaa Tounes).

In January 2014, the NCA also appointed the nine members of the Instance supérieure indépendante pour les élections (Independent Election Committee, ISIE), after a long

24 Schäfer, I. (2014). Zur Bedeutung der neuen Verfassung Tunesiens für die Rechte der Frauen. Online Publication, Universität Gießen/MIB HU Berlin, in: www.mib.hu-berlin.de.

debate on procedures and potential members. ISIE was charged with preparing the legislative and presidential elections before the end of 2014, in a very brief time period.

Legislative Elections in October 2014

The new parliament, elected on 26 October 2014, called the “Assembly of the Representatives of the People” (ARP) is a unicameral assembly with 217 seats. On 2 December 2014, the new parliament met for the first time. The guidance of the inaugural session was the task of the oldest MPs (Ali Ben Salem, Nidaa Tounes) and the two youngest MPs (Amel Souid, Ennahda) and Chekib Bani (Nidaa Tounes). The former NCA President Mustafa Ben Jaafar (Ettakatol) handed over responsibility to the new President of the Parliament, Mohamed Ennaceur (Nidaa Tounes), after he was elected by the Assembly; two Vice Presidents were appointed: Abdelfattah Mourou (Ennahda) and Faouzia Ben Fodha (UPL).²⁵ Besides the election of the President of the Parliament, during this inaugural session, a transition committee was elected for the management of the parliament and the public budget, which was in charge until the end of the second round of the presidential elections. The task of this transition committee was mainly to prepare two urgent laws: the new financial law for 2015 and a new anti-terrorism law.

The legislative elections took place between 24 and 26 October 2014, in about 11,000 voting offices. The fear of terrorist attacks was high; therefore the presence of police and army was considerably increased during the election period. The electoral participation was about 69%. The majority of the younger generation did not vote. Voting participation was higher in the coastal regions and in the north, and less in the poorer regions in the centre and the south. International election observers (including an EU electoral observer commission) called the elections “free and fair”.

In the new parliament, the distribution of the political parties looks very different in comparison to the NCA elected in 2011:

Members of the ARP in 2014 (217 seats):

Political Party	Number of Seats
Nidaa Tounes	86
Ennahda	69
Free Patriotic Union/Union patriotique libre (UPL)	16

²⁵ Nidaa Tounes offered the position of the President of the Parliament to the Front Populaire, but the party refused and preferred to stay in opposition. There was only one candidate for the Assembly Presidency, Mohamed Ennaceur (Nidaa Tounes). Nominations for the position of the Vice-President 1 were: Abdelfattah Mourou (Ennahda), Noomen Fehri (AfeK Tounes), Mbarka Brahmi (Front populaire); Vice-President 2: Noomen Fehri (Afe Tounes), Mbarka Brahmi (Front Populaire), Fr. Ben Fedha (UPL).

Popular Front/Front Populaire	15
Afek Tounes	8
Congress for the Republic/Congrès pour la République (CPR)	4
Democratic Current	3
People's Movement	3
National Destourian Initiative	3
Current of Love	2
Republican Party (Al Joumhourî)	1
Democratic Alliance	1
Farmers' Voice Party ²⁶	1
Movement of Socialist Democrats (MDS)	1
National Front for Salvation	1
Independent lists:	
List of the Call of Tunisians Abroad	1
List of the Glory of the Djerid	1
List of Rehabilitation	1
Total number	217
Voter turnout	69%

The clear winner of the election was Nidaa Tounes. Ennahda lost 20 seats but remains the second strongest political force. Different parties lost a significant number of seats, such as Ettakatol, CPR and the Republican Party compared to the NCA. Ettakatol lost many votes in because of its coalition with Ennahda in the Troika government. Many Ettakatol voters and followers rejected the cooperation with the Islamist faction, and felt disappointed with this decision. In addition, as the smallest coalition partner of the Troika government, Ettakatol worked itself into the ground between Ennahda and the CPR. But the party also did not succeed in mobilising enough critical mass of young members and voters due to the internal party organisation that was not adapted fast enough to the new political situation after the Tunisian revolution, and the lack of focusing political communication on youth and its concerns. Finally, the integrative role played by Ettakatol in the constitutional process was not honoured by the voters.

The CPR fared so poorly because of the increased unpopularity of Moncef Marzouki, who failed to bring about important future-oriented economic and political reforms and visions for Tunisia, and who was neither able to appease the political polarisation within the political and social landscape, nor to appease the security situation. Many former voters were disappointed by his performance as the first president of the new Tunisia.

Building the government required an absolute majority of 109 seats. Therefore, Nidaa Tounes had the right to start coalition negotiations. Before the elections, a coalition between Nidaa Tounes and Ennahda seemed probable (for pragmatic reasons), although

26 For the first time, there is a representative of Tunisian farmers (Faycal Tebbini) among MPs.

the main common denominator between the different internal wings and groups of Nidaa Tounes was the objective to hinder a second overwhelming electoral victory for Ennahda. But then, after the elections, the Nidaa Tounes leadership decided to marginalise Ennahda, and looked for other coalition partners. Finally, Ennahda was integrated into the first new government of the 2nd Republic, but received only one ministry (Employment). One of the reasons was the fear that non-integration of Ennahda might provoke potentially violent protests and anti-governmental mobilisation from the population and Ennahda voters and followers. Further coalition partners are UPL and Afek Tounes. In the ARP, the role of the smaller opposition parties remains difficult and challenging at the same time, as they are facing two major blocks (Nidaa Tounes, Ennahda).

Presidential Elections in November/December 2014 –The End of the Transition Process– The Beginning of the 2nd Republic

According to the new constitution (Art. 75), the President is elected for a five-year term by means of universal, free, direct, secret, fair, and transparent elections, by an absolute majority of votes cast. In the event that no candidate achieves such a majority in the first round, a second round is organised. Only the two candidates having won the highest number of votes during the first round can stand for election in the second round.²⁷ In order to be able to run for the presidential elections, a minimum of 10,000 supporters' signatures across the country was necessary, or of 10 NCA members. The electoral campaign had started after the legislative elections, and was criticised as a new kind of mud-throwing contest between the candidates, of a "quality" unknown in Tunisia so far. Ennahda and Nidaa Tounes expressed publicly the possibility of a common coalition. Ennahda decided to not present its own candidate for the presidential elections, in order to counter the accusation of a potential total power accumulation. Until the very last moment, the Ennahda leadership did not clearly take position for Marzouki, and did not explicitly call its members and followers to vote for Marzouki, although many Ennahda members publicly supported Marzouki's candidature.

The first round of the presidential elections took place on 23 November 2014. Finally, 23 candidates were officially allowed to run for office, among them Beji Caid Essebsi (Nidaa Tounes), Moncef Marzouki (CPR), Mustapha Ben Jaafar (Ettakatol), but also Néjib Chebbi (Al Joumhouri), Hama Hamami (Popular Front), Slim Riahi (UPL) or Hechmi Hamdi (Courant Al Mahabba). The judge Kalthoum Kanou was the only female candidate. In the first round no candidate achieved the absolute majority. The two candidates with

²⁷ The Constitution of the Tunisian Republic. This unofficial translation was prepared by UNDP, and reviewed by IDEA, in: www.idea.int/www.constitutionnet.org (19 February 2015), p. 22.

the majority of votes were Beji Caid Essebsi (42-47.8%) and Moncef Marzouki (26.9-32.6%). Voter turnout was 64.6% of 5.3 million registered voters. A few days before the second round, radical Islamists threatened terror attacks. But this could not be proven. Some observers questioned the origin of these threats, and suspected the involvement of the Ministry of the Interior in order to log roll the Nidaa Tounes candidate. Irrespective of this rumour, the presence of security forces was largely intensified during the election period all over the country. The second round took place on 21 December 2014. The duel between the two candidates left in the second round opposed Moncef Marzouki (CPR) and Beji Caid Essebsi (Nidaa Tounes). Finally, Beji Caid Essebsi was elected the first President of the 2nd Republic, with 55.68% of the votes, and officially took office on 31 December 2014. This victory of Beji Caid Essebsi, who presents himself as an inheritor of Bourguiba, can be understood as a sort of “soft restoration”, as his party Nidaa Tounes includes former RCD members and “Destourians” (supporters of Bourguiba’s approach to state prestige and secular modernity).²⁸

The implementation of the first free and fair legislative and presidential elections, on the basis of the new constitution and the new electoral law, marked for the Tunisian political class the formal end of the transition phase and the beginning of the Second Republic of Tunisia. Now, the new institutions have to prove their effectiveness and the new constitution needs to be revitalised. On 5 January 2015 the new President Beji Caid Essebsi appointed Habib Essid as the new Prime Minister. The first proposal for the new government presented by Habib Essid was confronted with many critics from different political sides. Only the second proposal was accepted in February 2015, and the new government could start to work.

In addition to the democratic transition milestones described above, the role of civil society has been a very important factor for the successful implementation of these milestones.

The Role of Civil Society in the Transition Process

Throughout the whole transition phase, Tunisian civil society was and still is very active, and plays its role as a counter-power in the state. The room for action for civil society activists has widely increased since the revolution. In particular, Tunisian youths have been the “avant-garde of the revolution” (M’rad, 2014, p. 186). Civil society actors used the possibilities to make political pressure (e.g. Casbah1, Casbah2 in 2011) as well as concrete proposals within the political and constitutional process on different occasions

28 Marks, M. (2015, February 3). Tunisia opts for an inclusive new government. *The Washington Post*.

(e.g. within the framework of the “National Dialogue”). Actually, the political crisis of 2013, after the assassination of the two opposition politicians Mohamed Brahmi and Chokri Belaid, has more or less been solved thanks to the commitment of civil society. Numerous human rights, women and youth activists, lawyers and trade unionists, organised peaceful demonstrations, created alternative platforms for political dialogue, and prevented a violent escalation of the political crisis.

The role of the trade union Union Générale des Travailleurs Tunisiens (UGTT) during the revolution was ambivalent: some trade unionists and local structures supported the revolution; however, the former UGTT leadership was partly rather close to the Ben Ali regime. After the revolution, the leadership team changed and the trade union played a constructive role in the transition process, especially within the framework of the National Dialogue. Conflicts with the Hamadi Jebali government had come up, when UGTT members had been attacked by Revolution Leagues in December 2012 (probably instigated by Ennahda). The UGTT asked for the dissolution of the Revolution Leagues and supported the idea of a technocrat government in early 2013. After the legislative and presidential elections of 2014, the UGTT called again for a participative economic dialogue and new salary negotiations for the public sector. Today, the UGTT represents a real opposition movement within the new political landscape, and has the capacity to mobilise many people.

The National Dialogue was mainly launched in spring 2013 in order to mediate between the Islamist faction and movement on the one hand, and the opposition faction and extra-parliamentarian opposition on the other. The so-called “Quartet” included the UGTT as principal mediator, as well as the employer’s federation UTICA, the human rights organisation Ligue Tunisienne des Droits de l’Homme (LTDH), and the bar association (Ordre des avocats). In addition, representatives of the major political parties participated. A National Dialogue Roadmap (end of NCA, adoption of the constitution, elections) was established. After having played an important role in overcoming the political crisis of 2013, members of the national dialogue asked for an institutionalisation of this politico-societal platform.

Besides the UGTT, numerous human rights, lawyers, women and other civil society organisations were and still are very committed in pushing forward the transition process in their respective fields. Under the ancient regime, the possibilities for civil society activities were limited, and often restricted by censorship or repression. After the revolution, the room for manoeuvre for civil society organisations increased tremendously, and the number of civil society organisations exploded. The law for civil society

organisations was facilitated and an unknown dynamic of civic commitment and new citizenship crossed the country. External actors and international donor institutions supported this dynamic and increased their financial support for civil society activities in Tunisia, also having an impact on the civil society landscape.

Tunisia has numerous factors that facilitate a democratic transition process, such as high education rates, liberal elites, a consensus-oriented tradition, an important broad and educated middle class, an active civil society and a moderate practice of Islam. The constellation of these factors renders the Tunisian democratic consolidation case specific and successfully contributed to achieving the constitution consensus. However, despite these favourable factors, the on-going transition process also has to face some challenges and difficulties.

Challenges and Difficulties

In terms of internal challenges, the Tunisian transition and democratic consolidation process has to cope with different problems such as the decomposition, fragmentation and tension between different political parties and camps, the phenomenon of political violence, the economic-financial and socioeconomic crisis, or the debate on a future societal consensus or inclusive society model allowing for the inclusion of all societal groups and factions.

Political and Institutional Transition, Good Governance, Transitional Justice

After the preparation and successful implementation of the legislative and presidential elections by the Instance supérieure indépendante pour les élections (ISIE), under the direction of Chafik Sarsar, effective political practice and good governance are the next challenges.

Different reforms in relation to the rule of law have already been tackled or implemented. This process continues and will include further constitutional amendments, legislation and decrees, in order to protect the constitutional state, especially the independence, professionalism and efficiency of the judiciary. In this domain, the rehabilitation of courts, fair access to justice and respect of fair trial standards or mechanisms in the transitional justice are on the agenda.²⁹ In December 2014, the Association des Magistrats Tunisiens (AMT), organisation of the judges, asked the new government and new parliament to respect the new constitution and the constitutional organisations, to establish a republican, democratic-participatory system, securing the sovereignty of the law and the independence of jurisprudence. The AMT also asked for a fundamental revision of the Electoral Law and for more respect of deadlines by the parliament.³⁰

According to the Corruption Perceptions Index of Transparency International Tunisia has a score of 40/100, and lost 2 positions in 2014 in the ranking in comparison to 2013: Tunisia is now placed in position 79 of 175 countries.³¹ Transparency International calls upon the new government to take measures towards the further implementation of the United Nations Convention against Corruption, ratified by Tunisia in 2008. Amongst the obligations of this Convention are: the development of a national strategy to fight corruption in partnership with relevant parties, including civil society organisations, and enabling the National Anti-Corruption Commission to play its role effectively by providing financial support and qualified human resources.³²

29 In December 2014, a UN special rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers visited Tunisia and will present her report on the independence of lawyers and judges to the Human Rights Committee in 2015. [http://www.unog.ch/80256EDD006B9C2E/\(httpNewsByYear_en\)/4B3E290059643971C1257DAA003825ED?OpenDocument](http://www.unog.ch/80256EDD006B9C2E/(httpNewsByYear_en)/4B3E290059643971C1257DAA003825ED?OpenDocument) (20 February 2015).

30 *Al Maghreb*, 9 December 2014.

31 The Corruption Perceptions Index ranks countries based on how corrupt a country's public sector is perceived to be. It is a composite index, drawing on corruption-related data from expert and business surveys carried out by a variety of independent and reputable institutions. Score 0 means highly corrupt; score 100 means very clean. <http://www.transparency.org/country#TUN> (5 December 2014).

32 http://www.transparency.org/news/pressrelease/transparency_international_and_i_watch_ask_tunisian_candidates_to_make_publ

A further challenge concerns the effective implementation of the guarantee of the respect for human rights as well as for freedom of press and expression. Therefore, Decree 115 on the media law, and Decree 116 on the Haute autorité indépendante de la communication audiovisuelle (HAICA) need to be effectively implemented, along with a reform of the penal code, constraining these freedoms. Many reforms and the creation of the aforementioned new control associations in terms of human rights, transparency and rule of law have been adopted. Now, these reforms and mechanisms will have to prove their effectiveness, such as the effective implementation of mechanisms of torture prevention. Actually, the situation of human rights has only partially improved since 2011. According to Amnesty International and other human rights organisations, human rights violations have continued since 2011. Torture has been used in prisons and in police stations, and security forces have continued to use excessive force against demonstrators.

In the field of women's rights, Tunisia was and is very advanced in terms of freedoms and gender equality compared to numerous European and MENA region countries. The Code du Statut personnel, guaranteeing important rights to women, has not been changed, although Ennahda tried to do so. The respect for women's rights has been reaffirmed by the lifting of key reservations on the UN Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), ratified by Tunisia in 1985, and referred to as the international women's bill of rights. Tunisia officially notified the UN about lifting the reservations in April 2014, and is the first country in the region to remove all specific reservations to the treaty.³³ However, women activists ask for further steps and for more systematic and efficient implementation of these principles and rights, for instance with regard to the inheritance law, which disadvantages women.³⁴

Other challenges consist of the local resilience to public policy reforms, pseudo-democratic acting by certain political representatives, sometimes an intentional delay of reforms, new corruption mechanisms and networks, a "revolution-exhausted" or reform-uninterested society, polarisation or fragmentation between different political poles. A climate of hate and threats emerged during the rule of Ennahda, especially in the social media, but also in public debates. However, this development has calmed down in the course of 2014.

Political Culture and Climate

While freedom of the press and freedom of expression have grown on the one hand, in the sense that less state censorship exists, and new media control associations and mechanisms have been developed, on the other, in daily life artists and intellectuals have

³³ <http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/04/30/tunisia-landmark-action-women-s-rights> (26 June 2015).

³⁴ Ibid.

increasingly become the target of physical attacks and/or psychological threats by Islamists. Different artists have been increasingly attacked, especially under the rule of Ennahda, but even afterwards. For instance, in June 2012, a contemporary art exhibition was attacked and destroyed by violent Salafists (Palais Adaliya, La Marsa). The different governments did not condemn these kinds of attacks, and did not push for criminal prosecution. In November 2014, a young rapper was kidnapped by radical Islamists, who forced him to cut his hair. Also in November 2014, UGTT leader Abassi was physically attacked by unknown persons, but not injured. At the same time, parts of the judiciary have not yet adapted to the new rights and freedoms, and sometimes react with disproportionate sentences, such as long-term imprisonments of bloggers for defamation of the army or state officials. But freedom of expression and press freedom might also be threatened anew because of the intensified “combat against terrorism”, as the journalism union fears.³⁵

Although the disposition for political consensus is highly developed in Tunisia, in 2013, a rather strong polarisation emerged between an Islamist majority and a liberal opposition, in the NCA as in wider society. Two large factions continue to dominate the political debate: the defenders of a conservative “backlash” around Nida Tounes, and the Islamist faction around Ennahda. In between these two camps or around them, on their margins, the smaller leftist, liberal or progressive political groups or parties are more or less grounded or marginalised. But does it make sense to name these camps in terms of “Islamist-conservative” and “liberal-progressive”, and to oppose a secular against a religious societal model? Do these notions really capture the social reality? In Tunisia, the Islam religion remains an important reference for the majority of the population. A certain social and religious conservatism is reality. But this majority believes in a moderate Islam. Political parties who use the religious reference can have major support from this large part of the society, as long as the political discourse remains moderate. At the same time, many mosques were and continue to be misused for political objectives, especially in times of electoral campaigns. According to the trade union of Imams, about 24 mosques are under the control of extremists and no longer under the control of the ministry. Another 85 mosques were privately built, are private property and are not under the control of the ministry.³⁶

Protests, strikes and physical attacks started in 2011 and actually continue since then, although on different scales. Strikes concern many different economic and professional sectors: e.g. workers in the textile industry and in the agricultural sector, employees of the transport society TRANSTU, or the personnel of hospitals. Even the employees of the Foreign Ministry once threatened a general strike. In Gafsa, a phosphate washing

³⁵ *Al Maghreb*, 24 February 2015.

³⁶ The number of mosques out of control varies according to the sources. Prime Minister Habib Essid announced closure of 80 mosques that are not under state control in reaction to the Sousse/El Kantaoui terrorist attack. *Le Monde*, 28 June 2015, p. 4.

plant was closed for two years following protests. Many young people continue to protest because the new jobs and opportunities promised after 2011 were never created in these poorer regions in the centre of the country; but due to the continued protests the Tunisian phosphate production, once a market leader, decreased to a third of pre-revolution volumes, and business has shifted to regional competitors – a vicious circle.³⁷ At different points of time during the last four years, the situation and climate within the society became very tense.

In terms of an open political debate, the two presidential candidates who were left for the second round, Beji Caid Essebsi (“the saviour”) and Moncef Marzouki (“the victim”) expressed a reciprocal hate tirade and controversial opinions just before the second round. The poisoning of the public debate went so far that the journalists’ trade union even threatened to boycott the electoral campaign. On the other hand, civil society organisations such as the NGO Mourakiboun (Observateurs) intend to calm the spirits and help with electoral preparations and public debates. In 2014 and 2015, there have been several attacks of security forces against journalists. The journalist federation has criticised these attacks as a potential return to former repressive practices.

Facing increasing radical-Islamist terrorist threats (and some real attacks) in Tunisia, there is a great danger that the political class will fall back into the former security discourse and the security sector will re-intensify its observation and repression methods, practised by the Ben Ali regime and state security.

All these developments led to a political climate, where the majority of the population is tired of the revolution and protests. Daily life has become worse for many people, compared to their previous situation. Many people are somehow reluctant about reforms, disinterested or sobered. In reaction to the Bardo and Sousse terrorist attacks, large parts of the population are starting to support the new security discourse and security plans of the Nidaa Tounes government.

The Socioeconomic Challenge

Alongside the political, security and judicial reforms, the economic sector is in the middle of a fundamental transformation process. After decades of clientelism and kleptocracy under the Ben Ali regime, it is challenging to reinstall transparent conditions. Besides, a modernisation of the management of public funds is on the agenda. During the phase of

³⁷ 30,000 people applied for 2,700 jobs in the last round of job openings in 2014. <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/14>.

the Troika government, critical voices against the Ennahda-led government became louder, questioning the economic and financial expertise of Ennahda policy makers in terms of re-establishing confidence of foreign investors and relaunching the Tunisian economy. Partially true, the argument was also used to weaken the Ennahda party, and to put in place a technocrat-led government afterwards.

After the first shock of the revolution in 2011, the economy broke down (-2%), then, economic growth recovered again with 3% in 2012, but went down again afterwards. Despite the political turbulences in the aftermath of the Tunisian revolution, the majority of international and European enterprises present in Tunisia remained. Out of 1,200 French enterprises only about 30 left the country (Bauchard, 2013, p. 5). Important economic and social reforms are on the agenda, some of them meeting resistance amongst the concerned professional sectors or the broader consumer society. In particular, the labour market is concerned, especially in terms of youth unemployment. Since 2011 unemployment rates have remained very high: the official unemployment rate is 15.2% (2014); youth unemployment is between 30% and 40% depending on the region; and graduate unemployment is 31.4% (2014).³⁸ After a phase of relative calm, protests in the public sector and other economic sectors returned in 2014.

Tunisia is an upper middle income country, and has a population of about 10.89 million inhabitants (2013), a GDP of 46.99 billion USD (2013). Infant mortality is decreasing: 13 (per 1000 live births, 2013), life expectancy of 74 years (2013), and adult literacy rates of 89% (male) and 74 % (female) (2015), and the GNI per capita is 4200 USD (2013).³⁹

According to recent IMF and World Bank Reports Tunisia is developing despite a difficult regional context. However, 2015 will be a difficult year and expectations should not be too high; the economic situation remains difficult. Growth rates remain fragile (2.3% in 2015, 2.4% in 2014, 2.3% in 2013)⁴⁰, added to high unemployment and a highly informal economy, which has grown since 2011 (estimated at 50% of GDP); but the predictions for growth were 3% for 2015 and 4.1% for 2016.⁴¹ Public debt is estimated at 51.7% of GDP in 2014, and 53% of GDP in 2015. Foreign investments are decreasing (2014: 12.5% less than in 2013; 22.3% less than in 2010); the household deficit will increase (+1%). Foreign investors hesitate to invest in Tunisia because of the unstable regional and political context. The recent terrorist attacks of March and June 2015 will negatively impact on the tourism sector and foreign investment. In the Doing Business 2015 Ranking of the World Bank, Tunisia came 60th (2015) against 56th (2014).

38 BAfD, OCDE, PNUD 2015. African Economic Outlook: Tunisie 2015. Tunis: BAfD, p. 2.

39 <http://www.transparency.org/country#TUN> (5.12.2014); <http://data.worldbank.org/country/tunisia> (29.6.2015); <http://wdi.worldbank.org/table/2.13> (29.6.2015), https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/print_2103.html (29 June 2015).

40 BAfD, OCDE, PNUD 2015. African Economic Outlook: Tunisie 2015. Tunis: BAfD, p. 2.

41 *Le Monde*, 28 June 2015, p. 2.

The negative score of the commercial balance has increased (2013: - 12.8%; 2014: - 13.3% of GDP). In 2014, exports increased by only 2.5%, while imports increased by 6.4%. The public budget deficit decreased (6.8% in 2013) to 5% of the GDP in 2014.⁴² Salaries do not increase in the same manner as the price levels. Since 2010, the average salary increased by 17%; but the price index for households by 21.5%. Food and beverages increased by 27.2%. The health care system remains in difficulties. The trade unions threaten with strikes in hospitals against the decisions of the health ministry to cut the budget for primary healthcare by 17%. Regional imbalances persist between the rich capital and its surroundings and the coastal regions on the one hand, and the poorer regions in the centre and in the south on the other. The poor and needy population is estimated at 3 million. The social security system is in deficit (-345 million TND).⁴³ While the general school enrolment rate is high (99% of children aged 6-11), poverty remains at about 15% on average, and 32% in certain regions (Centre-West, South-West).⁴⁴

The tourism sector, vital for the Tunisian economy and representing 7.3% of Tunisian GDP, collapsed in 2011, and it took a while to recover. But the sector never reached pre 2011 levels again. The two terrorist attacks of 18 March 2015 (22 deaths) and 26 June 2015 (38 deaths) harmed the sector even more. 470,000 direct and indirect jobs (14% of the active population) depend on tourism.⁴⁵ In reaction to the Bardo Museum attack, the number of tourists decreased by 25.7% in April 2015 and the foreign currency revenues decreased by 26.3%, according to the Central Bank.⁴⁶ A broad tourism campaign made hotel reservations climb slightly again, from 39.4% to 44.9% in Mai 2015.⁴⁷ But the number of French tourists decreased so much (-37.7% compared to May 2014) that for the first time the number of British tourists was higher in 2015 than the number of French tourists, traditionally number one.⁴⁸ After the brutal attack in Sousse on 26 June 2015, the summer vacation season 2015 was heavily affected, and different tour operators cancelled their trips. The attack in Sousse has not only harmed the tourism image and sector of Tunisia, but also foreign investments in general. Tunisia has desperately tried to attract new foreign investments since 2011. All are aware that a re-launch of the economy is a pre-condition for the success of the political democratic transition process. That was exactly the target of the Islamic State – to destabilise the transition process.

The Financial Law for 2015 allocates 15% of the budget alone for the ministries of the Interior (2.6 billion TND, for 3,000 new security officers, among others) and of Defence (1.8 billion TND, for 8000 new soldiers, among others), as well as an increase of the budget for the Presidency, the Parliament and less for the Prime Minister. Both ministries (Interior and Defence) intend to buy expensive anti-terrorism equipment. For 2015, another increase in electricity and gas prices (7%) is planned.

42 Bauchard, D. (2013). *Tunisie, An III de la revolution*. Note de l'Ifri. Paris: Ifri, pp. 4, 5. BAfD, OCDE, PNUD 2015. African Economic Outlook: Tunisie 2015. Tunis: BAfD, p. 2.

43 Achourouk, 20 February 2015.

44 BAfD, OCDE, PNUD 2015. African Economic Outlook: Tunisie 2015. Tunis: BAfD, p. 2.

45 *Le Monde*, 28 June 2015, p. 2.

46 *Le Monde*, 28 June 2015, p. 2.

47 *Le Monde*, 28 June 2015, p. 2.

48 *Le Monde*, 28 June 2015, p. 2.

Further points on the economic and financial agenda are the reform of the fiscal system, a better distribution of wealth in society, an increase of the minimum wage, and an improvement in labour rights according to international standards (ILO). Last but not least, Tunisia remains committed to further regional integration of the Maghreb region.

Next to the named challenges to the Tunisian transition, different additional factors render the situation more difficult, such as the negative impacts of the Libyan civil war on Tunisia, and the negative impact of transnational radical Islamism (international and domestic terrorism) on Tunisia.

The Security Challenge

With regard to the security situation, different threats can be identified: the impact of the Libyan conflict, activities of radical extremists at the border with Algeria and Libya, activities of radicalised Syrian return fighters,⁴⁹ and radical Salafists on a domestic level (home-grown terrorism). The general security situation in the country is calm, but in some parts of the country, radical individuals and groups succeeded in spreading violence and insecurity, especially in the border zones with Libya and Algeria, where armed Jihadist groups are active, or in the mountains of Jbel Chambi. Several soldiers and police officers have been killed since 2013 in fights with these groups. After a phase of institutional silence, the Tunisian government installed special military zones at the borders. The number of these fighters remains unclear.

Major shocks in terms of new security threats and deliberate provocation were the attacks against European tourists in the Bardo Museum of Tunis on 18 March 2015 (22 death) and in El Kantaoui – Sousse on 26 June 2015 (38 deaths), claimed by the Islamic State. But the attack of the United States Embassy and the American School of Tunis (ACST) in September 2012 by radical Salafists (Ansar Al-Sharia), announced an increasing impact of international and home-grown violent Jihadism in Tunisia. At the time, the Ennahda-led government did not react instantly, and the police came very late, accused of being indulgent with the radical Islamists. Ansar Al-Sharia is the armed branch of the Salafist movement; it is a radical Jihadist movement, originally created as a charity association, and founded by Abou Ayad. Today, it has about 10,000 estimated followers, and its radicalised Jihadist fighters are active in Syria, Algeria, and the Sahel region. Most of their arms come from Libya. The radical Salafist movement is also held responsible for numerous attacks against artists, intellectuals, students and professors (e.g. in Manouba University). They are also accused of the murder of Chokri Belaid and

⁴⁹ It is estimated that, since 2013, Tunisia has hindered about 9,000 people from travelling to Syria; some of them were imprisoned, some are free, but under police control. Since 2014, Tunisia interdicts – in order to further hinder “Jihadism tourism” – travel to Turkey for people under 35 years of age. Since then, they have travelled via Algeria or Morocco to Turkey. It is estimated that IS pays 1,000 TND/day for its fighters.

Mohamed Brahmi, and were formally labelled a “terrorist organisation” in 2013 by the Ministry of the Interior.

Since 2014, physical attacks, arrests or armed conflicts between the Tunisian police, military, security forces and radical fighters have taken place almost every day. For instance, in 2014, smaller terrorist cells were arrested in Sousse/Kalaat Al-Koubra (Al Nusra group), accused of being involved in the planned attacks prior to the recent elections. In December 2014, a policeman of the Garde nationale was killed (and beheaded) in Le Kef, by about 15 terrorists. He was not armed, as he was not in service at the time. Also in December 2014, a trial took place against a group of presumed terrorists of Ansar Al-Sharia, accused of having killed a state trooper during an armed attack against the border guard in Jbel Bouchebka in January 2014. The families of the accused Jihadists seem to receive money from Abou Ayadh, who is planning to establish a Tunisian branch of IS. Journalists were not allowed to follow this process. In Kasserine, five people were arrested as presumed terrorists who had helped the groups hiding in Jbel Chaambi. A further eight soldiers were killed in Jbel Chaambi in summer 2013, by a group called Okba Ibn Nafaa.

The external influence of radical Salafism is increasing. In 2011, the number of radical Salafists was estimated at only 200. This number rapidly increased in the aftermath of the revolution and the general complexity of the upheaval. The open border situation with Libya facilitated the entry for radical Jihadists into Tunisia, and all Islamist political prisoners who had been in prison under the Ben Ali regime were released. It is estimated that about 2,000 Tunisian Jihadists are currently fighting for the IS in Syria, among them a Tunisian terrorist, Kamel Zarrouk (Ansar Al-Sharia). These fighters represent an additional risk when they return to Tunisia.

A reform of the security sector, especially with regard to the police and border controls, has been on the agenda since 2011, but has not really been tackled so far.

Negative Impact of the Libyan Crisis

An increasing export of terror from Libya toward the whole Maghreb region is taking place. IS plans to establish a structure for the African continent in the Maghreb, in Libya. The plan is to train fighters in Libya and to distribute instructions and commands from Libya to the other Maghreb countries. It is presumed that the Tunisian Ansar Al-Sharia works together with IS. The Tunisian government is explicitly against a military intervention

in Libya. It does not want to cooperate with the terrorist militias, but recognises the two currently existing rival governments in Libya: an Islamist government in Tripoli, and a government of Abdallah Al-Thani in Tobruk, recognised by the international community, and under the protection of General Khalifa Haftar, controlling the eastern part of the country), and proposes new methods for the anti-terrorism combat. Many Tunisian citizens still live and work in Libya, and an evacuation of these citizens is under discussion. Two Tunisian journalists have been kidnapped in Libya.

In 2014, many Libyans continue to live in Tunisia, having fled the civil war in their country. This presence also implies additional socioeconomic problems for Tunisia. Housing rents went up due to increased demands. Additional food, logistical, health and other services become necessary. Libyan children need to be integrated into the Tunisian school system, and workers integrated into the labour market. Many injured people from Libya come to hospitals in Tunisia. Armed fights between the Libyan army and militias at the Libyan-Tunisian border take place more often, and paralyse the border region around the border crossing of Ras Jedir.

Conclusion and Perspectives

In sum, the challenges for consolidating a democratic system in Tunisia are still numerous and multifaceted. The future developments will largely depend on the interplay and cooperation between the new political majorities and the opposition, on the implementation of the new constitution, but also on the development of the regional environment, the support by the international community, and last but not least on the resilience to financial and economic pressures and security threats.

In terms of political freedoms, there has been an important liberalisation after the fall of the Ben Ali regime. In particular, the media is less controlled, and the freedom of opinion and freedom of expression have increased. The political climate has changed and developed. The results of the legislative and presidential elections in 2014 showed that the newly emerging Tunisian political system has succeeded in practising a peaceful political alternance, in a pluralistic political party system. New alliances between political parties came up after the electoral success of Nidaa Tounes in October 2014. It remains to be seen if the influence of former regime representatives and followers in this party hinder further reforms and political liberalisation, or whether there might be a step backwards in terms of political transition and transformation. Tunisia is far away from an Egyptian scenario, including a military and authoritarian backlash, but the danger of a (neo)conservative roll-back exists. The accentuation of a transnational, regional and domestic Islamist-terrorist threat, in order to push forward security measures, sometimes recalls the discourses of the Ben Ali regime. The new democratic institutions are challenged to provide respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and to be able to guarantee the independence of justice.

Irrespective of these politically contentious issues, there are further steps ahead, especially in terms of economic governance, such as the step-by-step introduction of a social market economy, the development of a just and committed social policy addressing all social categories and regions, a modernisation of the economic structures (innovation and reorientation towards future-oriented economic sectors), an increase of the level of economic competition, the development of the private sector and its good governance, improvement of the general business climate and the fostering of public-private partnerships.

According to different international indices, the democratic consolidation process in Tunisia is advanced in terms of democracy, good governance and human rights, and especially in terms of ratification and signatures of international conventions. Tunisia has many trump cards for a consolidated democratisation process: committed elites, an important middle class, committed civil society, a social *acquis*, a viable education

system and important human capital, and last but not least an important disposition for political compromise and consensus finding. Tunisia is in the middle of reinventing its political system and society project. Inclusion of the different political factions and societal groups will be one of the keys, alongside a fair and transparent distribution of prosperity, social cohesion, employment, transitional justice, security, development of the poorer regions and professional future perspectives for the young generation.

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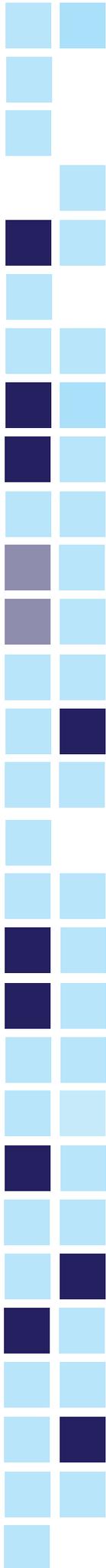
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IEMed.

The European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed), founded in 1989, is a consortium comprising the Government of Catalonia, 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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Comprising 100 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 three publication lines (EuroMeSCo Papers, EuroMeSCo Briefs and EuroMeSCo Reports), as well as a series of seminars and workshops 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.