

مركز دعم التحول الديمقراطي وحقوق الانسان
Democratic Transition and Human Rights Support Center



our

unfinished

dream

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our unfinished dream



Pale celebration

« Pale », « cold », « lost its shining through the years », these are the current expressions said in the memory of the “the dignity revolution’s” 10th anniversary (14th of January 2011). The latter passed a few weeks ago without much joy and happiness manifestations. Officially and popularly, if we exclude foreign media that still accord importance to this event and give attention to it as well as a few experts and specialists, they agree on one thing, all that was achieved in the sense of freedom of expression, media, democracy and peaceful transition over authority is now, more than ever, threatened as a natural result to the poor economic and social situations which were worsened by the COVID-19 crisis. Added to that, the recent political crisis between the country’s leaders, notably that between the president of the republic and the president of the parliament. This crisis paralyses the state’s institutions and warns of the possible and complete economic collapse as and Tunisia’s loss of its funders. This is catalysed by the absence of initiative, poor investment, obstruction of the production wheel due to insensible economic policies, dense frequency of protests, sit ins in many governorates added to the aleatory political scene.

Democracy is insufficient on its own:

It is undisputed that a lot was gained since the revolution, regular and free elections supervised by an independent authority, positive freedom indexes in comparison with other Arabic countries, and with regards to democracy rates that are incomparable in the whole region, as per the “economist”, a media that is open to the multitude of opinions after decades of shutdown and suffocating control, and that is now regulated by an independent authority that is maximizing its efforts to cordon

the chaos, the spiral-out, the effect of political and financial lobbies, a new constitution carrying the principles of a civil state, the principles of citizenship, liberty of religion and conscious, separation between powers, complete equality between citizens, and despite the ambiguity in its articles, laws mimicking those of ancient democracies: such as the Act that prohibits racism and the one that combats all kinds of violence against women....

The most noteworthy point is the resistance of the country before the instabilities and wars lived in the region after the “Arab spring” notably civil wars, radicalism and the return of dictatorship. That is still true even in consideration of the political assassinations, the difficult regional reality especially the civil war in Libya that was amongst the most important terrorism exporter as far as the training and export of radical individuals.

An alarming situation:



Away from the trap of “revolutions’ worshipping” that is perceived by some persons as the carrier of the keys to the “earthly paradise” and the “miracles creator”¹, there is a huge disappointment that lies in the wasting of a decade in political and partisan nonsense. During this time, the most important social demands were absent including employment, regional equilibrium and investment in vital sectors. As a result, the living situation was aggravated either because of inflation, increase of prices, the increasing monopolization, arbitrary importation in the context of the absent regulation and laziness of the state’s institutions. Due to the lack of regional development, administrative bureaucracy, weak governance, the doubling of unemployment rates especially among college graduated youth, the regional disequilibrium gap worsened. Because of the weakness of state institutions, the development of the parallel economy prospered so much it now has hold on

1- Yadh Ben Achour, leaders « the revolution and bringing back the memory”, January 13 2021.

10% of the economy yearly and reaches 50% of the GDP pursuant to experts.² This has a negative impact of fiscal returns (that are weak anyway), doubles other economic crimes like money-laundering and currency- smuggling...

as far as financial corruption is concerned, that was one of the motives of the revolution since the ex-reigning families during the reign of Ben Ali were known to control the articulations of the economic circle through the promulgation of a set of laws and legislations to protect its vital interests, make profits and eliminate competition in the private sector.³ financial corruption doubled after the revolution which increased desperation as per the possibility of change and reform and doubt surrounds therefore the efficiency of any political operation.⁴

The COVID-19 pandemic made the economic, social and financial predicaments worse as the Tunisian economy shrank by 8.8% during 2020, which means among the highest percentages worldwide. Debt increased from 72% of the national GDP to about 90% while unemployment reached 17.4% during the 4th trimester of 2020 while it was limited to 15.2 % in 2019. ⁵ the crisis impacted heavily the poverty levels and its division among regions while it does not surpass 15% nationally and officially, it reaches 30 % and 40% in the interior regions. ⁶



The level of poverty officially does not exceed 15% nationally and reaches the limits of 30 and 40% in the internal authorities.



The unemployment rate reached 17.4% during the fourth quarter of 2020, compared to 15.2% in 2019



Debt ratio increased from 72% of GDP to around 90%

The return of protests:

All these situations cannot lead to more tension and anger among youth that mostly lost the hope in the possibility of reforming the country and experiences repulsion vis à vis political and thinks it does not share its issues and does not care about its need for employment or living with dignity. This is why, during the recent years, social protests increased to reach 8000 and 9000 yearly movement

2- Mohamed Al Nouri "about political economy of Tunisia: the problem and solution ", leaders, August 26,2020.

3- The World Bank, All in the Family, State Capture in Tunisia, April 2014

4- Tunisia used to be ranked 59th in the corruption index in 2010 and is now ranked 74th as per 2019 and 69th as per 2020.

5- Maghreb voices, February 15th, 2020 « unemployment rates in Tunisia continue to increase»

6- The independent files, Arbia Hamadi Maamri, CORONA deepens the economic and social crisis in Tunisia, December 23rd, 2020.



Between 8,000 and 9,000 protests per year

, also the emergence of formats⁷ that target the obstruction of phosphate, oil and gas production in several Tunisian cities taking advantage of the weakness of the state and the vulnerability of the political scene as well as the hesitation of the governors and their reluctance towards executing the conventions signed by the former parties and activists...

Even the youth of the poor neighbourhoods in the Tunis the capital suburbs, could not let the revolution’s anniversary pass without making celebrations on its way. The youth believes that the general lockdown announced for 4 days between the 14th and 17th of January was not meant t slowdown the pandemic but rather to prohibit angry Tunisians from protesting against their poor situations. the youth protested at night, and challenged the curfew...

The Return of the police state



In the absence of solutions for development and employment and the political action stagnation, the Tunisian government lost a whole lot of its credibility to the use of the security arm, in a scary return to period where the Ben Ali police was the tool which he uses to fight back protests, gatherings and opposing parties’ criticism. Today, in addition to the authority’s willingness to “fight back” there are security syndicate unions that, aside from demanding the improvement of the financial status of security forces, it showed more than once its readiness to justify violations and illegal use of force through the use of threats, reluctance to obey and sit-ins as well as social media campaigns against activists and threatened with revengeful acts. ⁸

the security reaction did not come late, more than 1500 persons were detained

7- Formats are not subjected to conventional organizations such as the syndicate or parties but it is a new type of fast-alignment in which the youth gathers around a goal or several goals and asks the authorities to negotiate about life-related and clear demands such as AL Kamour format in Tataouine and the college-graduates formats

8- See article by Mahdia Elleuch « Tunisia from the police state to the state of police unions”, the legal agenda February 15th, 2021.



including hundreds of children pursuant to the Tunisian League for human rights' defence's report that was presented on the 4th of February 2021 in the location of the national syndicate for journalists, the report pointed out that arbitrary detainment and forceful entrance into houses that impacted heavily psychologically and materially, and the intensive use of tea gas that led to the death of the young Haykel al Hachidi, in addition to rape threats and assassinations to the detainees

the American foreign policy magazine warned about the return of the ghost of dictatorship in Tunisia in an article named "Ben Ali's Ghost Still haunts Tunisia" in which it pointed that what happened during the night protests led by youth in poor neighborhoods saying that after a decade of revolution, the scene witnessed in the streets of Tunisia looked like a recurrence of what the country lived during the revolution and ensured that the country is considered a "symbol of democracy in the Arab world that is slowly falling into the police state again"⁹

a stifling political crisis:

in addition to the economic and financial situations that were more aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic and its repercussions, as well as the restlessness of youth and regions in the possibility of change to a better situation after 10 lean years. The stifling political crisis occurs among its reasons we find the conflict between the two heads of the executive and the legislative about the prerogatives and their unreadiness to settle in order to manage the country without a shred of regard to the delicate limbo that Tunisia is placed into.

However, the deterioration of the political and financial states of affairs stem from the 2019 presidential and legislative elections as its results surprised most political analysts and represented a new turn based upon the rejection of current parties and the discussion about the revaluation the revolution's principles and its emblems.

This might be one of the secrets behind the success to president Kais Saïd, the one who doesn't belong, the surprising. He made the revolution's emblem "the people want" a title to all his party-conflicts both during the campaign and posterior to it also with the representative democracy that endow political parties with the primary role in managing the country affairs. He considers it bureaucratic, corrupt and sometimes conniving against the country and the



people's interests.

So, they have to be surpassed and replaced by an “assembling” democracy that emanates from the base to the top which means from the local to the regional to the national. Kais Saïd uses the absence of the constitutional court that is supposed to issue decisions in case of constitutional disputes, to his benefit to be the sole interpreter of the constitution and the main power broker as concerns its ambiguous articles and most importantly to enlarge his prerogatives...

À contrario, Ennahdha movement, the party that lost a lot since 2011 not simply in terms of its electoral inventory from one election to the other, but also in terms of other novel challenges imposed by the weak state of governance and poor management of public interests.

Internal conflicts fueled by the preparations to the period after Rached Al Ghanouchi, the historical president, shook Ennahdha as historical leaders of the movement deeply linked it in its existence, resigned and the sheikh's performance either within its party or as head of the parliament is subject to questioning and doubts.

Besides, Ennahdha's violent history, assassinations witnessed partisans of the movement, the absence of self-criticism about all faults of the past has driven many Tunisians to a state of anger against the movement even its most close empaths.

Subsequently, Rached Al Ghanouchi that perceives himself as the most capable politically after the death of his friend Beji Caiid Al Sebsi, sees the current president as a strong competition, as he is aligned to challenge and to trolls, as such, he could present a threat to the future of the movement and to that of Al Ghannouchi.

Correspondingly, both are trying to defend their private positions and expand their authority sphere but no one is cogitating about sharing power or caring about the stifling crisis that country is going through as Kais Saïd is trying to

preserve his popularity that he won through his campaign and achieving some of what he promised his electors, while Al Ghannouchi is sticking to his political game after he sensed that the initiative is being taken away from him and after his party's suffering from the consecutive losses it's been incurring from its rivals especially the president of the free constitutional party. This leads to thinking that the coming elections will be determinant to the movement and to its president that lost a lot of charisma, trust and political cunning before the numerous mistakes which led to the possible retrieve of confidence as per his status as a president of the parliament.

In the context of this personal and destructive reality and in the lived truth of the scandals, fights and violence incidents that are recurring between politicians in the parliaments, the voices of experts, analysts and persons that are fearful about the country's young democracy cannot heard, as the shouts of its politicians are too loud...