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**PATTERNS OF DEMOCRATIZATION IN POST-1990 TUNISIA:**  
**ORIGINS, ACTORS, AND OUTCOMES**

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Patterns of Democratization in post-1990 Tunisia: Origins, Actors, and Outcomes.

1990 Sonrası Tunus'ta Demokratikleşme Örüntüleri: Kökenler, Aktörler ve  
Sonnular.

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## **ABSTRACT**

The 25th of July 2021 exposed the fragility of Tunisia's democratic structures and marked the beginning of a new political era under a highly personalized system. This dramatic transformation sets the ground for this study to explore, analyze, and understand the current crisis's grassroots and assess the prospects of democratization in Tunisia. Tunisian democratization experiences tend to be analyzed from either a purely domestic or external dimension; the linkage between these two dimensions and their impact on the course of democracy has barely been discussed. Using qualitative analysis, this study aims to grasp the origins of the ongoing democracy crisis in Tunisia by investigating the impact of the different democratization phases from the 1990s to 2022. The study evaluates the main internal and external actors and factors in each democratization phase and highlights how the nexus between them triggered, influenced, and shaped democratization processes.

The study lays out four main contributions to democratization studies in Tunisia and the debate over the internal-external linkages in democratization. First, it highlights the fact that both the liberalization and de-liberalization processes in Tunisia during the 1990s and early 2000s are the outcomes of a combination of internal and external dimensions. Second, the study argues that the democratic transition, triggered by social demonstrations, influenced the domestic and regional landscape. This made the Tunisian democratic transition of regional and international order. The interactions between internal and external dimensions during this phase led to destabilizing and stabilizing Tunisia's democratic transition process. Third, the study suggests that after the establishment of the democratic institutions, the international actors' role shifted towards an 'adjusting' role, mainly during the crisis, to maintain the secularist-Islamist balance of power and, thus the country's stability. Fourth, regarding the current crisis the study emphasizes how the accumulative effect, the domestic actors' dynamics, tensions and conflicts, and

the regime-external actors' relationship have paved the way for a fully-fledged and continuing democracy crisis. As the origin of the ongoing crisis is multidimensional so is its resolution.

Keywords: Democratization, Domestic Actors, External Actors, External-Internal Linkages, Tunisia.

## ÖZET

25 Temmuz 2021, Tunus'un demokratik yapılarının kırılmasını ortaya çıkardı ve son derece kişiselleştirilmiş bir sistem altında yeni bir siyasi dönemin başlangıcı oldu. Bu dramatik dönüşüm, mevcut krizin temellerini araştırmak, analiz etmek ve anlamak için bu çalışmanın temelini oluşturdu ve Tunus'ta demokratikleşme imkanlarını değerlendirdi. Tunus'un demokratikleşme deneyimleri hâkim literatürde ya tamamen iç ya da dış faktörler üzerinden analiz edilmektedir. Bu iki boyut arasındaki bağlantı ve demokrasinin gidişatı üzerindeki etkileri ise çok fazla tartışılmadı. Nitel analiz kullanan bu çalışma, 1990'lardan 2022'ye kadar farklı demokratikleşme aşamalarının etkisini inceleyerek Tunus'ta devam eden demokrasi krizinin kökenlerini kavramayı amaçlamaktadır. Tunus'taki her bir demokratikleşme evresindeki ana iç ve dış aktörleri ve faktörleri değerlendirilmekte ve aralarındaki bağın demokratikleşme süreçlerini nasıl tetiklediği, etkilediği ve şekillendirdiği üzerinde durulmaktadır.

Bu çalışmayı, Tunus'taki demokratikleşme çalışmalarına dört ana katkıyı ve demokratikleşmedeki iç-dış bağlantılara ilişkin tartışmayı ortaya koymaktadır. Birincisi, Tunus'ta 1990'lar ve 2000'lerin başındaki hem liberalleşme hem de liberalleşmeden uzaklaşma süreçlerinin, iç ve dış boyutların birleşiminin sonuçları olduğunu altını çiziyor. İkincisi, çalışma, sosyal gösterilerin tetiklediği demokratik geçişin yalnızca yerel manzarayı değil, aynı zamanda bölgesel olanı da etkilediğini savunuyor. Bu, Tunus'taki demokratik geçişi bölgesel ve uluslararası bir önem haline getirdi. Bu aşamada iç ve dış boyutlar arasındaki etkileşimler, Tunus'un demokratik geçiş sürecinin hem istikrarsızlaşmasına hem de istikrar kazanmasına yol açtı. Üçüncüsü, çalışma, demokratik kurumların kurulmasından sonra, uluslararası aktörlerin rolünün, özellikle kriz dönemlerinde, laik-İslamcı güç dengesini ve dolayısıyla ülkenin istikrarını korumak için 'uyarlayıcı' bir role doğru kaydığını öne sürüyor. Dördüncüsü, çalışma, mevcut krizle ilgili olarak, biriken

etkinin, i aktörlerin dinamiklerinin, gerilim ve çatışmalarının ve rejim-dış aktörlerin ilişkisinin nasıl tam teşekküllü ve sürekli bir demokrasi krizine yol açtığını vurgulamaktadır. Sürmekte olan krizin kaynağı çok boyutlu olduğu için çözümü de çok boyutludur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Demokratikleşme, İ Aktörle, Dış Actörler, Dış-İ Bağlantılar, Tunus.

## INTRODUCTION

Democratization is a comprehensive process of regime change that includes different phases such as the democratic transition stage and its upcoming consolidation (Pridham, et al. 1998, 2). However, the process is likely to operate unevenly as a dynamic group of actors and factors intervene to influence and shape the process. These dynamics may make countries oscillate between democracy and authoritarianism (Huntington 1991, 41).

The movement toward democracy in Tunisia is not an exception. During the 1990s, Tunisia, Egypt, Algeria, and Jordan joined the third wave trend. Political reforms were held in Tunisia, under the slogan of political openness and liberalization. However, this movement consolidated Ben Ali's political power, legitimized the one-party rule, and reflected the capacity of an authoritarian regime to adapt and control shifting economic, social, and political spheres while keeping its authority unaltered (Szmolka 2017, 13).

However, the 2011 revolution disproved this assumption. The toppling of Ben Ali's regime on January 14, 2011, presented an opportunity to eradicate the dictatorships' *raison d'être* (Bermeo 2015), opened up possibilities for democratization, and, also, triggered democratic stirrings in several Arab countries; Algeria, Morocco, Libya, Egypt, Syria, Yemen, Bahrain, and Jordan. Thus, challenging the concept of 'Arab exceptionalism' (Diamond 2010, 93).

The course of these events has led to challenging the powerbases of the authoritarian regimes, disturbed the basis of numerous Middle Eastern regimes and their long-lasting Western alliances (Sarker 2014), and reshaped the balance of power internally as externally. These dynamics triggered geopolitical competition among regional and global actors to protect their interests, expand their influence, and/or gain ground in the region. Which drove democratization in the Arab World back to the international community's public eye (Negri 2015), generated

substantial shifts in approaches and alliances, and fostered an international role in shaping the post-revolutionary trajectories in the region?

Accordingly, different processes were involved in each country; the consolidation of authoritarian regimes, political liberalization, democratization, autocratization, armed conflict and even state collapse. Amidst the regional chaos and despite the political, economic, social and security challenges, Tunisia seemed to be the only country that managed to move safely toward democracy.

Yet, since democratization is not a linear or unidirectional process, it may be followed by a reverse wave, in which democratic gains are abandoned. Ten years after the revolution, the Tunisian model of democratization seems to be facing a severe bend. President Kais Saied invoked article 80 of the 2014 constitution, which enables the president, in the event of imminent danger threatening the nation's institutions or the security or independence of the country, to take any measures necessitated. Accordingly, he announced on July 25, 2021, the cabinet's dismissal, the parliament's suspension, and the seizure of absolute power. Two months later, the president brushed aside much of the constitution and declared his decision to rule by decree.

By abolishing the entire political system implemented in the aftermath of the revolution, Tunisia is facing a turn to authoritarianism in the shape of a personalist regime. This tendency is deepening political polarization as well as economic and social instability. These latter, if escalated, may trigger serious disturbance, whether internally or externally, especially with the unstable regional environment and the increasing geopolitical competition. However, since the actual democratic crisis is partially rooted in the legacies of history (Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán 2014, 28), a step back is needed to grasp “the accumulation effect” on the outcomes and the prospects for democracy in Tunisia.

Yet, discussing democracy and democratization is not a given task. Debates about the concept of democracy are deeply rooted in history. However, the current commonly used definitions relate to Schumpeter in 1942 and Dahl in 1971. Based

on the Schumpeterian description, democracy is “the will of people” which will be expressed through “fair, honest, and periodical elections” (Huntington 1991, 7). Accordingly, democracy is an institutional arrangement and “a regime or a system of governance” (Schmitter and Karl 1991). From Dahl’s perspective and his Polyarchy concept, the definition of democracy includes contestation criteria – included in Schumpeterian tradition- and inclusion or participation aspects such as; freedom of speech, right to organize and access to information, etc.... This definition provides the basis of evaluating democratization efforts, comparing political regimes, and classifying the systems worldwide.

In dealing with democratization, literature can be grouped into two major categories. The first deals with democratization as an endogenous process, which is generated and also shaped by a bunch of domestic changes such as; elites’ preferences, political institutions, political parties, civil-military relationships, the level of economic growth, the characteristics of the society, individual liberty, and urbanization, etc.... (Rustow 1970; Weiner 1987; Karl 1990; Linz and Stepan 1996; Grimm and Weiffen 2018; Diamond and Linz 1989; Castoriadis 1997, Mainwaring 1992). While the second perspective, which was developed during the third wave of democratization, aimed to enlarge the scope of their analysis by giving more attention to the role of external factors and actors’ interests and policies in regime changes, hence the democracy path (Whitehead 1991; Huntington 1991; Haggard and Kaufman 1997; Levitsky and Way 2005; Mansfield and Pevehouse 2006; Yilmaz 2010; Cavatorta 2010; Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán 2014; Mansfield and Snyder 2013; Grimm and Weiffen 2018). Based on this research, the changes in the global economy, the regional circumstances, snowballing effect, and the policies of external actors became essential components in analyzing democratization patterns. Accordingly, democracy survival or fall became not just the outcome of domestic changings within the different elements of the political scene (Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán 2014, 204) but also the result of external-internal interactions, geographical factors, and international actors’ policies.

For the Tunisian case, the studies between the 1990s and early 2000s generally evaluated liberalization attempts based on internal dynamics; political and economic reforms, political oppression, Human rights, social inequality, social organizations etc... (El-said and Harrigan 2014; Görmüş and Akçalı 2020; Dillman 1998; Hibou, 2009; Naggar 1989; Belev 2001; Ali and Crain 2002; Sadiki 2002; Bonhomme, 2017). Meanwhile, the role of international actors was tackled based on economic reforms programs and how they ensured the political order and supported Ben Ali's legacy (Havrylyshyn and Fund 1997; White 2001; Grugel 2002).

In the wake of the revolution, the democratization process was tackled from diverse perspectives. (Kaboub 2013; Bogaert 2013; Oubenal and Hamouda 2018; Görmüş and Akçalı 2020; Pfeifer 2016) linked the political and economic reforms that occurred during Ben Ali's era with financial instability, and social turmoil and, thus, the revolution. (Baker 2015; Bellin 2018; M'rad 2015; Netterstrøm 2016) traced the role of social organizations and civil society in ensuring a "successful" transition phase and establishing the post-revolution institutions. (Taylor 2014; Anderson 2011) focused on the prominent role of Tunisian armed forces in securing the demonstrations and enabling the beginning of the transitional phase. (Boukhars 2017; McCarthy 2019; Hassan, et al. 2020; Murphy 2013) explained the development of democracy in Tunisia based on elite relations, settlement and consensus. (Kelibi 2014; Arieff and Humud 2014; Freidrich Ebert Stiftung 2014; Szmolka 2014; Hecan and Farhaoui 2021) used an institutional approach to evaluate the potential effects of the new political framework on political stability and thus democracy survival.

The expanding effect of the revolution generated profound regional political changes and reshaped the nature of geopolitical competition in the region. (Szmolka 2017; Oğuzlu 2011; Sarker 2014; Ghetas 2011; Malmving 2012; Houry 2013; Hecan and Farhaoui 2021; Cavatorta 2010; Diamond 2011; Blaydes and Lo 2012) studied the repercussions of the Tunisian revolution on redesigning the geopolitical map in North Africa and Middle East countries. While (Marzo 2020; Atlas 2012;

Scott and Carter 2014; Zardo and Cavatorta 2016; Uslu 2007; Barnes 2013; Kausch 2013; Malmvig and Markus Lassen 2013) focused on the international actors' role and programs, mainly the US and the EU, in assisting democratization efforts in Tunisia.

Generally, the literature related to the Tunisian case focuses on identifying separately the domestic dynamics and the external actor's programs and policies regarding democracy promotion in Tunisia. The interaction between the two components and their impact on the patterns of democratization in Tunisia has barely been discussed. On the other hand, the international political economy dimension and the geopolitical competition, which is highly aggravated after the revolution, and their influences on the democracy survival or fall in Tunisia remain understudied.

Accordingly, the way all these variables interact to shape democratization experiences in Tunisia from 1990 to the current democracy crisis will be the pivotal interest of this research. What are the leading international/ regional political tendencies in each phase, and what are their implications at the domestic level? What are the main internal and external actors in liberalization, transition, democracy consolidation, and democracy backsliding moments in Tunisia? What is the nature of internal-external interactions? How did the Tunisian revolution shape the regional environment, and has it been shaped back by it? And what are the prospects of democratization for Tunisia?

To answer these questions, a qualitative approach will be adopted. The perspectives' diversity of theories and empirical research will provide a rich and diversified background and bases for this study, and eliminate the risk of partiality. It will also expand and develop theories, as well as the method of analyzing democratization experiences. In this vein, the study will theoretically and empirically combine the fact that democratization is an outcome of endogenous dynamics as in Linz and Stepan 1996 and Mainwaring 1992 literature, and a result of external factors and actors influence and intervention as emphasized by Huntington 1991, Levitsky and Way 2005, and Yilmaz 2010. On the other hand,

and in order to investigate the internal-external interaction impact on the democratization process and the fate of democracy in Tunisia, this research will use previous studies elaborated to explore the democratization experience in Tunisia. It will also employ economic, social and political reports, conducted surveys, the 2014 and 2022 constitutions, different domestic and external media channels, official internal and external actors' statements, journal articles, and social media's publications.

Through answering these questions, this study aims to contribute to democratization studies in the North African region and comparative studies on democratization experiences in the late twentieth century by giving a broader picture of the origins, actors, and outcomes of democratization in Tunisia.

This research is the first handshake regarding Tunisia's democratization patterns. The time limitation prevented a deep analysis of how the geopolitical context and competition influenced the country's experience with democracy. This research also briefly tackled the international political economy of democratization in Tunisia since its analysis requires an understanding of the international actors' foreign policies, strategic interests, and even an analysis of these countries' domestic environment. To well-draft the possible scenarios regarding the prospects for democracy in the country, conducting a comparative study is essential. Due to time limitations along with the event novelty in Tunisia, it presented a real challenge.

This study will be outlined in six main chapters to achieve this objective. The first will focus on this study's theoretical background: the pillar of democratization, stages of democratization, the internal and external origins of each phase, and the way the internal and external actors and factors interact and influence each phase's path and outcome. The second chapter aims to study the 90s liberalization experience in Tunisia within the global context of the third wave of democratization and economic liberalization, the policies and strategies of the main external actors in Tunisia (mainly the US and EU), the way they shaped the domestic dynamics

and the outcomes of this stage. The third chapter will explore the transitional phase (2011-2014) by analyzing the domestic and regional shifts, the new internal political dynamics, the nature of internal-external interactions, and the whole variables influenced the institutionalization process of democracy. The fourth chapter will analyze first step toward democracy consolidation in Tunisia; the 2014 elections' outcomes, domestic actors' positions and interactions, the linkages with the international actors, and the political and socio-economic outcomes of this stage and how they paved the way to the breakdown of democracy. The fifth chapter will examine the political landscape after the 2019 elections, domestic actors and factors characteristics, the regional-internal dynamics, how all these dimensions interacted to lead to the July 25 2021 crisis. The last chapter will answer the question "Where to?" by presenting the current political situation and system, the international stance and the chances of democracy in Tunisia.

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **PATTERNS OF DEMOCRATIZATION: A LITERATURE SURVEY**

Discussing democratization is not a given task. Debates over the concept, the triggering actors and factors, and the possible paths are deeply rooted in history. Referring to (Huntington 1991, 35; O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986; Grugel 2002,3; Pridham 2000, 16), democratization is the process of changing the political system from a non-democracy to liberal democracy. The latter reflects, according to Dahl's polyarchy formula of democracy, a method of governance that ensures the rights of contestation and participation, which includes the freedom to form and join organizations, freedom of expression, the right to vote, eligibility for public office, the right of political leaders to compete for support/votes, alternative sources of information, and free and fair elections (Dahl, 1971). Furthermore, the democratic system includes a checks and balances process that ensures the government's accountability and prevents the de-democratization of the political system. Accordingly, democracy requires a sequential set of institutional and behavioral reforms to replace non-democratic institutions and practices with accountable and representative ones.

In tracing the origin of democratization, the collapse of authoritarianism in Latin America revived scholars' interest in the regime change process. Most of the scholars (Rustow 1970; O' Donnell and Schmitter 1986; Przeworski 1991; Mainwaring 1992; Linz and Stepan 1997) investigated regime change process as a primarily domestic outcome, where the prospects for democracy are often explained by local forces and calculations (O'Donnell, Schmitter and Whitehead 1986,5). The collapse of the Soviet Union followed by the Eastern European transitions towards democracy, highlighted the significant international involvement -whether directly or indirectly- in this process. The international dimension, which is a general term for various influences, external factors, and an advance of actors located or coming

from particular borders of a country (Pridham 2000,285), of democratic transition in the 1990s and 2000s, took an important place in the scholarly debate (Pridham 1998; Whitehead 1996; Whitehead 2001; Grugel 2001; Meernik, Krueger, and Poe 1998; Mansfield and Pevehouse 2006; Yilmaz 2010; Levitsky and Way 2005) and was considered as the most critical factor at that specific moment (Pridham 1998, 14).

In tracing the course of democratization, Pridham (2000) dealt with the concept as a multi-staged and multi-dimensional process (Pridham 2000, 17). The multi-staged aspect considers democratization as a process that overlaps stages of liberalization, the end of the authoritarian regime, the stage of democratic transition, the establishment and consolidation of the democratic government, and the probability of deconsolidation (O' Donnell and Schmitter 1986; Huntington 1991,35; Pridham 2000,17). Yet, since democratization is not a unidirectional process, the sequence of stages is not guaranteed. For instance, liberalization may not lead to the openness or collapse of the authoritarian regime. Democratic transition, on the other hand, may not ensure progress toward consolidation, and embarking on consolidation does not guarantee the non-deviation from the democratic path. The multi-dimensional aspect of democratization involves not merely the creation of new rules and procedures (the formal dimension of transition) but also the societal level as well as intermediary linkages and interactions between different groups, especially elite—mass relations (Pridham 2000, 17).

Based on this background, this part endeavors to theoretically examine the stages of democratization (the liberalization, democratic transition, and democratic consolidation and deconsolidation) by focusing on their internal and external origins; the role of internal dynamics, including the political elite's dynamics and socio-economic factors, and international dimensions and the way they triggered and shaped each stage and the possible outcomes.

## **1.1. LIBERALIZATION**

The liberalization of the political system entails the expansion of political and civil liberties through offering greater space for individual, civil society, and political opponents, releasing most political prisoners, loosening censorship, and partial opening of the political system to competitive elections (Huntington 1991; Mainwaring 1992; Linz and Stepan 1996; Pridham 2000), but most importantly, without subjecting top decision makers to the electoral test (Huntington 1991, 9). Accordingly, liberalization is a form of political reform initiated from within the established regime.

However, embarking on liberalization may trigger the yearning for democratization within some groups versus the wish for repression among others (Huntington 1991, 137), which means that there is no common outcome for this adventure. The authoritarian regime can endure without losing power, share limited capacity with the opposition, strengthen its position, or witness a total defeat. Given this ambiguity, why does an authoritarian regime adopt a liberalization policy? What factors put the question of liberalization on the political agenda, and what are the possible outcomes?

### **1.1.1. The Internal Origins of Liberalization**

#### **1.1.1.1. Authoritarian Regime's Inner Dynamics**

For (Przeworski 1991; Kaufman 1986; O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986), liberalization is an elite-led process. It results from power struggles, schisms, or splits within the ruling elite. This conflict begins with the emergence of reformers, the soft liners in O'Donnell words, who believe that the authoritarian regime has reached its limits and capacities and that initiating democratization is necessary. This trend is often met with strong rejection among hardliners who believe that political openness would create chaos and instability. Once soft-liners gain leverage over hardliners, the liberalization process begins. Soft liners, often, become the leaders and managers of the process to deepen their legitimacy and power through

elections and weaken the hardliners who remain a potential source of complications and attempted coup (O' Donnell and Schmitter 1986, 16).

However, initiating liberalization may be possible even without any liberalizing proponents. Ruling elites may assume that their authoritarian ruling style may be challenging to sustain or is becoming detrimental (Salamé 1995, 3). Hence, realizing that the requirements of keeping power, such as repression of the opposition, clientelism, the politicization of armed forces, etc., are leading to weakening and undermining the legitimacy and capacity of the regime, political liberalization becomes a necessary or desirable alternative to ensuring a safe exit from power.

On the other edge, liberalization may reflect the 'self-confidence' of the incumbents. Believing that their economic 'miracle' or other achievements will guarantee their survivability in power, power holders restore political institutions and hold elections in the hope that voters will keep them in control (Huntington 1991, 128). By doing so, incumbents will have the opportunity to reinforce their legitimacy domestically and internationally.

#### **1.1.1.2. Opposition Groups Threat**

Stating that liberalization is the resulting action of elites within the established regime is accurate. However, the impetus for reform generally comes from outside the government. Though it appears that the authoritarian elites may look to keep all cards (Brinkerhoff and Crosby 2002,18; Mainwaring 1992). When the ruling elite's coercive actions can end up prompting the opposition to wage a broad struggle over the established regime and strengthen their stance, then to lower the risk they may face, the incumbents may pursue three ways. First, if the opposition is gaining ground or the balance of power is altering more towards strengthening the resistance, the regime would expand fundamental freedoms of expression and individual rights and arranges negotiations with opposition groups over the needed political reform. However, while engaging in such negotiations, the incumbent often keeps the opportunity to control the process and maintain the balance of power in its favor.

Second, initiating negotiation and liberalization processes can be a tactic for authoritarian rulers to diffuse opposition to the regime and coopt moderate opposition groups (Huntington 1991; Hudson 1988; and Mainwaring 1992). This will enable the incumbent to prevent the opposition from gaining more power and, accordingly, from challenging the bases of its rule. Third, authoritarian regimes can also liberalize to take advantage of their opponents' vulnerabilities (Young 1992), create divisions within them, make them accountable to regime inefficiency, or initiate new opposition groups, more intended to targeting the reformers (Young 1992). Authoritarians are most likely compelled to adopt a particular liberalization quota hoping to decrease or even integrate the opposition (Linz 1990).

#### **1.1.1.3. Popular Pressure and Legitimacy Crisis**

The exclusive focus on political actors may provide an incomplete image of liberalization impetus. Governments continuously, try to maintain and gain popular support and sympathy to enhance their legitimacy and thus, their power. However, since the popular component is an oscillating force, actors' legitimacy is likely to change over time. When legitimacy is questioned through mass movements and riots due to economic crisis, for example, the stability of any regime, whether democratic or authoritarian, is in danger. In authoritarian regimes, when social affects the ruling circle's (Pridham 2000, 77), political reforms are likely to become a part of the political agenda to alleviate these tensions.

To deal with this situation, the authoritarian regime responds in two ways. First, the regime seeks a mediating power between itself and society. It invites trade unions, key opposition figures, and other national organizations to participate in the formulation of "effective" reforms. By doing so, the regime seeks to regain popularity and support while sharing the burden of the current crisis with other political and social actors. Second, without participatory or mediating channels, social discontent is contained through adopting new policies to enhance economic growth and ensure political stability. In this regard, the regime introduces economic liberalization measures such as loosening financial barriers and improving

economic individual rights, etc.... In the political sphere, the authoritarian regime introduces multiparty elections, thus, allowing the opposition groups to form their political parties, as in Algeria and Jordan in the late 1980s following mass food riots (Sadiki 2002). However, due to the central control of the regime over state institutions and coercive power, opposition parties are either likely to turn into 'loyal opposition' or to be, lately, excluded from political life by repression's means. Hence, liberalization does not mean the democratization of the system. It is often, an alternative solution to the extant authoritarian system's problems.

Internal dynamics represent a source of pressure and/or an opportunity for incumbents to launch political liberalization to keep their regimes' stability and endurance. Yet, these reforms are likely to be undertaken to manipulate the public, deviating from genuine challenges and attenuating legitimacy crisis (Sadiki 2002).

Liberalization, may in fact be the outcome of internal dynamics, yet what about the role of international dynamics in triggering liberalization?

### **1.1.2. The International Dimension of Liberalization**

Liberalization alternatives may not solely, be the outcome of internal dynamics. The constraints, pressures and opportunities may also generate liberalization choice brought about by the international context.

Since the 1980s, significant shifts in the international context have taken place (Scott and Carter 2015), and a broad trend toward political and economic liberalization was the defining feature of this period. Economically, the global economic stagnation and the oil crisis in the early 1980s generated social discontent that evolved into political demands for regime change. These movements drew attention to the fragility of the economic and political institutions of authoritarian regimes, mainly in developing countries, and the need of reforms. These assumptions intensified the internationalization of neoliberal doctrine as the best solution to tackle economic hardship and social upheaval. Thus, the resulting neoliberal ideology, within the framework of the Washington Consensus, sought to

establish an open economy system along with the establishment/development of democratic institutions.

More or less simultaneously, a political trend towards democratization has appeared in different countries. The widespread wave of democratization resulted in the democratization of Latin America in the 1980s, followed by the democratization of East Asia and the Pacific between 1986-88, the collapse of the Berlin Wall, and the velvet revolutions in the former Soviet Union between 1989 –91. Furthermore, in light of these events, the number of democracies in Sub-Saharan Africa has started increasing. For the Middle Eastern and North African region, the wave of democratization and the ongoing economic crisis challenged their authoritarian governance style, prompting them to open up their policy process to either mitigate or prevent social tensions. It was clear to the region's power-holders that democracy had become inevitable at this stage (Huntington 1991, 101).

The global shift towards a democratic or liberal political order was closely related to the shift in the international political economic system as opening up the market and lifting trade barriers seemed to enhance states' desire to reduce repression. Consequently, this assumption increased the international organizations' opportunities to shape non-democratic countries' political and economic order by encouraging more political openness, and introducing economic reforms, especially in previously statist economies. Hence, the new international political economy order presented a framework that challenged state authority and constrained non-democratic behavior.

Besides the impact of the international political economic system, hegemonic powers' politics affected the possibilities of political liberalization. From the end of the cold war, democracy promotion along with neoliberal economic reforms became the pillar of the US and its western partners' international politics (Durac and Cavatorta 2015, 241). To encourage the initiation of liberalization reforms, international actors sought to influence domestic policy choices of other countries by manipulating the chances and limitations met by the target countries, whether

directly or via the nongovernmental (NGOs) and international organizations they influence (Simmons, et al. 2006). Consequently, in many developing countries, such as Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Egypt, etc.... international institutions prompted these regimes to open their political field as part of the conditions required for obtaining loans and assistance packages.

Distinctly, the origin of liberalization is more than just the political arena. It is tightly related to economic opportunities and competition, bringing economic liberalization and democratization together (Brinkerhoff and Crosby 2002, 7).

After examining the international origins of liberalization, it is essential to examine the possible political outcomes of external-internal interactions. Joining the political and economic global trend or promoting the neoliberal doctrine provides, to some extent, mutual benefits.

For international powers, promoting political and economic openness enabled them to reshape countries' policies according to their strategic interests, such as access to energy resources, integrate new markets into the global financial system, advance regional stability, alleviate anti-western ideologies, stabilize intra-regional conflicts, etc... Yet, liberalization implies a “farewell to the long-held monopoly of power” (Schlumberger 2006, 52). Thus some authoritarian regimes may resist the demands of liberation. In this context, international actors, mainly the US, used the carrots and stick<sup>1</sup> method to urge its political and economic liberalism vision on the rest of the world (Simmons, et al. 2006). For the EU in order to gain EU membership, countries have to initiate political and economic liberalization, as was the case in Eastern and Central European countries. Furthermore, the EU influence transcends European territory to attract geographically neighboring countries to initiate political and economic reforms to benefit from the European assistance and market potential. Tunisia and Morocco are prominent examples in this context.

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<sup>1</sup> In this context the 'carrot' refers to political and military support, as well as preferential access to U.S. markets. On the other hand, 'stick' represents the US pressure policies that range from financial aid restrictions to threats of military coercion.

For authoritarian regimes, by pledging their commitment to initiate political and economic reforms, they enhanced their legitimacy, guaranteed financial and military assistance, and opened up new markets. Thus, both authoritarian regimes and external actors benefited from the political stability to increase trade and political cooperation and keep economic activities and foreign investments on track. However, the outcomes of the global trend of economic and political liberalization may not always guarantee regime change; on the contrary, it may generate counterproductive effects at the local level (Tordoff 1994; Hudson 1988; Huber et al. 1999). Economically, since economic liberalization involves the reduction of government intervention, the implementation of these reforms may revive demonstrations against the government and cause political instability (Tordoff 1994), especially when the measures taken are not accompanied by the establishment of the required institutional structure that ensures equal and open access to the market. In some cases, liberalization may lead to the establishment of political pluralism and electoral competition. Yet, its bases remain fragile. During liberalization, the established power structure and institutions remain unchallenged, which helps authoritarian regimes tighten their control over the political and economic spheres. In addition, electoral competition in authoritarian regimes has always been managed in favor of the incumbents, which will prevent the opportunity for changing the political authority structure and “imped routinization of competition” (Munck and Leff 1997). In the case where opposition groups succeed in the elections, the electoral defeat of the incumbent will not be accepted. Therefore, resorting to coercive means to restore the balance of power and the upper hand of the regime becomes possible. At this point, the hardliners may gain support from power holders, and a de-liberalization process may begin.

If democratization is a process that implies the transformation of the authoritarian political system to make democracy possible, liberalization, whether domestically or externally generated, is far from achieving this goal. Liberalization is often considered a late strategy of defense adopted by authoritarian rulers. It is little likely to stimulate or ease the shift towards democracy (Pridham 2000, 18). However,

“liberalized authoritarianism is not a stable equilibrium” (Huntington 1991, 137), and the outcomes of this phase may deepen political and social instability and lead to shifting in international actors’ calculations regarding the benefits of supporting the existing regime. When these factors emerged and incumbents start to question their capabilities, and when the society’s autonomous elements start believing that they can (Hudson 1988), a step towards dismantling the authoritarian regime and thus democratic transition could be possible.

## **1.2. DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION**

What democratic transition means, and when does it start and end? For (O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986), democratic transition is the intermediate period between an authoritarian regime and established democracy. This period extends from removing the preceding rigid system, through the foundational stage of the new democracy until its establishment and early operation (Pridham 1991, 5). Accordingly, the democratic transition involves different steps of regime change; first, the collapse of the authoritarian regime and the decision to “embark on democratization”(Pridham, et al. 1998, 14), second, the institutionalization of democracy through the design of a new constitution and new political framework, and the final step is the operationalization of the new system and the election of the new government. Once all of these phases are achieved, the democratic transition can be considered to have paved the way to talk about the consolidation of democracy.

What are this phase's internal and external origins, how do the two dimensions interact, and what does the institutionalization of democracy involve are the central questions of this section.

## **1.2.1. Origins of the Authoritarian Regime Collapse**

### **1.2.1.1. The Internal Dimension of Democratic Transition**

The essence of the literature that examined the third-wave transitions, was based on and inspired by Rustow's (1970) essay 'Transitions to Democracy: Toward a Dynamic Model,' in which he mentioned that transition is the result of strategic interaction and negotiation of the political elite<sup>2</sup>. Accordingly, democratic transition, the same as liberalization, has been considered an elite-led process.

Based on this perspective, (Linz 1990; Huntington 1991; Mainwaring 1992) explained the transition by analyzing the different stakeholders in the process and how it is conducted. Accordingly, they defined three modes of evolution: *Reforma* or transaction, *ruptura* or replacement, and *ruptuforma* or transplacement. Transition through transaction occurs when the incumbent is complying with regime change. The increase of the suppression costs, elimination of any source of threat and/or the instability of the socio-economic order, present an incentive for the regime to raise the political sphere's scope. Hence, the regime opts for more political openness and institutional reforms. However, political openness remains in its liberal form rather than democratization, and the balance of power remains in favor of the regime, which affects the nature of accommodations concluded with the opposition forces. Like liberalization, the reform through transaction ensures severe changes in the political system (new electoral system, new institutions, constitutional revisions, multiparty system...). Yet, these changes remain under the influence of the old regime elite, even with a noticeable decline in its power during the transition period.

Transition through *ruptura* or replacement offers the opposite of the previous form. It refers to the situation in which the authoritarian regime witnesses a regression in its power. At the same time, the opposition gains ground and ends up with the overthrow of the old regime and transfer of power to the opposition. To achieve this

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<sup>2</sup>O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986) and Karl (1990) adopt the same perception.

outcome, opposition groups often gather and form a 'National Front' to bring down the regime. However, embarking on building democratic institutions is usually a long process in an uncertain environment combined with a potent power struggle even within the anti-authoritarian coalition. Their way of dealing with these struggles will safeguard the transition process or hinder all of it.

The transition through *ruptuforma* or transplacement occurs when the balance of power between the opposition and power holders is relatively equal. Thus, both camps are interested in defining a new distribution of the power strategy. The regime has no benefit in clinging to power, especially in a lack of popular support and legitimacy and fear of state collapse. On the other side, the opposition seeks complete political openness, deep reforms, and equitable power-sharing. Consequently, the regime accepts to explore the possibilities of negotiations, settlements, and agreements regarding how the democratic transition should be conducted. Transition through *ruptuforma* contributes to a clear break from the past and ensures stable progress toward democratic consolidation.

However, like liberalization, the democratic transition is not only the outcome of elite interactions, calculations, and dynamics. Economic conditions and social support will determine the regime's legitimacy and, thus its survivability or collapse (Przeworski 1985; Stepan 1986; Linz and Stepan 1996; O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986; Karl 1990; Haggard and Kaufman 1997; Grugel 2002; Przeworski 2003). As (Przeworski 2003) emphasizes, the decline in economic growth can break dictatorships by making the economy too complex to be run by command, thus eroding the regime's legitimacy. Hence, when the public becomes aware that the existing regime is incapable of managing economic and political affairs, "the political economy of legitimacy and coercion changes sharply" (Linz and Stepan 1996, 80). Public dissatisfaction with economic conditions, especially over an extended period, plays a pivotal role in igniting calamity of authoritarian regimes, leading to mass mobilization, social upheaval, and even revolution. Unlike other modes of transition, mass mobilizations are spontaneous, unplanned, and ideologically and politically unorganized (Volpi 2013). Since mass mobilization

will either affect the opposition stance against the regime, increasing the chances of overthrowing the authoritarian regime or provide the hardliners with incentives to consolidate their coercive power. It is often evaluated as secondary importance in most of the transition literature. Yet, if assessed as the primary mode of transition, mass mobilization can force the authoritarian regime to come into massive concessions or break down.

Like liberation, interpreting the origin and motivation of the democratic transition based on purely internal dynamic terms is likely to provide an incomplete picture of such a complex process. Accordingly, how can the international dimension, along with domestic dynamics, make the democratic transition possible?

### **1.2.1.2. The International Dimension of Democratic Transition**

#### **1.2.1.2.1. The Transnational Dimension**

The second debate over the origin of the democratic transition revolves around the importance of the international dimension in regime change.

To reassess the role of the international dimension, Huntington 1991 and Whitehead 1996 emphasized the prominent role of geographical position in triggering and shaping a country's democratic transition process. Their observation generated two almost similar concepts; Huntington's 'demonstration effect' and Whitehead's 'contagion effect. This means that democratization is a wave-like process; the occurrence, and most importantly, the success, of a political event in one country, will be transmitted or generate significant political changes in neighboring countries and, accordingly, in the region. As Huntington argues: successful democratization in one country can foster democratization elsewhere because they may be encountering the same problems or because the successful democratization in other countries showed that democracy could be the solution to their problems whatever they are, or just because the nation that witnesses this change is of a power and/or is seen as a cultural and political model (Huntington 1991, 100).

So, if contagion is “a neutral transmission mechanism” (Whitehead 2001, 6) how could it shift the internal balances? The contagion effect affects internal dynamics, whether through shifting public attitudes, expectations, and interpretations or through pushing the incumbents to revise their strategies and calculations. If the regional/ international context in which the authoritarian regime exists supports democracy, then the regime may engage in political reforms.

The spatial clustering in democratic transitions imposes a kind of “cross-boundary dependencies” (Gleditsch and Ward 2006) that set up conditions for the occurrence and the endurance of domestic political change. However, the recognition of regional and international context’s influence while examining democratic transition in a country is a justifiable perspective for some bounded purposes (Whitehead 2001, 23). Using only a transnational dimension tends to offer one-way effects instead of interactional influence forms (Pridham 2000, 288). Democracy is frequently the result of significant changes in the behavior and strategies of international actors toward a particular country (Gleditsch and Ward 2006). Thus, if hegemonic powers' strategic and economic interests are challenged through the democratization process, these powers will prevent the contagion effect and support the dictatorial regimes even in the presence of social demands for political reforms. Otherwise, they may intervene and help the spread of the democratization wave.

Accordingly, grasping external actors’ nature, interests, forms of influence, and external- domestic interactions along with the spatial clustering will provide a better understanding of the origins of the democratic transition process.

#### **1.2.1.2.2. External Actor’s Interests and Influence**

As discussed in the previous section, the shift in the regional and international status quo in the 1990s provided a convenient framework for the US and EU to bolster their interests through democracy promotion. This strategy forced many authoritarian regimes to initiate the democratic transition process or caused the dismantling of these regimes. The question here is through which mechanisms these

actors shaped the domestic dynamics and achieved the dismantling of authoritarian regimes and/or the commencement of the democratic transition process in a given country?

Based on literature, external influence is often applied through three mechanisms. First, through influencing domestic actors' preferences regarding democracy or authoritarianism. Second, through reshaping the domestic balance of power, and third, through direct intervention to trigger and control the democratic transition process. Due to the scope of this study and the nature of the Tunisian democratization experience, the third mechanism will not be examined. So, how the first and second mechanisms are applied?

#### **a) International Actors' Role in Influencing Domestic Preferences and Calculations**

Authoritarian regimes' susceptibility to external actors' democratizing pressure would determine their political choices. Through assessing the "external costs of suppression and the internal costs of toleration" (Yilmaz 2010, 79), the regime will define its next move. If continuing authoritarian policies will undermine the regime's chances of external support, increase international pressure, or may engender sanctions and/or military intervention, then to avoid adverse political and economic consequences, the regime will go into democratic reform. However, western leverage has rarely been sufficient to induce democratic change (Levitsky and Way 2005, 33). International actors often concentrate on implementing electoral routinization instead of polyarchy democracy tenets. This means that countries often escape from the western spotlight once the elections occur, even if they fail to bring democracy (Levitsky and Way 2005, 22).

In addition to the expected external costs, international actors may influence regimes' preferences through conditionality. The latter is sketched as the willful use of coercion by joining particular conditions to the distribution of the benefits to recipient countries. (Schmitter 1996, 30). Regular political assistance, such as

economic aid or entering international institutions/unions, are among the main incentives within the conditionality mechanism. Yet, this mechanism's efficiency also depends on domestic evaluation of the benefits and costs of conceding external conditions. When conditionality is not associated with incentives and support, it is more likely to be popularly viewed as foreign interference in internal affairs.

#### **b) International Actors' Role in Reshaping the Domestic Balance of Power**

The first mechanisms, western leverage and conditionality, are more dedicated to the government level, while the second mechanism, western linkages, concentrates on increasing the role of non-governmental actors in withdrawing authoritarianism. This mechanism aims to reshape the internal balance of power to upraise the interior suppression cost above the level of the internal toleration costs (Yilmaz 2010, 81-2).

In their work on *international linkage and democratization*, Levitsky and Way offered a systematic approach to analyze how this mechanism functions. Western linkage is defined as “the density of a country’s ties to the US, the EU, and Western-led multilateral institutions” (Levitsky and Way 2005, 21). This dimension includes economic, geopolitical, social, communication and transnational civil-society linkages that can bring the authoritarian regime to an end.

The existence of these linkages offers domestic opponents a global network to highlight regime abuses, increase the base of domestic actors supporting political change, improve the ability of international actors to act in case of abuses, and reshape the domestic power balance by strengthening the capacities, resources and public support of the opposition (Levitsky and Way 2005, 25). Hence, when the linkage between internal NGOs, the economic elite, political actors and individuals, and the West is dense, the international opinion becomes more aware of authoritarian abuses, which increases the external costs of suppression and thus the demands for democratization gain ground. On the other hand, dense western linkage

empowers opposition groups. It enhances the ability of international actors to build an alternative center of power with which they share similar political and economic goals. This alternative power will either be the critical force in dismantling the authoritarian regime or the well-organized group that will defeat the authoritarian regime and rules the democratic transition phase.

However, international actors' support for regime change remains contingent that it will never challenge their interests in the country and region.

Whether the democratic transition was initiated by internal or external factors or a combination of the two, the period of democratic transition is crucial in shaping how democracy is institutionalized and, thus the way democracy will function.

### **1.2.2. The institutionalization of Political Democracy**

Democratization involves the substitution of autocratic institutions for democratic institutions. Accordingly, institutionalization is the phase of determining the game's new rules according to which the political actors will play and laying structures and procedures to make democracy possible and stable.

Constitutional design is the essence of this process that will determine whether the country will move towards a democratic system or something else. The constitution defines the political regime (parliamentarism, presidentialism, or semi presidentialism), perception of human rights, women in society, electoral systems and the experience of the elections, freedom of speech as well as freedom of association, and the role of a free media, etc...., both in political fields and civil society (Dahl, 1971; Haggard and Kaufman, 1999; Lijphart, 1999). During constitutional engineering, the choice of the government regime, whether parliamentary, presidential, or semi-presidential, is likely to be a controversial topic. Each political actor seeks to gain maximum power and ensures that the new framework will function in its favor and guarantee its survival. Expectations regarding the chances of success in coming electoral rounds will determine the regime's preferences for each political actor. When a political party's chances of

success in the presidential elections surpass those in the parliamentary elections, it will push for the presidential system and vice versa. Semi-presidentialism, often, remains a means of consensus that will ensure the chances of each political party to be part of the political scene.

Building democratic institutions are not only challenged by elites' preferences regarding the political regime nature. Considerable challenges come from the previous regime's heritage. Since the democratic transition phase creates winners and losers, initiating democratic transition often threatens the power of the outgoing elites and their political and economic allies. The uncertainty and the unclear prospect after regime collapse may oblige the old regime's political allies to make concessions or push them a step aside for a while until the right moment shows up. However, political openness during the democratic transition permits many players to enter the political sphere, even if they are not committed, democrats. This creates the possibility of bringing down the democratic opening (Landolt and Kubicek 2014).

Furthermore, the fear of the old regime's economic actors and allies stripping away their economic privileges may increase either their degree of resistance or pressure on the new political elite. The explicit and implicit confrontations with the critical economic actors and the unstable political environment often lead to economic decline due to the withdrawal of domestic and foreign investments. The lasting of this situation may end up with a financial crisis, and social unrest, thus, spoiling the democratic transition. In this context, rapidly establishing democratic institutions may reduce uncertainty, which is widely seen as a marking transition. It can also start securing the transition to democracy from any reversal risk (Pridham 2000, 94). Regardless of the threat from the old regime, the new democratic elite itself may face challenges regarding the state's management. The transitional elites are frequently unique to the government. They lack the needed skills to tackle a bunch of the transition phase's problems and those inherited from the authoritarian regime, such as internal tension, financial distress, and external threats. Furthermore, they tend to be unfamiliar with the structures of the state administration, not knowing

the energy and time needed to overcome bureaucratic resistance and inertia and are unschooled in employing the power levers to make a change (Brinkerhoff and Crosby 2002, 20). To overcome these challenges lobbying for funds, support and negotiations with various political and nonpolitical actors and establishing/reinforcing trust and ties with international actors became essential. Thus, especially in countries where western linkage exists, international actors hasten to offer democratic assistance and economic support to enhance political and financial stability.

However, establishing a new political order and institutions is a complex process involving a long and uncertain political struggle as competing groups, both outgoing and transitional elites, seek to gain power and define the rules of the new game. Thus, the institutional building process can often be fragmented, frequently interrupted, and prolonged. Once the institutional indeterminacy is lengthy, it exacerbates political instability, and economic hardship. It raises legitimacy questions about the emerging democratic government, the process of decision-making, and indeed the political system's future (Linz and Stepan 1996, 4). Only negotiations and consensus among the new democratic elite will ensure the achievement of “acceptable if not satisfying arrangements for the transition to democracy” (Huntington 1991, 165). Once this arrangement is achieved, and the operationalization of the new political structures may take place, the democratic transition is complete, and a further step towards the consolidation of democracy begins.

### **1.3. THE CONSOLIDATION OF DEMOCRACY**

A democracy is consolidated when it becomes the only game in town (Linz and Stepan 1996, 5). This means that all social, political and institutional actors accept that the only way to gain power or change the regime can be through democratic means.

However, in most cases, once the democratic transition is achieved, various tasks need to be fulfilled, and many conditions have to be consolidated (Linz and Stepan

1996, 5). Accordingly, this part will focus on understanding the indigenous and exogenous requirements that may shape the outcome of the consolidation and survival of democracy.

### **1.3.1. The Internal Dimension of Democratic Consolidation**

What conditions make democracy consolidate and thrive? Linz and Stepan (1996) proposed three essential dimensions, behavioral, attitudinal, and constitutional. Behaviorally, democratic consolidation implies that no political, economic, social, or institutional actors attempt to bring down the democratic regime through unconstitutional and undemocratic ways. Attitudinally, democracy becomes consolidated when democratic political culture emerges, as Robert Dahl mentioned in his essay *Themes and Perspective*. This culture inquires that the majority of public opinion, even during economic crises and profound dissatisfaction with incumbents, remains committed to democratic means to change the government. Constitutionally, democracy is consolidated when all actors in the polity -whether they are governmental or nongovernmental- become equally accountable to the constitution and the rule of law, when the established norms solely solve the political conflict, and when these norms are ineffectively and costly violated (Linz and Stepan 1996, 5).

#### **1.3.1.1. The Behavioral Aspect of Democratic Consolidation**

Political elites play a prominent role at every stage of the democratization process (liberalization, transition, and consolidation). During the consolidation phase, the widespread acceptance of the new political framework and the game rules would mitigate the intensity of the political conflict and increase the probability that this conflict will be solved through institutional channels. Therefore, the ability of the political elites to be unified and committed to these institutions and norms constructs a stable regime that may grow into a modern democracy if allowed by economic conditions and other facilitative conditions. (Higley and Burton 1989).

However, the early stage of democratic consolidation involves fierce political competition and conflict. What determines the survival or collapse of democracy is the willingness of the political elite to exercise restraint amid a crisis and adhere to democracy even in the presence of authoritarian or other alternatives to the regime. In this context, in addition to the performance of the democratic government in dealing with the crisis, opposition groups' ability and readiness to suggest legal and constitutional political alternatives decide the fate of democracy.

In this regard, Linz 1978 emphasized in his book *the breakdown of democratic regimes and the impact of opposition groups*, which he classified into two categories: disloyal and semiloyal oppositions, on hindering and even subverting the democratization process. The disloyal opposition usually refuses to acknowledge the legitimacy of the elected government and/or the newly established democratic institutions and tends to launch wide anti-establishment attacks. According to Linz 1978, they obstruct the parliamentary process, support and join subversive groups, plans, and actions and adopt a systemic calumny on the system parties and politicians, to name a few. On the other hand, the semi-loyal oppositions are difficult to recognize in the political scene. They are generally committed to democratic institutions and rules. In a crisis situation, they have "a decisive role in the process of the loss of power by democratic regimes and implementation of the semi-or pseudo-legal takeover" (Linz 1978, 27). When a nascent democratic regime faces effectiveness, legitimacy, and deep political cleavages challenges, semi-loyal opposition' leaders tend to collaborate with disloyal opposition to overthrow the democratic government. Once gaining public legitimacy/support, this new opposition block overtly becomes more involved and mobilized in questioning the democratic system itself and resorts to a mass movement and social pressure, strikes, and even seeking the armed forces' support to topple the democratic government.

In short, the relationships between the political actors and how they respond to the problems they face determine the survival or collapse of democracy. Thus, mutual

trust and extensive communications and interactions among political actors are critical in determining the fate of democracy.

### **1.3.1.2. The Attitudinal Aspect of Democratic Consolidation**

Political elites' behavior and commitment to democratic procedures are decisive in determining the course of democracy. Yet, their worth and legitimacy are influenced by the government's performance and its ability to implement policies that respond to the citizens' needs. For government and democratic elites, public interests and tendencies often constitute criteria upon which they can decide and formulate their policies. The moment that the public realizes that democratic government and institutions are unable to overcome inherited challenges and meet their socio-economic expectations, the democratic system will be rejected (Linz 1978, 11), and consequently, the prospects for democracy will be blurry.

Democracy survival proceeds in tandem with economic reform and performance. (Diamond and Linz 1989; Linz and Stepan 1996; Haggard and Kaufman 1997; Przeworski 2001; Grugel 2002; Bernhard et al. 2003) argue that a positive economic performance decreases the probability of democracy collapse and increases the chances of democratic consolidation and sustenance. At the same time, consecutive years of economic stagnation, hardship, and decline have the opposite effect.

When the new democratic governments fail to meet peoples' expectations within the 'honeymoon period' – which is an 8-year breathing space; 4 years for an initial government and 4 for its replacement (Linz and Stepan 1996, 78-79)-, legitimacy crisis occurs, and public discontent arises.

Over time, according to Huntington 1991, this situation will generate four possible outcomes. First, when social disillusionment occurs, it causes the reluctance to participate in political life and, thus the decrease in voting levels compared to the democratic transition period. Second, the newly elected government's poor political and economic performance leads to the emergence of 'anti-incumbent' reactions. This will be manifested in the electoral defeat of incumbent leaders and parties

when attempting to win reelection. Third, poor government performance and inter-elites' conflicts may produce 'an antiestablishment response.' In this case, voters lean towards punishing incumbents, rejecting all political parties and elites, and supporting a political outsider. "However, successful populist candidates generally did not follow populist economic policies but instead launched rigorous austerity programs designed to cut government spending, promote competition, and hold down wages" (Huntington 1991, 266). Fourth, the failure of the democratic government will be associated with the loss of the democratic system itself. In this instance, public discontent will allow semi-loyal and disloyal oppositions to oust the democratic government. At this moment, replacing the democratic regime with an authoritarian one was most likely cherished with great relief and general public approval (Huntington 1991, 49).

#### **1.3.1.3. The Constitutional Aspect of Democratic Consolidation**

The third dimension of democracy consolidation is the constitutional aspect. It refers to the ability of the political system and constitutional institutions to curb political conflicts and crises from turning into a fully-fledged democratic crises. In this context, (Sartori 1994; Sartori 1999; Lijphart 1997; Lijphart 2012; Linz 1985; Cheibub et al. 2013; Duverger 1980; Elgie, et al. 2011; Skach 2014) placed greater emphasis on the way government systems through the power-sharing logic, and the checks and balances mechanisms determine democratic stability and survivability. Based on this literature, parliamentarianism was seen as a stable government system due to its ability to create a coherent and steady government and resolve the executive-legislative conflict more quickly than the presidential system, thus preventing government stalemate. In case of high political tensions, a government reshuffle or, in extreme cases, parliament dissolution can be carried out without creating a regime crisis. Democracy under presidentialism, on the other hand, is expected to be unstable and prone to collapse. This is mainly due to this system's zero-sum and fixed-term features, which increase the concentration of power in the chief executive's hands, raise the probability of power abuse, and thus the personalization of the political system.

In case of crisis, such as the president's violation of the constitution or the legitimacy loss, impeachment process may not be easy to conduct. For the semi-presidential system, the literature highlights three major flaws; the presidentialization of the political process, cohabitation, and divided minority government. The presidentialization of the political process is where the president controls the legislative and executive and acts beyond what is written in the constitution. When this occurs, democracy may shift towards what Linz calls "constitutional dictatorship." Cohabitation reflects the situation in which the president is not a parliamentary majority member. This may lead to either a) an intra-executive conflict, b) a government deadlock that may end up with either the president's seizure of power to break the deadlock, or c) a stalemate which will open the gate to a military intervention (Linz and Stepan 1996; Elgie and McMenamin 2008). A divided minority government is the outcome of a highly fragmented parliament where division and shift in legislative coalitions are frequent. This situation leads to government instability and presents an incentive for the president to intervene in government affairs and use their powers beyond constitutional limits. This will either lead to the presidentialization of the political process, a constitutional amendment to expand presidential authority or the rule by decree.

In sum, for a democracy to survive and persist, a suitable institutional framework, good government performance, and the political elite's commitment to democratic means are required. Moreover, political and economic crises in the early stages of democratic transition and consolidation are common. Yet, its persistence in time may generate democratic erosion. Unless democracy and democratic institutions are accompanied by commonly shared norms such as tolerance, political trust, compromise, and, most importantly believe in the legitimacy of democracy, the democratic system will not resist in times of crisis (Diamond 1997, xviii).

Although democratic consolidation requires indigenous conditions and commitments to thrive, the international/ regional context and the nature and intensity of internal-external interactions would impact the outcomes and the prospects of the democratization process.

### **1.3.2. The International Dimension of Democracy Consolidation**

The international/regional context under which the newly established democracies are moving ahead with democratic consolidation plays a pivotal role in shaping democracies and determining their fate. Whitehead (2001) and Boix (2011) suggested that the likelihood of democracy emerging and consolidating is higher when the world and regional systems favor liberal norms and policies. Through analyzing the structure of the international system over fifty years, Boix 2011, emphasizes that the international system is a fundamental component for either the promotion, stabilization and consolidation of national democracy or its subversion. In periods where dominant powers are liberal or authoritarian, they “are more likely to promote like-minded regimes” (Boix 2011, 815).

Hence, a favorable and supportive environment along with behavioral, constitutional and attitudinal dimensions may guarantee the consolidation and survival of democracy even when it faces daunting challenges such as; economic stagnation, high inflation, increased social inequalities, political cleavages, etc...(Whitehead 2001; Pridham 1998, 7; Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán 2014, 5). Thus, how this dimension works? And how it influences the course of democratic consolidation.

As the demonstration effect generates democratic transition attempts in neighboring countries, a successful transition towards and/or a positive outcome of democratic consolidation in a given country increases the desire of opposition groups and parties with similar ideologies to dismantle the regime and reach power. It also fuels public demands in countries with similar conditions to initiate democratization or proceed with the consolidation of democracy. Hence, establishing a democratic institution and embarking on democracy consolidation in a country presents a

potential threat to the survival of neighboring authoritarian regimes. Therefore, to stop this danger, these regimes resort to establishing or strengthening their ties with the disloyal domestic opposition through financial support, assistance, and security and intelligence coordination. This enables the disloyal opposition to gain ground in the political, economic, and military spheres, undermine democratic institutions, and deepen political and social cleavages. By doing so, disruption in the functioning of the government occurs, which decreases its legitimacy. Amid a political and/or economic crisis, the neighboring countries' authoritarian regimes will offer disloyal oppositions a backup to push for implementing unconstitutional and undemocratic alternatives to end the current democratic system. Hence, the failure of democratic consolidation in a country, whether peaceful or belligerent, will trigger subsequent democracy collapse, as in Latin America in 1947–9 or 1963–6, or in West Africa in the mid-1960s. The Egypt 2013 military coup and its repercussions on the evolution of democracy in Tunisia is an example from the recent time, which will be analyzed in the third and fifth chapters of this research study.

At the level of international actors, supporting or undermining democratic consolidation is constrained by the country's regional environment and the susceptibility of internal conflicts to turn into proxy conflicts between foreign rivals. Hence, when promoting democracy would not jeopardize hegemonic actors' interests, they will contribute positively to implementing and consolidating democracy. Accordingly, and to support democracy consolidation, international actors follow political and developmental approaches (Grimm and Weiffen 2018, 259). The political system includes the delivering of expertise and assistance to empower the capacities of international actors' national allies (members of parliament, state administrations, political parties, journalists, business elites, and civil society leaders) to secure the non-deviation of the process and help them accomplish the consolidation stage (Whitehead 2001; Grimm and Weiffen 2018). On the other hand, the development approach aims at promoting favorable conditions for democratic consolidation (Grimm and Weiffen 2018, 259), developing socio-economic conditions, alleviating the impacts of economic

hardship through financial aid, foreign investments, bilateral agreements, and technical support to enhance democratic institution operationalization. However, donors are likely to expect returns from their help. This may result in dependencies and interdependencies between recipients and donors, influencing internal conflicts, reform, development, and human rights observance (Scott and Carter 2015).

As can be seen, democratization is a long and complex process. For the sake of simplicity, the conceptual framework of the literature suggests either indigenous or exogenous approaches to understanding the pattern of democratization. Yet, understanding the overlap between the internal and external dimensions is important in mapping out a wide picture of the patterns and fate of democratization in a country. From this perspective, the following chapters will analyze how internal-external interactions shaped and influenced the patterns of democratization in Tunisia, starting from the 90s to Saied's period.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **THE PATTERN OF POLITICAL LIBERALIZATION, AUTHORITARIAN RESILIENCE, AND COLLAPSE IN TUNISIA**

The global economic stagnation and the oil crisis in the early 1980s posed tremendous challenges to the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region's authoritarian regimes. A slowdown in the region's economic growth and productivity -the GDP in the MENA decreased on average by 1 percent per annum in the 1980s, a rate worse than any other region in the developing world, apart from sub-Saharan Africa (El-said and Harrigan 2014)-, an increase of both fiscal and current account deficits, and an accumulation of external debts handicapped states' capacity to manage and remedy the negative economic consequences. Consequently, social movements emerged that later transformed from mere protests against the financial situation into protests calling for political reforms and rights. As a result, reformers within the incumbent elite emerged and, along with other social groups, started to pressure authoritarian regimes to initiate economic reforms and embrace a democratization process. These challenges from below presented a real threat to the legitimacy and, thus, the viability of these regimes.

Internationally, the neoliberal remedy was proposed to overcome global economic stagnation and structural problems of the developing world economy. Through its leadership in international financial institutions like the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), as well as directly through its extensive contacts with MENA regimes, the U.S. administration pushed for radical economic reforms under the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs). The latter requires trade liberalization, market openness, austerity measures, and privatization of state-owned enterprises.

In the face of political and social turmoil, economic crisis, and international pressures, governments across the region began to engage with the IMF, the WB, and other international organizations in economic and political liberalization processes. The wave started with Morocco in 1983, followed by Tunisia (1986), Jordan (1989), Egypt (1991), and Algeria (1994) (Durac and Cavatorta 2015, 92-3).

Simultaneously, the end of the Cold War provided another incentive for international powers (the US and its Western allies) to promote political liberalization in the region. After supporting “friendly tyrants” (Schlumberger 2006, 38) throughout the Cold War, such as military and economic support for the Mubarak regime, or consolidation of military cooperation with the Algerian government, to name a few, a broad Western consensus emerged that the expansion of democracy would be a peaceful solution for regional disputes, and would bestow the international stability, help further with economic issues, and brings out better living conditions for citizens (Durac and Cavatorta 2015, 247).

However, as the MENA region was always an essential geographic entity for external powers, and since the course of liberalization may lead to the weakness of incumbents and/or the demise of Western-friendly incumbents, democratization in the region has been limited. As Oliver Schlumberger argues, “It is not only against the interest of Arab regimes to strive for democratization but also against Western governments’ interests. Asking Arab governments to cooperate in “democratization” means abolishing the partner and expecting him to cooperate in the business— which is not a particularly realistic scenario” (Schlumberger 2006, 52).

In addition, the case of Algeria in 1991 affected the course of political liberalization in Algeria and Tunisia. When the Islamic party defeated the ruling party, the Front for Islamic Salvation (FIS), in both local and legislative elections, fears and disquiet from Islamism began to resurge in U.S and EU policy-maker circles (Durac and Cavatorta 2015, 248; King 2009). The fear that promoting democracy in the MENA

may bring anti-Western movements to power, destabilize the region and, thus, jeopardize Western interests has led to a change in external actors' preferences and made them retreat from the strategy of promoting democracy in the region, preferring to stick to their historical allies. At the same time, and due to the unstable domestic social, political, and economic environment in the region, liberalization and reform would continue to take full advantage of economic opportunities with the last political resistance (Murphy 2002, 237).

The interactions of the international and domestic contexts between the late 1980s and early-2000s were far from changing the authoritarian character of the Arab regimes. Instead, the domestic elites' and global economic elites' interests became more and more intertwined (Bogaert 2013, 215), contributing thus to authoritarian upgrading, and portraying the MENA as an exceptional context for resisting waves of democratization (Bellin 2012; Hinnebusch 2006; Diamond 2010).

This chapter aims to grasp Tunisia's liberalization pattern in light of this international and regional context and trends. Why did the regime choose to liberalize in the first place? Why did it decide to take a step back in the process? And why this pattern ended up with the collapse of the regime? To answer these questions, this part will examine how the external-internal interactions affected domestic actors' dynamics and policies, how these dynamics shaped the political, economic, and social landscape and how they led to the 2010-2011 revolution.

## **2.1. THE ORIGIN OF LIBERALIZATION IN TUNISIA**

Tunisia witnessed two waves of economic and political liberalization. The first liberalization experience occurred from 1970 to 1986 and came as a result of the failure of the socialist model in the late 1960s. By pursuing limited market-oriented policies, signs of economic recovery appeared. For instance, the GDP increased from 4.75% in 1969 to 10.56% in 1971. However, the pace of this growth did not sustain. After three consecutive years of severe drought, 1981-86 witnessed an economic slowdown; by the end of 1982 and 1986, the annual growth was -0.49% and -1.45%, respectively, as political agitations, and social unrest.

During the first years of the 80s and within the economic stagnation context, the Islamist movement, the Islamic Tendency Movement (MTI), and leftist groups gained ground, and trade union and student movements became more politicized. Accordingly, demands have sparked for political liberalization and a multiparty political system. It was clear during these events that Bourguiba's political structure was in chaos (King 2003, 30). As a result, the government was obliged to liberalize the political system and conduct multiparty elections in 1981. However, hardliners refused these measures and manipulated the elections to prevent any opposition candidate from being elected. (Anderson 1986, 248). After re-stabilizing and legitimizing his political system, the government retracted from the multiparty experience, held trials, and eradicated his "bête noire"; the Islamists (King 2003, 30).

The collapse of the liberalization movement and the consolidation of Bourguiba's populist authoritarian system did not protect him from social wrath. When the regime left government subsidies on essential food products, based on the IMF and WB demands, tremendous demonstrations throughout Tunisia, from December 1983 to January 1984, sparked, which were faced by intensive repression. As social pressure continued, the regime decided to reactivate the food subsidy system.

However, the exacerbation of economic conditions in 1985 and 1986 due to the global financial crisis exacerbated the government's predicament. The fiscal and current account deficit reached a critical 6.6% and 7.1% of GDP, respectively, by 1985-86 (Bechri and Naccache 2006). In addition, due to the oil crisis, remittances and Gold and Western countries' aid to Tunisia decreased. Finding alternate financial resources to address the economic problem and its effects was unattainable.

Under these circumstances, the regime, in 1986 declared its inability to finance essential imports or pay its foreign debt and announced its intention to carry out the economic reform sponsored by the IMF seriously. However, with ongoing social unrest and severe political opposition from the banned MTI, Bourguiba failed to

launch the SAP. After the 1987 constitutional coup that removed Bourguiba from power, it fell on Ben Ali to implement this program.

Since the economic and political dimensions are closely interconnected in Tunisia, initiating economic liberalization was supposed to create a market-oriented society and thus facilitate the transition toward democracy. Yet, political reforms stemming from the will to implement the SAP were only a form of controlled growth and a mere façade of democracy (Sadiki 2002), which contributed to maintaining the authoritarian character of the regime, tightening its grip on economic and social life and create a socio-economic crisis which ended up overthrowing Ben Ali's government.

## **2.2. LIBERALIZATION AND THE RECONFIGURATION OF THE POLITICAL SPHERE; POLITICAL RECONCILIATION AND REFORM 1987- 1990**

Once in power, Ben Ali sought to send positive signs and reassuring messages to national and international actors. In his first presidential address to the Tunisians, Ben Ali stated that the age in which we live could no longer permit either presidency- for-life or automatic succession of the head of state, from which the people are excluded . . . Our people deserve a developed and organized political life which genuinely relies on the plurality of political parties and popular organizations (Ben Ali 1987). He also pledged to embark on the SAP to ensure a prosperous and developed economy.

Accordingly, how did Ben Ali promote democracy? How did he restructure the political sphere? What are the measures that have been taken, and how they ended up reviving authoritarianism?

### **2.2.1. The Transformation of the Ruling Party**

When Ben Ali staged his coup, the ruling party, the Constitutional Socialist Party (PSD), was facing a severe legitimacy crisis due to its inability to manage the

country's economic crisis. However, the party maintained absolute hegemony in the political and economic spheres. For Ben Ali, who was a military and non-partisan member, the leadership of this party would give him access to the party's grassroots, rapprochement with the party's economic elite network, and most importantly, the political framework that would embrace his pro-democracy and human rights rhetoric and ensure his survival in power.

As a result, he immediately appointed a government with the same composition as Bourguiba's cabinet to reassure the PSD leaders and their economic allies that he was not a threat to their interests and political elite. Yet, Ben Ali also needed to eliminate the most challengers to his power. Thus, he placed Bourguiba under compulsory residence and arrested two ministers (Mohamed Sayah and Mansour Skhiri) and several party leaders close to Bourguiba.

With the absence of broad resistance from the party members, except the hardliners who resisted political and economic liberalization, transforming the party radically was a matter of time. To centralize his control over the ruling party, Ben Ali asserted his hegemony within and over the party as soon as he took office. (Murphy 1999, 169). Within two days after seizing power, he nominated himself as the chief of the ruling party, reducing the number of the political bureau and encircled himself with a team of devoted technocrats and advisers who were committed to economic reform (Dillman 1998).

The second major step was restoring public confidence in the ruling party. As a result, Ben Ali decided to rename and rejuvenate the party. The PSD became the Constitutional Democratic Rally (RCD). By renaming the party, Ben Ali emphasized the idea of starting a "new era" in which the party should be more open to all citizens. The next step was the rejuvenation of the party through the organization of an extraordinary congress, 'The Salvation Congress,' held on July 29, 30, and 31, 1988. The congress set the agenda for party's restructuring and recruitment policies and regime's political reform initiative. Among the significant outcomes of this congress were the official election of Ben Ali as the head of the

party, the reduction of the Politburo, again, to being under the dominance of interior or ex-military personnel (Murphy 1999, 170) close to Ben Ali, and the marginalization of the position of the hardliners within the central committee. At the end of the year, the party claimed that 80 per cent of the regional structures were renewed, 40% of the cadres were replaced, and the membership average age dropped to the mid-30s (Anderson 1991). Many new members were businessmen and big landowners ready to benefit from the increasing liberalization (King 2009).

By transforming the ruling party, Ben Ali expanded his grass-root, gaining massive popularity among the people on the street and the Tunisian intelligentsia (Anderson 1991), thus fortifying his political position and influence. This step will enable him to conduct comfortably, lately in the same year, the National Dialogue with the opposition groups, the trade union, and the national business association.

### **2.2.2. The National Pact**

Far from the framework of the political party, Ben Ali needed to bolster his legitimacy, gain wider acceptance for his coup, and incorporate more partners into his agenda. However, two main forces potentially threaten these ambitions: the Islamists and National Trade Union (UGTT). Despite welcoming Ben Ali's statement regarding political openness and reforms, they remained skeptical about the seriousness of these promises.

Starting from the fact that the banned MTI was staunchly opposed to Bourguiba's regime and that the confrontation between the state and this entity was about to brink the country into a civil war. Ben Ali sought to show sympathy for the Islamists in their opposition to Bourguiba's tyranny. Thus, he abolished the state court, which Bourguiba had used against the Islamists and others in the opposition following the 1984 bread riots, released over 600 political prisoners affiliated with MTI (Murphy 1999, 168; Kaboub 2011, 60), and invited exiled opposition leaders, who had been tried in absentia, ...to return with promises that cases would be reviewed with great understanding. By doing so, Ben Ali gave the Islamists hope and reassurance that a wave of national reconciliation and democratization was about to begin.

The second force that Ben Ali had to deal with was the (UGTT). Since the 1970s, this organization has been the prominent and most substantial social opposition group. It was the first to organize a general strike in the country in 1978 against Bourguiba's economic policies and the deterioration of the economic conditions. Yet, the strike escalated from a mere protest against the economic conditions to demands for democracy and political reforms. Soon clashes between the police and the demonstrators emerged and challenged the ruling party's efficiency and legitimacy. Therefore, in order to alleviate these tensions, Bourguiba announced the 1981 multiparty elections. Thus, for Ben Ali to ensure a smooth implementation of the economic and political reforms, coopting this organization into a broad political consensus, as a first step, seemed crucial for the stability and survival of his new regime. To reassure the organization, Ben Ali ordered a prison release for several prominent figures, among which the UGTT leader Habib Achour (Murphy 1999, 168).

Furthermore, to demonstrate his seriousness to all political actors, Ben Ali announced the amendment of the constitution and the restriction of the president's office to two consecutive terms (Murphy 1999, 172; Sadiki 2002, 135). Thus, a constitutional committee was established to conduct the needed legislation. On the other hand, on 3 May 1988, he approved a new law that set the ground for the institutionalization of the multiparty political system. However, in an attempt to shut out the Islamist challenge, the law prohibited all parties from being based on race, religion, language, or region (Murphy 1999, 172).

Within this context and vision, Ben Ali called the authorized political parties, the representatives of national organizations, and a representative of the MTI (Rached Ghannouchi) to join the national dialogue to come out with a 'consensual' agenda regarding the new political framework.

The national dialogue, known as the National Pact, was formulated around four topics: state identity, political system, economic development strategy and foreign relations. The first one focused on the Arabo-Islamic identity of the state and

population. This point enabled Ben Ali to distinguish himself from Bourguiba's vision of the state, where the Arab and Islamic heritage were marginalized, and to build the image of the leader who revived the Arabic and Islamic pride identity in the country (Anderson 1991). The second topic emphasized the idea of democratic pluralism, the separation of the RCD from the state, the end of single-party rule, and the personalization of the political realm. It also acknowledged the sovereignty of the people who will choose its representatives in free, periodic, and regular elections and ensured the neutrality of military forces. Meanwhile, the third section called for consolidating democracy through developing social and economic conditions.

The National Pact was broadly accepted, and the 16 political organizations and parties<sup>3</sup> that joined the discussions signed the National Pact and became bound to foster national stability, interest, and democratic reforms (Kaboub 2011, 60).

The 1988 National Pact was seen as Tunisia's answer to a transition through transactions that may "ride the leading edge of what many hoped would be a wave of democratic transitions in the region" (Sadiki 2002, 133). Theoretically, the transition through transaction guarantees a certain degree of stability and commits both the regime and the signatories to a continuous process of gradual de-authoritarianization. However, since the balance of power remains in favor of the regime, political reform often remains in its liberal form rather than democratization. Even with changes in the political system (new electoral law, constitutional amendment, multiparty system...), when the operationalization of these reforms threatens the authority of the system, the latter will always have the

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<sup>3</sup> The pact's final signatories included the RCD's recognized political parties, which were 6: The Tunisian Communist Party, the Mouvement des Democratres Socialiste (MDS), and many other smaller parties. One of these parties had been approved only in September. The 7th tolerated party was led by Ahmed Ben Salah, the former minister associated with the socialist policies of the 1960s. A representative of this party took part in the debates but did not sign the Pact. Many other organizations did the same: the Union of Industry; Commerce and Manufacturing, the national labor commission, the National Union of Women, the National Union of Farmers, the national union's engineers, lawyers, doctors and pharmacists and the League for the Defense of Human Rights. A participant associated with the Islamist movement formally signed the Pact on his behalf (Anderson 1991, 253).

ability to adjust the parameters of the political process and even reverse the wave. In the case of Tunisia, the fact that the National Pact was drafted unilaterally and held among unequal actors, it served as a vehicle that allowed Ben Ali to subdue those who are opposing his policies or those who are posing a future threat to his power behind a pleasant façade of democratization. As Anderson (1999) argued, despite the fact that the pact legitimizes political competition and pluralist democracy, it contained the seeds that could subvert the whole process of liberalization. Which was the case following the 1989 elections.

### **2.2.3. 1989 Legislative Elections**

After the transformation and revitalization of the ruling party and the gathering of political and social actors under the roof of the National Pact, securing electoral legitimacy was Ben Ali's next move. Thus, he announced his intention to hold presidential and legislative elections in April 1989.

In this regard, the MTI, which changed its name to Ennahda (the Renaissance) in light of the new party's law, applied for recognition as a legal party to have the right to run in the upcoming elections. The rejection of their application forced them to participate as independents which will deprive them of public funding for their electoral campaign.

Under the lack of economic resources and the winner-take-all electoral structure, Ennahda, the Democratic Socialists Movement (MDS), a party that was excluded by the PSD and then legalized in the 1981, along with other small opposition parties, formed an electoral alliance to defeat the RCD hegemony. Facing this challenge, the RCD used divide-and-rule tactics to keep the opposition off balance and hinder this alliance (King 2009; King 2003). It also focused on mobilizing its supporters to advocate the party's new image as a national and progressive party of consensus. In addition, benefiting from government's achievements related to structural adjustment program and economic stability, the RCD sought to expand and strengthen its support base by ensuring economic benefits for rent-seekers from the ongoing economic reform.

Despite these strategies, Ennahda was able to win a clear victory over the secular opposition parties<sup>4</sup>. The results were estimated at 30-60 percent of the votes, 14 percent of the nationwide votes and up to 25 percent in big cities, including Tunis (King 2003; Görmüş and Akçalı 2020; Kaboub 2011). The electoral success of Ennahda generated “a direct head-to-head of the RCD versus the Islamists” (Murphy 1999, 182), a situation that Ben Ali strove to avoid. Moreover, the election results reflected that despite the well-calculated measures of political openness and the expansion of the RCD social base to include the middle class, which constitutes the main base of Ennahda, the latter continued to be the only prominent political competitor to the RCD. To avoid sharing power with the Islamists and maintain the RCD dominance over the parliament, the electoral results were subject to falsification in favor of Ben Ali’s party. (Kaboub 2011, 72). However, although the regime broke its promises, Ennahda did not enter into a confrontation with the regime. It is noteworthy that this position did not stem from Ennahda’s intention to avoid direct clashes with the regime. It was in fact due to the dividedness within the party after the leadership problem between Ghannouchi and Sadak Chourou in 1988.

Given that Bourguiba’s political style generated social and political instabilities, conducting political reforms seemed the effective strategy for Ben Ali to absorb these tensions and revive confidence in the regime. However, the vertical relation used by Ben Ali in drafting the new political framework along with the weakness of the political parties limited the scope of reforms, consolidated the ruling party’s role in the state, and revived the conflict between the Islamists and the regime.

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<sup>4</sup> Other secular opposition parties included the Union Démocratique Unioniste (UDU), the Partie Social Libéral (PSL), the Rassemblement Socialiste Progressiste (RSP), and the Tunisian Communist party. However, none of these parties was able to generate popular support. The largest, the MDS, won less than 4 percent of the vote nationwide (Anderson 1990; King 2003, 31)

### **2.3. THE REGIME CONSOLIDATION AFTER THE 1989 ELECTIONS**

In the first three years of his presidency, Ben Ali pursued a more tolerant attitude toward Islamists and opposition groups. However, he worked to keep democratization in its controlled liberal stage. When the elections yielded unpleasant results for the regime, the latter was faced with two options; either to eliminate its rivals through the means of repression or to keep the liberalization process on track, since it is a prerequisite for economic assistance from the IMF and the WB. The regime, simply, chose both ways. By empowering his political and social control and strengthening his international relations, Ben Ali ensured a long-standing rule.

#### **2.3.1. The End of Honeymoon with the Islamists**

When it became clear that the regime will never allow the presence of any opposition that can present an alternative to his “consensual authoritarianism”, in King’s words, Ghannouchi decided to join the opposition but from abroad. On May 28, 1989, he left the country for Algeria to start a wave of radical criticism of the regime later. In this instance, for Ben Ali, “the honeymoon” with the Islamists came to an end (Kaboub 2011, 72), and a new chapter is about to be crafted regarding the regime-Ennahda relationship, as well as in the process of the democratization as a whole.

When Ghannouchi traveled to Algeria, he started criticizing the regime increasingly and harshly. From the regime's perspective, these criticisms encouraged violent demonstrations and activities and, thus, posed a threat to the country’s stability. As a response to these security threats, the regime launched an anti-extremist campaign through which he strengthened the links between the security apparatus and the RCD and reinforced the ruling party’s hegemony. In addition, a cabinet reshuffle was made in the early 1990s, in which Ben Ali placed his prominent supporters at the head of the interior and defense ministries. Therefore, backed by the security apparatus and RCD machinery, Ben Ali was ready to fight the extremists.

Meanwhile, the electoral victory of the FIS in Algeria's first openly contested elections and the defeat of the ruling Front de Libération National (FLN) in local elections in 1990 and subsequently in legislative elections in 1991 caused a regional and international shock. For Ben Ali, they were legitimizing the Islamist opposition or granting it a chance at political activity (Murphy 1999, 194) was no longer in question. He even went further with his fears by imposing censorship and blocking media reports regarding the FIS victories. As a result, the tensions between the regime and Islamists increased. With the latter constantly criticizing the state and calling "for a repetition of the splendid Algerian intifada of 1988" (Murphy 1999, 194), the regime launched a campaign of arrests and imprisonment.

Internationally, due to Algeria's colonial history and its deep relationship with the Soviet Union during the Cold War era, anti-Western rhetoric dominated the street during the electoral campaign. Hence, the victory of the FIS has raised fears that liberalization will bring the West-unfriendly Islamists to power, which, according to the international actors, would put democracy to end (Durac and Cavatorta 2015, 66). In sharp contrast with their pro-democracy discourse adopted in the post-Cold War period, the US and EU, particularly France, were either salient actors in the military coup in early 1992 or silent about it. Thus, the civil war (1992-2002) took place by favoring and supporting authoritarian stability in Algeria. The war caused the loss of 100,000 lives and reshaped the whole pattern of democratization in the region. As for Tunisia, with increasing domestic and regional threats, the country's stability has been crucial to the U.S. to ensure the Maghreb stability. Thus, preventing a similar Tunisia scenario was a sufficient incentive for the US to maintain its military assistance and regime support.

On the other side, the 1991 invasion of Kuwait and the intervention of the US forces led to the emergence of popular regional support for Saddam Hussein and widespread hostility to the US. Islamists in Tunisia, as in Algeria, were leading the demonstrations and protests denouncing the US invasion of Iraq, which facilitated the strengthening of their foreign policy's legitimacy (Durac and Cavatorta 2015,

249). As the Tunisian regime kept a pro-US stance, the demonstration evolved to condemn the government's position and demand for a political severe opening.

What occurred in Algeria and Iraq illustrated the interplay between the internal and external dimensions and how these interactions have long-standing effects on authoritarianism persistence and survival in the region and produced two interconnected outcomes. The first was related to external actors' policies regarding promoting democracy. The Fear of the rise of Islamists to power and the possible expansion of anti-western rhetoric drove the US to reinforce its relations with the region's authoritarian regimes. The second outcome was that these events provided a suitable pretext for Arab rulers to suspend reforms or settle for façade reforms that would ensure their grip on power without fear of international pressure. More than that, they could justify their resorting to pressure from the international community.

Hence, the regime was unwilling to step back once given the complete legitimacy to handle the Islamist opposition issue (Murphy 1999, 193). Within two years, it succeeded in tearing down the organizational structure of Ennahda and sustaining his seat at the top of the pile.

### **2.3.2. The Establishment of Loyal Opposition**

Having successfully eliminated his prominent opponent, Ennahda, Ben Ali faced the need to pursue liberalization reform. With social and economic challenges deriving from the first round of economic liberalization programs (1987–1991), the regime needed to implement additional institutional reforms. In this context, ensuring a broad political consensus was required to include the secular legal opposition in his political and economic agenda. To achieve this goal, Ben Ali renewed the National Pact. He invited the six permitted parties to discuss the Eight (1992-6) Development Plan and to support the economic reform process by unifying them with the UTICA in the form of CSP, Conseil Supérieur du Plan (Murphy 1999, 209). Yet, after crushing Ennahda, the opposition became uncomfortable cooperating with the regime. To reassure them, the latter pledged,

as a second step, to provide 50 000 dinars to each party as financial aid to help them reinforce their parties and expand their media coverage. Despite these attempts, the legal opposition boycotted the by-elections in 1991 and demanded the electoral law amendment to widen their representativity.

Consequently, and to reconcile with the opposition, Ben Ali asserted, in July 1993, his commitment to hold multi-party elections and announced his intention to reform the electoral law. As a result, he increased the number of seats in the National Assembly from 144 to 163 and allocated the new 19 seats to the opposition based on a proportional representation, which meant that the seats would be divided between them according to the percentage obtained in the national votes, and the remaining seats would be allocated based on the winner-take-all system, which almost guarantees the majority for the RCD (King 2003, 32; Murphy 1999, 211-2).

Although the quota system was introduced to give the weak but 'loyal' opposition a minor role in public affairs (Sadiki 2002), opposition parties accepted the deal and contested the 1994 parliamentary elections. These elections were a noteworthy event. For the first time in Tunisian political history, opposition parties are represented in the National Assembly. The 19 allocated seats were vested to four opposition parties. The MDS has ten seats, the Movement for Renewal 4 seats, the Unionist Democratic Union (UDU) 3 seats, and the Party of Union People (PUP) 2 seats (King 2003; Sadiki 2002). In the presidential elections, the opposition parties' structural, organizational, and financial weaknesses, along with their dividedness, prevented them from presenting a presidential candidate to challenge Ben Ali. Thus, they were 'obliged' to endorse the president's candidature for re-election (Murphy 1999, 212). As a result, Ben Ali won the 1994 elections with 99% of the national vote, marking his second term as president.

Through co-opting the opposition into his political and economic agenda and through a "tailored" electoral law, Ben Ali was able to promote internally and internationally the idea that Tunisia was undergoing political severe liberalization. However, it is evident that the regime was tightly controlling the political realm and

that the electoral reform was no more than just an introduction of a simulated proportionality, which allowed “the minor parties who owe their political survival to Bin Ali” (Sadiki 2002) to be part of his democratic façade.

### **2.3.3. The Subordination of the UGTT**

After the retirement of Habib Achour and Abdelaziz Bouraoui, in 1989, from the UGTT leadership, the organization held an extraordinary congress to elect a new leader. The winning of the less militant wing, led by Ismail Sahbani, marked the shift in the organization-government relationship. Although economic reforms will negatively affect the working class and promote business class interests, the new leader determined that a cooperative rather than conflictual attitude toward the government, (Murphy 1999, 187), is the best policy.

Over time, the UGTT shifted its focus away from political reform demands and began tending towards supporting the government's policies and financially co-opting the population (Kaboub 2011, 61). By 1993, the UGTT and the UTICA signed a three-year agreement with the government to limit wage hikes (Dillman 1998) and to support the neoliberal market-oriented policy.

As King cited, before signing the 1993 agreement, the UGTT president stated: “Our Union... has chosen in principle to adapt itself to global transformations by adopting methods of work and intervention... Today the union is trying to adapt to changes in the international economic system, the structural adjustment programs, the new world order, and the market economy. The task of meeting these challenges is the union's preoccupation” (King 2009, 450-1).

Under this statement, it became clear that the UGTT is no longer an independent body. His submission to the ruling party enables the government to bring about economic reform, despite the absence of solid opposition in society (Dillman 1998).

#### **2.3.4. The Socioeconomic Bases of the Exercise of Power**

From his first day in power, Ben Ali has adopted two strategies: restructuring the political system and completing the economic reform plans. Politically, Ben Ali was able to take advantage of the national and regional circumstances and international support in a way that increased his control over the political sphere. Economically, with macro-economic recovery and stability during 1987-91, a steady annual GDP growth rate near 5%, the country soon became a poster child for the successful SAP (King 2003) in the region. Yet, although this achievement, the unemployment rate kept increasing from 13.1% in 1984 to 15.6% in 1994 (INS 2008). In addition, the liquidation and privatization of government-owned enterprises generated vociferous opposition from the employees.

Aware of economic reforms' unpleasant social side effects, Ben Ali felt the need to maintain social stability to prevent political dangers. Accordingly, the regime has since the early-1990s launched unprecedented social welfare projects; the National Solidarity Fund (NSF), the Tunisian Solidarity Bank (BTS) in 1999, and the National Employment Fund (NEF) early in 2000.

Although originating from domestic social dynamics, these initiations were part of the international financial institutions' recommendations. As mentioned, after the failure of policies that only targeted macroeconomic reforms in developing countries, a social aspect of reforms became increasingly required. Therefore, social safety nets were institutionalized to promote the twin objectives of reducing poverty and increasing economic growth in developing countries. Hence, as part of the new logic of international monetary institutions, they prompted the Tunisian government to adjust its system of social protection in the period between 1986-2002 (Görmüş and Akçalı 2020).

With his ability to ride with the wave, social welfare programs helped Ben Ali achieve popular legitimacy, expand his grassroots base, and reinforce and maintain his power. For instance, the NSF, widely known as 26-26, a special fund aiming to alleviate poverty and enhance living conditions in the country's deprived zones by

the year 2000, was entirely managed by the RCD with a complete lack of transparency and data records. Fund financing was based on the principle of national solidarity and voluntary donation. However, alleged voluntary donations are often given under pressure (Hibou 2006, 199). As stated by Hibou, entrepreneurs have to contribute to the fund constantly and charitably to avoid tax investigations, restrictions from accessing public markets, and other sanctions. For ordinary citizens, the regime's pressure was manifested by harassment and administrative difficulties when issuing administrative documents. Simply put, the FNS was a façade of a “welfarist state” when it served as a tool to eliminate potential threats from social instability and strengthen the regime's control over society.

By setting new social schemes, Ben Ali deepened his legitimacy and redefining the social contract that indirectly states that the ruler provides stability and social and economic development while the governed accept regime coercion and limited political rights (Hibou 2006; El-said and Harrigan 2014, 117). Furthermore, such programs - rather than alleviating poverty and facilitating the incorporation of society into the market - reinforced people’s dependency on the state and deepened the political and economic monopoly of the ruling party.

### **2.3.5. Reinforcing International Ties**

The analysis of the persistence and consolidation of the Ben Ali regime is more comprehensive than the previously mentioned measures and dynamics. The international dimension also contributed to the perpetuation of authoritarianism in Tunisia. Consequently, aware that the regime may only succeed with international linkages and support, Ben Ali focused on expanding Tunisia's role in the region and its foreign allies.

From the outset of his reign, Ben Ali was keen to continue Bourguiba's policy regarding Maghreb unity. He stressed that Tunisia would do its best to bring the idea of Maghreb unity to life (Borowiec 1998, 86). However, given the unstable internal conditions of neighboring countries; The military coup and civil war in

Algeria, the monarchy in Morocco and the issue of Western Sahara, Gaddafi's "revolutionary" Libya and US sanctions on the country, and Mauritania on the fringes of all international activity (Borowiec 1998, 86), solidifying Maghreb Unity and economic ties between these countries was a challenging task. In this regard, in 1993, Tunisia shifted its focus from Africa to Europe and started emphasizing the significant economic ties with the EU.

The shift in this policy was due to two main factors, macroeconomic hardship at the domestic level and change in the EU policy regarding Southern Mediterranean countries. Internally, in addition to the social impacts of SAP's first phase, the economy was slowly and even reversely responding to these adjustments; the GDP decreased from 13.5% in 1992 to 12.7% in 1993. During this period, the government was driven to borrow to stimulate the economy, which deepened the country's current account deficit. In addition, since local production was lagging, the country's external trade deficit increased. The latter passed between \$1 billion and \$1.5 billion in the mid-80s to nearly \$2.5 billion between 1992 and 1993. The regime recognizes the need to think internationally in this context of macroeconomic difficulties.

The mid-1990s witnessed a change in the EU's approach toward its southern neighborhood. Following the events of Algeria, European countries stressed the need to play a more systemic part in the region's state to bypass the negative international spillovers from national events such as arms proliferation and migration movements, (Durac and Cavatorta 2015, 257-8). As a result, the EU initiated the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) policy known as the Barcelona Process. The logic behind this policy is that to promote democracy in the region; the EU mission should focus on enhancing economic conditions in the targeted countries via consolidating trade exchange opportunities. By doing so, domestic development and international security can be achieved. For Tunisia, this new policy framework presented a significant opportunity for additional financial assistance, trade, and a source for the regime to safeguard its international legitimacy. It was, therefore, no surprise that in 1995 Tunisia signed the European

Union Association Agreement and became the first South- Mediterranean country to do so. The agreement granted Europe a vital conditionality instrument (Schlumberger 2006, 39) and an acknowledgment that the Tunisian regime is committed to the democratization and economic liberalization processes.

By solidifying its linkages with the EU, Tunisia has further proved itself to be more compatible and reactive to its Euro-Mediterranean neighbors' developments (Sadiki 2002). Moreover, the approaching association with the European Union transformed the political economy of Tunisia toward a more export-oriented economy, giving it a privileged position on the European scene. Furthermore, the country continued expanding its economic ties with international actors; it became a WTO member in 1995 and had an economic alliance with Morocco, Egypt, and Jordan after signing bilateral agreements to lift tariffs, etc.

Consequently, by essentially reinforcing its international and regional economic ties and maintaining political and social stability, Ben Ali's regime gained a favored position within the international community. It deepened the belief, nationally and internationally, that there was no better alternative to his regime either economically or politically. This position was reflected in the 1999 election results, where Ben Ali won his third and, theoretically, final five-year presidential term with 99.4%. So how did all these achievements turn into a spark that ignited the 2010-2011 revolution?

## **2.4. THE REGIME POWER REGRESSION**

### **2.4.1. The 9/11 and the New Democratization Agenda**

Before the September 11 attacks, the EU and the US opted to preserve the region's existing status quo to prevent the side effects of liberalization. The 9/11 attacks, alongside with the attacks in London and Madrid have triggered an emerging sense of energy in the relationship between the EU, the US and the Middle East. It also generated a whole new political and policies' set dynamics. Accordingly, the MENA region's political system and dynamics were considered the primary threat source that needs to be treated to ensure European and American national security.

In light of these events, democracy promotion became a central policy for the US in their war on terror. A consensus appeared in the Bush administration that the US decades of support to authoritarian leaders in the Middle East did not grant stability; it instead fostered terrorism (Carner 2006) and that empowering democracy in the region was the best cure.

Accordingly, the US initiated several initiatives to reshape the MENA's grassroots through fostering the partnership of the US NGOs with local reformers. (Carner 2006). For instance, the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), launched in December 2002, aimed to push reforms in the economic field, encouraging Arab democrats and civil society to achieve political change, along with cultural and social objectives (Carner 2006; Durac and Cavatorta 2009; Powel 2009). Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, and other MENA countries were potential candidates for this program. Even if the program was not a "regime change" program, as the U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell announced, it has a prominent role in reshaping Tunisia's domestic actors' dynamics. For that approach also focused on shaping the social dimension. He counted the empowerment of civil society as part of his Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. Hence, they began to work on training and strengthening civil society about human rights and democratic principles.

On the security level and in the war on terror agenda, Ben Ali became a privileged ally for the US and EU. Since 9/11, the links between the US and Ben Ali's regime became more robust and more profound, and "the heavy-handed practices of Bin Ali" (Durac and Cavatorta 2009) became essential to eradicate the threats of terrorist groups. From 2002 to 2005, Tunisia obtained 74.8 million as security assistance from the US, exceeding the amounts it has from Morocco (66.9 million \$) and Algeria (\$5 million) combined. (Powel 2009). For the EU, the fact that Ben Ali succeeded in eliminating Islamist structure and threat, it kept mentioning human rights reforms and democracy among its medium-term objectives for Tunisia (Powel 2009). Once again, the security approach, which overshadowed the US and the EU policies, marginalized the question of political reform and thus contributed to preserving and strengthening the status quo to avoid the uncertainty and risks

arising from the democratization process. Yet, both actors kept pressing for more economic reforms and social programs.

Domestically, external actors' preferences reinforced Ben Ali's control over every aspect of life. On the human rights level, under the umbrella of the Anti-Terrorism Law, enacted in 2003, Ben Ali began conducting political trials for some of his opponents, restricting liberties and increasing arbitrary arrests and human rights violations. In its report regarding Tunisia, (Amnesty International 2006) cited that (a) 'Freedom of expression remained severely curtailed'; (b) 'Human rights defenders continued to face harassment and sometimes physical violence,' and (c) 'judges' activities and right to freedom of expression was further restricted' (Durac and Cavatorta 2009). On the political level, benefiting from the blessing of international actors has allowed Ben Ali to shape the political system more profoundly and keep his monopoly of power. In 2002, he was able, thanks to the RCD and National Organizations' support, to amend the constitution to ensure his remaining in force until 2014. On the economic level, during the second phase of the SAP, the frontiers between the economic and the political were increasingly blurred (Hibou, 2006). Ben Ali's inner circle of family and their wife, Leila Trabelsi, started controlling the governance of the economy. For instance, the Trabelsi-Ben Ali clan and its foreign and domestic allies benefited from the privatization of SOEs, sometimes at nominal prices. The other notable characteristic of the economy during this period is that for local or foreign investors to benefit from economic incentives and different opportunities, they must collaborate and work with the regime's inner circle. Otherwise, they will be subjected to the disciplinary power - and even policing - of the Tunisian political system. These practices allowed the Ben Ali-Trabelsi clan to control almost 50% of the business sector in Tunisia (Murphy 2011, 300). Most of them were in critical sectors, telecommunications, energy, banking, agriculture, import-export, real estate, and tourism. Accordingly, internally and externally, with a strong security apparatus at his disposal, a hegemonic political party, and a vast network of

economic elites, Ben Ali “seemed untouchable” (Murphy 2011, 299). So how will the regime's power regress?

#### **2.4.2. External-Internal Interactions and the End of the Ben Ali Regime**

The amalgamation of economic and political powers in the hands of Ben Ali’s government and its inner circle affected how the economy operated and triggered social discontent, which paved the way for the reinforcement of the opposite stance.

On the socioeconomic side, to avoid paying enormous bribes or taxes imposed randomly, businesses chose to work in the informal sector (Pfeifer 2016). Consequently, the latter went from 12% of GDP in 1995 to 29% in 2009. This led the government to reduce its investment share and–furthered the dependency of Tunisia’s job creation on FDI, workers' remittances and tourism (Kaboub 2011, 66). As a result, the unemployment rate, mainly among university graduates, kept growing from 8.6% in 1999, 13.5% in 2005 to 19.0% in 2007. The 2008 financial crisis exacerbated this situation. The crisis generated a decline in FDI flows, tourism proceeds, and workers’ remittances, which were Tunisia's job creation pillars.

Furthermore, in the same year, the economic situation has been worsened due to local factors. When the Compagnie des Phosphates de Gafsa (CPG), a state-owned company and the world's fifth largest phosphate company, announced the recruitment contest results, It was clear that the available places were attributed to people close to the RCD in the region. As an immediate consequence of growing local corruption and dissatisfaction with the region's economic and social conditions, the “Hunger Intifada” broke out in Gafsa. The demonstrations, which lasted for five months and gained a broad social scope (students, unemployed people, workers, and civil servants with the complete absence of the UGTT), were met with intense use of repressive power, resulting in the murder of two young protesters by the forces of security, and the detain of more than 200 pacific demonstrators (Kaboub 2011, 63).

Politically, the early 2000s witnessed the emergence of a ‘genuine’ opposition voice as a reaction to the Anti-Terrorism Law. In addition to the exiled and released members of Ennahda, secular parties such as the CPR, Congr s pour la Republique, established in 2001 by the human rights activist Moncef Marzouki, the Parti Democrate Progressiste (PDP)- founded by Nejiib Chebbi in 1983 (legalized in 1988), the leftist party Ettakatol (called initially the Forum Democratique pour le Travail et les Libert s) created by Mustapha Ben Jafaar in 1994, and the communist party of workers (PCOT) led by Hamma Hammami, became more active in revealing the regime’s authoritarian and corrupt practices, and human rights infringements. These forces, except for Ettakatol, united under “the October 18 Movement for Rights and Freedoms” on October 18, 2005, to end the authoritarian rule of Ben Ali. The agitations in Gafsa and the predatory behavior of Ben Ali enabled the opposition groups to grow stronger and fostered their interconnectedness (Pfeifer 2016) and attracted the attention of international actors.

Internationally, the increasing authoritarian behavior of the regime and the growing dominance of Ben Ali’s clan over the country’s economic resources created a broad consensus among Western diplomats that the government needs to start political severe reform. As Marzo 2020 cited, in 2004, Bush urged Ben Ali to undertake several political and economic measures to liberalize the country, suggesting a strict timeline. In return, the US will deepen economic cooperation with Tunisia. Yet, the official Tunisian answer was negative; Ben Ali refused to release power and rejected the political offer (Marzo 2020, 84). In light of this event, it became clear that the regime and its allies were out of the reach of any pressures of international democratization (Hochman 2007). Hence, with the presence of US-friendly opposition groups and the absence of any US security rival in the country, the US decided to drop Ben Ali from power by supporting opposition groups.

Suddenly, the Tunisian regime became a subject of international organizations’ criticism. For instance, the IMF and the WB, which had previously praised Ben

Ali's economic miracle<sup>5</sup>, pointed out the existence of social tension and the need for an open and diverse civil society to contain the potential risks. In addition, several think tanks, US Non-Governmental Organizations, Human Right Associations, and advocacy networks started to visit Tunisia frequently in order to observe the situation and connect with local activists (Marzo 2020, 84). For the opposition, this shift in the US-regime relation presented a glimpse of hope. Ennahdha, which was promoting its new image as a moderate and democratic body, along with the other opposition forces, worked to influence and convince the US administration of their readiness to rule the country without threatening regional security. As a result, in late 2005, after establishing the 18 October movement, the contact between the local opposition and the US administration increased. Lately, in 2006, both the US and the EU acknowledged that there were still unresolved problems with Tunisia's democracy (Powel 2009).

Variations in internal dynamics, the social unrest, and the unified opposition body, as well as the shifting stance of international actors towards the regime, were clear messages to Ben Ali that his authority was under threat. The regime responded with intense repression of dissent, imposing further restrictions on freedom of expression and 'improving' mechanisms for electoral fraud to ensure the integrity of the 2009 elections. On the international level, Ben Ali's relationship with the US decayed between 2008 and 2010 (Marzo 2020, 91), Washington has escalated pressure on Ben Ali to hold the upcoming elections in a fully competitive manner or to withdraw from power while Ben Ali did not budge. In November 2009, Ben Ali was re-elected for a fifth term by an overwhelming (albeit entirely fraudulent) 89.4 %, and the RCD kept its dominance within parliament. Washington sustained from sending the usual presidential congratulatory message, (Marzo 2020, 92), increased its

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<sup>5</sup> In 1996, the IMF stated that Tunisia, despite the unfavorable regional context, was able to implement economic reforms, integrate into the global market and achieve stable economic growth. Not only this, in 1999 the IMF recognized that the careful and consistent macroeconomic policy management of the Tunisian authorities had been a crucial element in attaining good results (Görmüş and Akçalı 2020). A few weeks before the revolution, the World Bank (2010) cited that Tunisia has achieved outstanding progress in attaining equitable growth, easing poverty, and improving social indicators...and Tunisia is far ahead in terms of the rule of law, government effectiveness, prevention of corruption, and regulatory quality (Kaboub 2011, 57).

support for the 18 October movement and the national economic elites affected by the financial tyranny of the Ben Ali's clan and intensified its collaboration with the high-ranked military officers.

Meanwhile, the social and economic situation of the middle class was steadily deteriorating, especially in interior regions, while the trading empire of Trabelsi Ben Ali was thriving. On the other hand, the WikiLeaks papers increased social discontent and the regime's legitimacy crisis and provided evidence that Washington was seriously abandoning Ben Ali. Consequently, his overthrow was only a matter of time. The combination of all these dynamics and factors weakened the regime and paved the way for the December 17-January 14, 2010-2011 revolution. Like the “bread revolution” in 1984, demands for economic reforms, embodied in the famous slogan “work, freedom and national dignity,” shifted with the increasing violence of the regime to demands calling for the departure of Ben Ali. The scope, diversity, and rapid expansion of the revolutionary movement and base were hard to handle the regime, even with its veteran experience in eliminating opposition voices. The grassroots popular revolution, on January 14, 2011, succeeded in toppling the 23-year-old Ben Ali's regime and opened the way for the democratic transition phase to occur.

This chapter sheds the light on the political liberalization's pattern in Tunisia. In its origin, the process resulted from a combination of internal and external pressures. The economic crisis during the Bourguiba's rule weakened the incumbent, increased international pressure for political and economic reforms, and allowed soft liners within the regime to seize power. In this regard, Ben Ali's ambition to stabilize, legitimize and consolidate his new regime made political and economic liberalization the best strategy. Yet, with increasing Islamist movement's threat internally and regionally, both Ben Ali's regime and international actors' policies prioritized security matters over democratization. This allowed ben Ali to eliminate his rivals and coopt social actors as well as other political parties while enjoying popular and international support. By upgrading his authoritarian system and increasing repressure and economic control, internal and external opposition grew.

When international actors' economic interests became unachievable due to the widespread corruption, clientalism, and economic monopolization, intense pressure emerged. However, since international pressure has rarely been sufficient to induce democratic change (Levitsky and Way 2005: 33), the US shifted gradually its support toward empowering the opposition and setting the ground for changing the regime. Although the international role was notable for changing the balance of power, it was the social component that decided the fate of Ben Ali's authoritarian rule.

**CHAPTER THREE**

**BUILDING DEMOCRACY: THE PATTERN OF  
DEMOCRATIC IN TUNISIA**

Although the departure of Ben Ali was a decisive step in toppling the authoritarian regime, the fact that the old elite remained in control of the political life made the chances of undertaking political reforms and initiating a serious democratic transition process uncertain and even dubious. The outcomes' ambiguity led to the persistence of mass mobilization and actors' conflict until the achievement of consensus over the initial terms of the democratic transition agenda. By embarking on building democratic institutions after the National Constituent Assembly elections, the political conflict never stopped rising. In addition, the major regional shifts triggered by the Tunisian revolution and later by the 2013 military coup in Egypt, revived regional and international actors' interests in the region and to a certain extent Tunisia. Accordingly, this chapter attempts to analyze these factors and actors, their interactions, and how they shaped the country's democratic transition phase.

**3.1. INTERIM GOVERNMENTS AND THE INITIAL TERMS OF  
DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION**

**3.1.1. Mohamed Ghannouchi's Interim Government**

In fact, well-established state institutions secured the first phase of the transition from turbulence and failure (Abd el Mula 2013). This was so clear a day after Ben Ali fled. Based on article 57 of the constitution, Fouad Mbazaa, the parliament speaker, was nominated as the president for the interim period. Two days later, Mohamed Ghannouchi, the RCD's prime minister and vice president, announced the establishment of the National Unity Government (NUG) to prepare the ground for presidential and legislative elections.

However, because former ruling party's members dominated the NUG with a modest presence of former opposition parties, PDP and Ettakatol, and the UGTT, a wave of demonstrations erupted opposing the composition of the interim government. Due to these demonstrations, Mustfa Ben Jaafer (Ettakatol) and the three ministers of the UGTT pulled out of the cabinet, and the first 'Unity Government' collapsed. After it resigned from the first interim government, the UGTT with leftist political parties formed a coalition, called the 14<sup>th</sup> January Front. The coalition called for carrying legislative and presidential elections within a maximum period of one year and excluding RCD members from the interim government.

On January 27 the interim Prime Minister announced the composition of the second interim government. This time, the weight old regime's figures were reduced (but not eliminated), and some of the former opposition parties (PDP and Renewal Party) and the UGTT were included with a ministerial portfolio for each of them. Yet, the interim government was reluctant to take a distance from the previous regime, overdue in elaborating a clear reforms schedule and setting a deadline for elections (Paciello 2011, 76). Hence, it failed to gain legitimacy. Consequently, the anti-government demonstration continued to occupy the street.

To alleviate the increasing popular pressure and prove the government's good intentions, a political liberalization attempt took place; several political parties were legalized, amnesty for political prisoners, restrictions on the Tunisian League for Human Rights were lifted, and the interim premiership announced a timeline of 6 months to hold the elections. Moreover, three national committees were established: 1) the Higher Committee for Political Reform, tasked to reform the constitution; 2) the National Fact-Finding Committee on Abuses and Violations to inquire into human rights violations by police forces during protests; and 3) the Anti-corruption National committee to investigate cases of corruption and bribery during Ben Ali's reign. On the other hand, the ministers affiliated with the RCD submitted their resignation from the party and the Interior Minister announced the suspension of the RCD activities. Nonetheless, no measures were taken to pull

down the old repressive security system that Ben Ali constructed to suppress and control Tunisians (Paciello 2011, 76).

These measures could not silence the street. The demonstrators considered the interim government's decisions as procrastination to circumvent the revolution. As a result, demonstrations and Kasbah 1 sit-in continued to demand the government's resignation and the election of a National Constituent Assembly (NCA). Yet, the government intervened to break up the sit-in aggressively. The government-demonstrators' pressure reached its climax when the security apparatus killed three people. This incident obliged Mohamed Ghannouchi and two ministers related to the Ben Ali regime to resign.

In the course of these events, a new political landscape was taking shape. To protect the revolution, the 14<sup>th</sup> January Front merged with other civil society organizations and opposition political parties, Ennahda and the CPR, to form the National Council for the Protection of the Revolution<sup>6</sup> (NCPR). The council aimed to oversee the interim government, approve its appointment, draft legislation related to the transitional period and review the established national committees. As the protests continued, the council gained legitimacy and became a key in pushing forward the political transition process during Beji Caid Essebsi's government.

### **3.1.2. Beji Caid Essebsi's Interim Government**

A new one under the leadership of Beji Caid Essebsi replaced the government of Mohamed Ghannouchi. Given his age and previous political life during the reign of Bourguiba and Ben Ali, his designation as the head of the interim government has been received with a high level of resistance and skepticism from Ennahda and young people. Thus, the country witnessed another round of demonstrations demanding an entirely new government formation.

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<sup>6</sup> The National Council for the Protection of the Revolution's foundation statement, in Arabic, may be seen in ANNEX 1.

To deal with these pressures, the interim president announced on March 3 that the Constituent Assembly election, a central demand by protesters and political forces, would be held on July 24, 2011. The assembly would be in charge of drafting a new constitution before holding presidential and legislative elections. Furthermore, shortly after the formation of the new government on March 7, Essebsi announced the dissolution of Ben Ali's security apparatus and the RCD, removing the former regime's institutional bases (Murphy 2013). A further significant event occurred; 1) the legalization of Ennahda on March 11, 2) and the merger of the NCPR with the commission for political reform to form the High Commission for the Fulfillment of Revolutionary Goals, Political Reform, and Democratic Transition (High Commission) on March 15. Establishing the High Commission, which comprised 155 members, was a serious step towards building national consensus and moving forward with the democratization process.

The outcome of these prolonged rounds of demonstrations, confrontations, and negotiations was the achievement of National Constituent Assembly (NCA) elections on October 23, 2011, that would enable political forces to start the institutionalization process despite the unstable regional environment.

### **3.2. THE EXTERNAL IMPACT OF THE TUNISIAN REVOLUTION**

The initiation of the democratic transition process in Tunisia by the withdrawal of Ben Ali and the establishment of an interim government generated a series of regional transformations highlighting the interconnection between the internal and external dimensions in triggering democratic transition. This section aims to grasp these interrelations by examining the regional impact generated by the Tunisian revolution and how these changes influenced the US and EU policies regarding the ongoing democratic transition in Tunisia.

### **3.2.1. The Contagion Effect of the Tunisian Revolution**

When the Tunisian revolution succeeded in toppling Ben Ali and showed the people's ability to transform the political regime in the country, an unintentional spread of the regime change idea within the MENA appeared.

A few days after Ben Ali's fleeing to Saudi Arabia, Egyptian civil society and opposition groups, on January 25, 2011, launched a mass demonstration of about 20,000 participants, calling for Mubarak's removal from power. Losing control over the widespread demonstration, Mubarak, on 11 February, resigned and transferred his authority to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF).

Events in Tunisia and Egypt showed how authoritarian leaders could be removed, sparking similar demonstrations in other countries in the MENA. On 15 February, Libya joined the anti-government movements. Protests against Gaddafi took place. However, unlike in Tunisia and Egypt, the protests in Libya turned into an armed confrontation between the regime and the opposition leading to the military intervention of NATO. After months of civil war, which cost tens of thousands of lives, the regime cracked, and Gaddafi was murdered on 20 October 2011. In Yemen, protests erupted as small-scale demonstrations demanded President Ali Saleh's removal on 14 January 2011. A month later, after Mubarak's fall, protests grew, led by a new group of youth and civil society activists (Dalacoura 2012; Sarker 2014). The demonstrations were met with an increasing coercive attitude by Salah's security apparatus. In November 2011 and light of the Gulf agreement, Salah agreed to transfer power to the government of National Unity, and on February 25, 2012, Salah's reign officially ended. In Syria, the situation was different. Mass demonstrations started in March and were harshly met by the regime. The regime's reaction initiated a vicious cycle of repression and further anti-government protests that ended in a civil war. Furthermore, the famous upheaval wave reached Gulf countries. In Bahrain, where the Sunni and Shiite polarization is high, the regime backed by Gulf Cooperation Council forces, mainly Saudi

Arabia, was able to put down the demonstrations within a month and announced a state of emergency.

In all these cases, Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Syria, and Bahrain, mass demonstrations either generated the withdrawal of the head of the regime or deepened internal fractions and external influence. In other MENA countries which learned how to avoid dangers and overcome difficulties (Huntington 1991, 101), rulers announced a bunch of political reforms, as in Morocco, Jordan, and Algeria. Meanwhile, in Saudi Arabia, the regime combined social and security measures; promoted social welfare spending and adopted renewed oppression (Dalacoura 2012).

The embarking on democratic transition in Tunisia, Egypt, and Yemen, the internal fraction in Libya, the civil war in Syria, the semi-democratic evolution in Algeria, Morocco and Jordan and the resilience of the Gulf countries' regimes are the internal outcomes of the widespread mass mobilization. The impact of these successive events was not only limited to their local consequences, but also extended to shape the international actors' attitude regarding Tunisia's democratic transition experience.

### **3.2.2 External Actors' Response**

The events in the Arab world had different effects on Western policies... the country's ties with Western powers, the country's geopolitical position, economic resources, and the nature of local actors, along with other elements, shaped the way foreign powers interacted with ongoing events. Therefore, to understand the global impact on the democratic transition pattern in Tunisia, it is substantial to understand the critical elements of the EU and US foreign policies toward the region first and Tunisia next.

The MENA and US and EU policies have always been drafted around security and political and economic interests. Security interests refer to the potential risks coming from the region's instability, such as the strengthening of terrorist groups,

the spread of weapons, and illegal immigration from geographical proximity to Europe. Political interests are mainly the political orientations of the elite towards the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and other regional rival, mainly Iran. While economic interests, a more critical issue, include secure access to energy resources along with increased exports of the EU to regional markets (Turan 2018). Thus, as long as the new elite will not jeopardize any of these interests, keep radical Islamist movements under control, ensure a safe and liberal economic environment, control illegal immigrants' flows, and at least keep a neutral distance from the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, then democracy will be welcomed, promoted, and enhanced. Based on this background, the EU and the US formulated their stances and policies regarding the ongoing regional reconfiguration.

In relation to Tunisia, the spark of this whole regional reconfiguration, the international focus was separate from its geopolitical importance, as the case for Egypt or Libya. For the EU and US, Tunisia is the best model in the region to undergo a successful democratic transition. If this experience fails, it would generate dreadful implications for other countries such as Egypt, Libya (Arieff 2011), and even Algeria. Ensuring Tunisia's stability means keeping economic exchanges with Euro-zone, lowering the risks related to illegal migrations, and, most importantly, preventing another political upheaval in Algeria and therefore keeping the flow of energy supply to Europe and the US- Algerian military cooperation<sup>7</sup>. In addition, with the escalation of armed clashes and establishment of the "Islamic State in the Islamic Maghreb" in Libya, supporting the process of democratic transition and institutional building in Tunisia would end the state of uncertainty and thus ensure state institutions' normal functioning which would facilitate effective control of the terrorist threats coming from the south.

From this perspective, supporting stability and a smooth transition in Tunisia were common objectives for the US and the EU. Accordingly, the US administration and

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<sup>7</sup> Both US and EU are conscious about Algeria's strategic importance in terms of the Sahel's security situation, the EU energy security, and the very big economic opportunities in a country at the heart of the Maghreb, and whose the integration of its economy is disabled by the conflict and the Western Sahara (Ghettas 2011).

policymakers, who empowered opposition groups during the Ben Ali era, quickly announced their support to Tunisian demonstrators in toppling the authoritarian regime and paving the way to democracy building. Although the Tunisian revolution coincided with a budget cut in the US, the Obama administration has pledged over \$33 million fund to support, through the channel of NGOs, Tunisia's political transition, economic reforms, and medium and small businesses in addition to humanitarian aid for refugees coming from Libya to Tunisia. Furthermore, the US foreign policy towards Tunisia witnessed a shift in logic. During Ben Ali's rule, the US interests in the country were mainly of a security dimension; after the revolution, the US enlarged its interference domain to include political and economic spheres. Thus engaging actively in promoting democracy in Tunisia is merely a "means of advancing American standing in the region and other material benefits" (Sadiki 2009, 18).

The EU's stance was slightly different from that of the US, mainly at the beginning of the revolution. While the US quickly supported the revolutionary movement, the EU after some initial confusion, sided with the demonstrators and issued several statements urging Ben Ali to step down. For instance, France, the prominent foreign actor in Tunisia, supported Ben Ali by assisting his security apparatus to 'effectively' contain the tide of protests<sup>8</sup>. Yet, since the relationship between Tunisia and France is based on economic and security interests, France asserted, immediately after the fall of Ben Ali, that Tunisia was and remained an important trading partner and stressed the need to cooperate to conserve security and economic stability. Accordingly, France announced the allocation of €350 million as financial assistance. Similarly, after Ben Ali's withdrawal, the EU declared its support by sending its High Representatives to Tunisia (Malmvig and Markus Lassen 2013). Moreover, it promptly granted emergency funds to the country and accelerated the ongoing review of the EU's Neighborhood Policy (ENP) to define

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<sup>8</sup> Michele Alliot-Marie, the Former Minister of the Armed Forces of France, suggested sending French police to assist the Tunisian police in "restoring order," because the French were qualified in dealing with security situations of this type (Dailymotion 2011).

the new different economic and technical measures to assist the country's democratic transition.

For the US and the EU, supporting Tunisia's democratic transition has become an important part of their security, economic, and political agendas. Hence, how will democratization support work, and how will it shape the nature of internal-external interactions?

### **3.2.3. Internal-External Interactions after Ben Ali's Regime Collapse**

Over 2011, the US and EU, along with internal actors, focused on properly preparing the ground for the Constituent Assembly's elections.

The legalization wave of political parties during Ghannouchi's second interim government generated a boom in the number of political parties. The latter achieved 124 parties, all of them competing in the NCA elections. Among these new parties were Ennahda, the CPR, and the PCOT. However, this advancement towards a multiparty system, the fractionalization and weak organization of most parties may hinder the progress of the democratic transition process. Only a limited number of these parties have the financial and organizational abilities and a straightforward political program to run for the constituent elections. Accordingly, providing financial support and training programs for civil society and political parties became the main orientations of the prominent international actors in the country. On the ground, the legalized and new political parties acknowledged their need for more expertise and financial resources. Thus, all of them, without exception, welcomed foreign economic and technical contributions and collaborated actively with international donors/organizations. As Marzo (2019) mentioned. Many transitional elites, including moderate Islamists, embraced international democratic promoters and their agenda.

The external-internal interactions have affected, directly and indirectly, local players' internal dynamics and attitudes, mirrored the US-EU competition through local actors that each side supports.

The US's International Organizations such as Freedom House, MEPI, and the National Democratic Institute (NDI), worked on enhancing political parties' technical skills in formulating their electoral programs to meet the needs of citizens, setting up electoral lists, and drafting communication and advocacy strategies. On the other side, the EU focused on financially supporting and developing civil society to be an active actor in observing the 2011 elections and safeguarding the transitional process. To achieve this aim, the EU, during the 2011-2012, allocated €390 million. After the elections, the EU engaged in the political realm through the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), which offered technical assistance to political parties.

Although these two actors initially focused on preparing the ground for the 23 October 2011 elections to end the uncertainty and instability, each actor worked on strengthening his political role by supporting different and rival actors. In this regard, the US government was perceived as biased toward Ennahda. In contrast, the European governments and donor agencies were seen as leaning towards Nidaa Tounes, a new political party that will be created during the transitional phase (Kausch 2013). These preferences will lately influence the domestic political dynamics and, thus the course of the democratic transition.

### **3.3. INSTITUTIONALIZING DEMOCRACY IN TUNISIA**

Building democracy is more challenging than dismantling authoritarianism, as the outcome of transitional processes can be affected by the political leaders' choices, preferences, and leadership abilities (Mainwaring 1992). This was true for the Tunisian case, as the battle to define the new rules of the game made the democratic transition a stage of political conflict, whether between the new elites and those affiliated with the old regime or between the new elites themselves. In addition, the assassinations of Chokri Belaid and Mohamed Brahmi in 2013 led to a deep political crisis and polarization. On 3 July 2013, the military coup in Egypt added a regional dimension to the domestic turmoil. These forces and factors made the

constitutional drafting a slow, complex, and confrontational process and modeled the way democracy has been institutionalized.

### **3.3.1. The Constituent Assembly's Elections and Political Dynamics**

The election of the constituent assembly on October 23, 2011, marked the starting point of the institutionalization stage of democracy. The election was broadly perceived as well-conducted, fair, and transparent (Arieff 2011). The elections resulted in choosing 217 members for the NCA to govern the country and draft the new constitution within one year. However, this duration has been extended due to political conflict, disagreement, and security and governance challenges.

The NCA encompassed 20 different political parties. Ennahda won first place with 89 of the seats in the NCA, followed by the CPR with 29 seats, Ettakatol with 20 seats, the Pétition Populaire Pour la Liberté, la Justice et le Développement (PP), known as Al Aridha Al Chaabia, with 18 seats, and the (PDP) received 16 seats (The Carter Center 2011, 53). The absence of a party with an absolute majority, due to the proportional electoral formula, prompted political parties to build a government and constituent coalition. In addition, the multiparty training programs initiated by the US organizations encouraged the agreement over competitive politics and pluralistic practices (Marzo 2019) and temporarily lowered ideological tensions between the major political parties. Consequently, the consociationalism approach was quickly applied after the elections. Ennahda, which announced its collaborative intentions before NCA elections, formed a coalition government widely known as the Troïka, with two secular center-left parties; the CPR and Ettakatol. Due to this alliance, legislative and executive powers were shared between these three parties. The leader of the CPR, Moncef Marzouk, was elected as interim president, Ettakatol's leader, Mustafa ben Jaafar, was selected as the speaker of the NCA, and Hammadi Jebali, the secretary general of Ennahda, was appointed by Moncef Marzouki as the prime minister.

The Troika coalition aroused high resentment among other secular forces. Consequently, and to 'counter the hegemony of Ennahdha and create a political

balance,' Beji Caied Essebsi, the former prime minister in the interim government, appealed to national political and intellectual forces that reject extremism and violence and are involved in the historical reform process, to gather their material and moral energy around an alternative that enhances political balance and ensures the activation of mechanisms for calm deliberation that without which democracy is not feasible<sup>9</sup>. The return of Essebsi to the political scene and his intention to play a prominent role in the democratic transition process presented an opportunity for former Ben Ali loyalists and the bourgeoisie to be part of his initiative. As a result, 'national political and intellectual forces' answered Beji's call, organized themselves around his charismatic character and reputation, and established on June 16, 2012, Nidaa Tounes party (Call for Tunisia). The party united former RCD members, the economic elites of the old regime, human rights activists, members of the UGTT, and a wide range of ideological movements (Mansouri and Armeillei 2016).

Politically, the emergence of Nidaa Tounes created a polarized bilateral political scene. Ennahda met this step with solid opposition and considered that Nidaa Tounes is a restructuring of the RCD. The party even regarded it as more dangerous to the country than the Salafists<sup>10</sup>. At the level of the NCA, by convincing eleven deputies from different parties and orientations to break away from their original parliamentary blocs (Amira 2018), Nidaa Tounes was able to form a parliamentary bloc in the NCA and become a substantial player in the institutionalization of democracy in Tunisia.

To confront the bilateral polarization between the Troika and Nidaa Tounes and to protect the revolution's goals, the Popular Front was established on October 7, 2012. The front gathered 12 left-leaning parties issued from different schools of thought 1) Marxist Leninist schools such as; the Workers' Party (3 seats in the

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<sup>9</sup> For more details about the Essebsi initiative, the January 26 2011 statement is included in ANNEX 2.

<sup>10</sup> From 2011, The Salafists, a religious movement of Sunni Islam that calls for a return to Islamic law (shaaria) and practices that were prevalent at the time of the Prophet Mohammad, enlarged their grassroots and became more organized and violent.

NCA), the current of the PTPD, Movement of Democratic Patriots MOUPAD, the Democratic Patriots, Progressive Struggle Party - PLP 2) Trotskyist tradition such; as Workers' Left League – LGO 3) socialist-oriented party: People's Party for Freedom and Progress – PPLP 4) Pan-Arab Marxist Unionist Popular Front, 5) Nasserite Arab nationalist: People's Movement (2 seats in the NCA), 6) Baathist Arab Nationalist: Bath Movement and the party of the Arab and Democratic Vanguard – PAGAD (1 seat in the NCA), and 7) Environmental party; the Green Tunisia (Baron 2012), in addition to associations and independent figures.

Externally, the victory of Ennahda was met with anxiety from the EU. In its 2007-2013 Regional Strategy Paper for the Mediterranean, the EU considered political Islam as a threat to its strategic ambitions in both economic (trade, energy, migration) and political (security, stability) terms (Powel 2009). Accordingly, the victory of an Islamic party must be addressed by supporting the opposition group, mainly Nidaa Tounes, which carries ‘the spirit of modernity.’ For the United States, the Islamists' victory in Tunisia was not a cause for concern. The historical ties that developed between the Islamists and the US administration under Ben Ali facilitated the building of common ground and ensured the US that the Islamists in Tunisia adhered to liberal economic and political terms and held a Western-friendly ideology. Accordingly, supporting the Islamists in building democracy will accelerate the end of the uncertainty phase and enhance the role of the US in North Africa. Each power offered extensive support and consultation to the constitutional draft process and widen its portfolio of assistance to encompass a more significant focus on institutional and capacity building on one hand and policy development on the other (Kausch 2013).

Although the EU and US were the significant players amid the revolution, the success in overthrowing Ben Ali and the NCA elections attracted the attention of new players; among them was Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and its ally, the United Arab Emirates (UAE). These actors were vying for influence among potential and different new partners. While Qatar supported Ennahda, the UAE and Saudi Arabia considered the Muslim Brotherhood, or MB-type parties’ ascendance as a common

threat. Accordingly, the gulf countries were intolerant regarding the MB influence (Khoury 2013). As a consequence, the democratic transition experience in Tunisia came under the spotlight of Gulf States like the UAE and Qatar.

The new domestic political landscape and international linkages will shape the internal political dynamics and profoundly affect the process of the democratic transition and constitutional drafting, particularly during 2013.

### **3.3.2 The Pattern of Constitutional Drafting**

The constitutional drafting process in the posttranslational period is crucial in determining the structure of political relations and most importantly, in establishing and allowing democratic functionality. Therefore, constitutional drafting presents a vital part in defining the new power-sharing logic, reconfiguring the political process, and can have far-reaching effects on the way the democratic system operates (Lijphart 1992; Shugart and Carey 1992). In Tunisia, the process of drafting the constitution was highly characterized by great tensions between the different political components in the NCA and within the Troika.

#### **3.3.2.1. The Consensus over the Government System**

Although the questions of the state identity and public and private freedoms, especially women's rights, have sparked widespread controversy within the assembly, the dispute over the government regime was the major issue that has led to schisms within the troika and even to a deadlock situation. The sensitivity in this matter was the origin of two factors. The first was related to the political history of the country. The presidential system in Tunisia persistently generated executive central supremacy over legislative (Murphy 2013). Bourguiba was "President for life" until Ben Ali overthrew him to reproduce the same tale later. Hence, drafting a constitution without these flaws has been the starting point of the democratization process in Tunisia. The second factor was related to the fact that the new constitution would determine how the power would be shared between the

legislative and executive branches. Therefore, each political actor sought to ensure that the new framework would function in his favor and guarantee his survival.

From this perspective, Ennahda, which evaluated that their chances of winning parliamentary elections exceeded those in presidential ones, supported the idea of a parliamentary system. The case was not the same for its allies and other political parties. Accordingly, they favored a semi-presidential system that preserves their chances of winning the presidency without securing a parliament majority. Achieving consensus over the government regime seemed unachievable until the assassination of Chokri Belaid on 06 February 2013. The event influenced the work of the government and assembly. On the government side, immediately after the assassination, the Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali announced his intention to conduct a cabinet reshuffle and form a technocratic government. Meanwhile, the opposition forces called for national demonstrations and strikes. Midst these demonstrations, demonstrators attacked the headquarters of the Ennahda in various states, and thousands demonstrated in front of the Ministry of the Interior, demanding the overthrow of the government (Al Jazeera 2013) and to form a technocratic one.

To alleviate these pressures, the Troika, after an arduous journey of negotiations<sup>11</sup>, announced in March, the formation of a new government which included members of the Troika and a large number of technocrats. Ali Laarayedh, the former interior minister, was nominated to the Prime Minister's office, and Ennahda conceded the ministries of defense, interior, foreign affairs, and Justice.

On the Assembly side, the Popular Front, Nidaa Tounes, and the Republican Party (Joumhourî) announced their withdrawal from the Assembly. For the Troika, ending the uncertainty and instability of the transitional phase became a common goal. In this vein, Marzouki launched a National Dialogue to resolve the issue of the government system. The dialogue took place from 15 April to 15 May 2013 and

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<sup>11</sup> During the negotiations, Ennahda refused to give up “the sovereignty ministries” and indicated its willingness to abandon its alliances within the troika if they adhere to this condition. It also began its consultations with other parties and assembly’s blocs to secure the alternative. On the other side, the CPR and Ettakatol adhered to their conditions regarding the ministerial reshuffle and threat to withdraw from the government.

gathered seven parties; Ennahda, Ettakatol, the CPR, the Republican Party, Democratic Alliance, Initiative Party, and Amen Party, it achieved its goal and resulted in a consensus on the semi-presidential system.

By choosing this system, the executive power will be distributed between the head of the government and the head of the state, and unlike the pre-revolution period, the president will have limited capabilities. Furthermore, the government will be accountable only to parliament, and the president-legislature relationship will be balanced through checks and balances mechanisms, such as impeachment and veto power, and institutions on top of it; the Constitutional Court. The latter, a new institution, will decide on contentious legal and constitutional issues and executive-legislative and intra-executive disagreements.

Achieving a consensus over the government system presented an essential step towards establishing democratic institutions. Yet, democratization, again, reached a deadlock in the wake of the military coup in Egypt and the assassination of Mohammed Brahmi. How these two events influenced the course of democratization, and how among all these turmoil and instabilities the democratic transition in Tunisia achieve its “exceptionalism<sup>12</sup>” status in the region?

### **3.3.2.2 The Destabilizing Effect of Egypt’s Coup**

As the Tunisian revolution influenced neighboring countries’ regimes, the country was also affected by the way events evolved in these countries. The military coup in Egypt intensified domestic political polarization and political instability in Tunisia. While the Troika condemned the coup, Nidaa Tounes and the Popular Front considered it the right move to righten the revolutionary course and end the Islamists rule, which didn’t succeed in maintaining the democratic transition (Jamaoui 2014).

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<sup>12</sup> After a period of political uncertainty, the Tunisian ‘transition’ has been recently characterised as an “exceptional success story” by Freedom House (Mansouri and Armeillei 2016).

External actors' neutral or supportive stances on the coup, as the US and UAE, respectively, offered the opposition in Tunisia a suitable environment and incentives to work on reproducing a similar outcome.

Both Nidaa Tounes and the Popular Front called for the overthrow of the troika government, the dissolution of the NCA, the formation of a National Salvation government supervised by technocrats with an urgent program to prepare the ground for the coming elections, and the construction of a committee to complete the drafting of the constitution (Jamaoui 2014). In the same vein and with the same approach, Tamarod Movement announced its establishment on July 3, 2013. This nascent movement was presented as the Tunisian version of the Egyptian Tamarod movement. The latter succeeded in leading the popular demonstrations nationwide and collecting 22 million signatures to withdraw confidence from Mohamed Morsi, which was used later by the army to legitimize the coup. Thus, aiming to achieve similar outcomes, Tamarod Movement in Tunisia collected one million and 700 thousand signatures to dissolve the NCA and overthrow the Troika government (Al Arabia 2013b). All these forces, along with other opposition parties and the losing parties in the October 23 elections, launched a National Dialogue among themselves. All participants considered that the government and the assembly had lost their legitimacy and called for the necessity of holding a national conference for salvation that includes various civil and political forces and would end the transitional phase (Jamaoui 2013).

During these events and after succeeding in Egypt, the UAE, pushed by the will of containing the spread of political Islam and democratization in the region, supported the anti-Ennahda protests of 2013 (Rakipoğlu 2020) and promised Nidaa Tounes party financial support in exchange for the reproduction of the Egyptian scenario (Nessma 2015) and removal of Ennahda from the political scene. Although Essebsi rejected to copy the Egyptian experience and declared his commitment to legitimate political competition means, he kept the UAE financial offer for the coming elections (UAE71 2021).

A cluster of anti-Islamist actors' soft and hard powers, limited Ennahda's maneuver margin (Marks 2016). Thus, to minimize the potential risks, Ennahdha reinforced its collaboration with its allies and the new government members. Strengthening this front has been crucial to confront the Tamarod movement, ensuring the survival of Ennahda, and to prevent the dramatic demonstration effect of Egypt's coup.

The challenges of the democratic transition phase continued and reached its climax after Mohamed Brahmi's assassination on July, 25, 2013. This puts the political actors between two choices "either compromise or risk chaos" (Yerkes and Ben Yahmed 2019b).

### **3.3.2.3 The Assassination of Brahmi and the Fate of Democratization**

The assassination of Mohamed Brahmi, the representative of the People's Movement in the assembly, on July 25, 2013, deepened the political crisis and instability. The event triggered the most significant wave of protests since the overthrow of Ben Ali (Al Jazeera 2016). It was the origin of a power-balance change in the political scene.

The Popular Front allied with Nidaa Tounes, Tamarod, several civil society organizations, and socialist and liberal parties to form the National Salvation Front (NSF) on July 26. Since its establishment, the coalition has called for the continuation of demonstrations and sit-ins at the headquarters of the NCA to force its dissolution and the downfall of the second troika government. The new Front, also the NSF, called for establishing another body to finish drafting the constitution in no more than two months, then put it to a popular referendum. It also called to establishing a National Salvation Government with a limited number, to set and supervise the upcoming elections, (Al Jazeera 2018; Nawaat 2013) though the NCA deputies scheduled to end within weeks of drafting the constitution and the electoral law. Moreover, the NSF took advantage of the Troika's weakness in the security field to escalate its pressure and increase its influence among the masses. It also sought to woo the military following the Egyptian example. However, the military institution maintained its neutrality. As an alternative the Front increased

its coordination with the UGTT, which sided with the opposition movement by pushing the pace of mass protests and strikes (Abbash, 2020, 197).

The strikes and protests led by the Tamarod Movement and its political allies continued for a month within the framework of the "departure (Arraheel) sit-in." Politically, the sit-in deepened the gap and polarization between the ruling and opposition forces, increased political violence, and hindered the Assembly's work due to the resignation of more than 70 deputies.

With the increasing political and popular pressures, the speaker of the Assembly, Ben Jaafer, announced on August 6, 2013, the suspension of the Assembly's works pending the resolution of the political deadlock. This decision created divisions within the troika and gave a new dimension to the ongoing political conflict. The CPR and Ennahdha refused this decision and considered it "the last step of the inversion path" (Al Arabia 2013a). With Ennahdha and the CPR clinging to electoral legitimacy and the opposition sticking to calls for dissolving the Assembly and bringing down the government, reaching a point of consensus seemed impossible. Thus, how this ample conflict will be contained?

### **3.4 The National Dialogue**

Achieving political stability became one of great importance, externally and internally. Externally, for both the EU and the US, the success of the Tunisian democratic transition was of central importance. The failure of Tunisia would have dire implications for EU national security and Algeria's strength, especially after the growing number of Islamist militants exploiting the chaos in neighboring Libya to obtain training and smuggle weapons across North Africa's porous borders. Thus, the US, contrary to its stance on Egypt's coup, decided to safeguard the democratization process in Tunisia and prevent the country from falling into chaos. In this vein, the US State Department indicated that its diplomats in Tunisia are in touch with actors over the political spectrum, including business leaders, social

activists, and politicians, encouraging them to settle their conflicts peacefully and, through dialogue, to construct a prosperous and safe future (Arieff and Humud 2014).

Internally, the operationalization of this goal was embodied by the US ambassador's invitation to both Rached Ghannouchi and Beji Caid Essebsi on August 12, 2013, to establish a bipartisan dialogue. Yet, this came without achieving any result. The polarization carried on. On August 13, the opposition organized one of its largest protests in front of parliament in Bardo Square. Around 40,000 participants called for the government's resignation and the Assembly's dissolution. On the same day, thousands of Islamists were protesting in support of Ennahda on Habib Bourguiba Avenue, just a few kilometers away (Reuters 2013). Fortunately, the protests did not turn into violent confrontations between rival demonstrators. Right after the end of its largest protest, the Salvation Front announced its 'escalators plan' to force the Ennahda government to leave (Bedhiafi 2013).

In light of the increasing tension and polarization, the EU was involved in the mediation between the religious and secular parties (Narbone 2020). On August 14, 2013, Ghannouchi and Essebsi met in Paris to seek a settlement. However, again, no common ground was achieved. On the contrary, the Paris meeting has been unaccepted by each party's followers, creating thus problems for both political leaders.

At this moment, the role of reputable national civil organizations became crucial in solving the problem. Consequently, the UGTT took the lead and imposed its control over events through the National Dialogue initiative. The initiative, launched on August 15, 2013, proposed a road map to end the ongoing stalemate through consensus between all political parties. The initiative called for setting a timetable for expediting the drafting of the constitution, ratifying the electoral law, and the formation of the electoral commission (Euchi 2014). Furthermore, it stipulated that

a technocratic one replace the troika government until the formation of the new elected government.

Yet, although the UGTT regained its political role during the revolution and later during the two interim governments, its position after the NCA elections were controversial. The Troika considered the UGTT responsible for the growth of sit-ins and strikes, which contributed to the economic disruption, burning of the state budget, and slowing of the transitional period (Jamaoui 2014). Additionally, the organization has been accused of being biased towards underrepresented secular parties within the NCA. Therefore, the existent confidence crisis led Ennahda to be initially reluctant to deal with the National Dialogue Initiative. After weeks of frequent meetings between the UGTT and Ennahda, the latter accepted to join the initiative with the condition of respecting the electoral legitimacy, in another word, keeping the Troika in office.

In this regard, Algeria, the strategic actor in North Africa, took the lead in resolving the crisis. For Algeria, Tunisia is a strategic corridor – an extension of its own East in the direction of Libya (International Crisis Group 2015, 19). Hence, a stable Tunisia provides strategic depth against a rising threat of transnational Jihadism using Libya as a base to destabilize the region (International Crisis Group 2015, 19).

In the first stance, via its ambassador in Tunisia, Algeria held several meetings with various political actors in Tunisia, such as Moncef Marzouki, Mustafa Ben Jafer, Rached Ghannouchi, Nidaa Tounes, the UGTT, and Hama Hammami the leader of Popular Front (Lahyani 2013), etc... in mid-September 2013. When the political crisis seems intractable, the Algerian president played the role of mediator between Ennahda and the opposition forces in Tunisia (Nadhif 2013) by inviting Ghannouchi and Essebsi to Algeria. These meetings are said to have been a turning point in Tunisia's National Dialogue (International Crisis Group 2015, 20).

The political crisis in Tunisia has evolved from a national political concern to a regional/international one. Thus, as Whitehead mentioned, once it becomes crucial

to face the international dimension, the strategic actors with central interactions to the transition course will start acting beyond the domestic logic, non-caring about their choices' external ramifications (Whitehead 2001, 19). From this perspective, and after a marathon of negotiating meetings between dialogue organizers, political parties, and social organizations, the National Dialogue began on October 5, 2013, to last until November 10, 2014. The dialogue led to the formation of a technocratic government led by Mehdi Jomaa on January 10, 2014, an anonymous vote on the constitution on January 26, 2014 (200 votes out of a total of 217 deputies), and fix October 23, 2014, as the date for legislative elections followed by presidential elections on November 28 (first round) and December 21, 2014 (second round). The National Dialogue ended months of political instability and uncertainty by achieving consensus between the political parties. Consequently, it laid the political foundations to make democracy possible, and completing the democratic transitional phase.

However, although the gains on the political level by achieving consensus and establishing the democratic institution, economic difficulties persisted. Following Ben Ali's oust, the economy was in shambles; foreign direct investments declined by 20%, and more than 80 foreign companies left the country ,(Achy 2011). Tourism activity, the largest provider of foreign currency, also dropped by more than 50%. Consequently, the GDP declined to achieve -1.9%, the unemployment rate achieved its highest level of 19.8%, in 2012 to stay at 17% in 2013, the inflation reached 5.8% in early 2012 (Chebbi 2017), and both current and financial account deficits increased.

Furthermore, the Tunisian economy was susceptible to geopolitical risk and economic policy uncertainty. The instability in Libya, Tunisia's first Arab and African financial partner, directly affected the Tunisian financial performance. The outbreak of armed conflict in Libya provided a suitable environment for radical groups in and out of Tunisia to grow and expand. This created an uncontrolled weapon flows activity which affected the security situation in Tunisia, consequently, the economic and investment environment. As a response, the Troika

decided to close the frontier with Libya to halt weapon flows and the joining of young people to armed groups. This decision negatively impacted the business of thousands of Tunisian economic institutions that have a direct trade relationships with Libya, and the informal economic sector, which was the pivotal activity in the interior and southern regions of Tunisia. Consequently, these regions have witnessed a decline in living conditions, dissatisfaction with the performance of the troika, and increasing demonstrations, which gained high support from the opposition to widen their grassroots movement and pressure on the Toika (Jamaoui 2014, 15).

In June 2013, by facing these economic challenges, Ali Laareyedh's government agreed with the IMF to a two-year, \$1.75 billion loan program designed to provide Tunisia with a financing cushion in case of an adverse shock. The IMF has since warned of growing fiscal strains and the slow pace of economic reforms, stating in October 2013 that Tunisia's urgent challenge was to preserve macroeconomic stability while continuing the reform agenda in a harsh political environment (Arieff and Humud 2014). However, since economic reform required a stable political climate, the successive political crises hindered governments' ability to uphold the reform agenda. Consequently, dissatisfaction with the economic situation kept rising. In a survey conducted by the (International Republican Institute 2013), 66%, on March 201, of interviewees considered that the economic situation ranged between somewhat bad (46%) and terrible (20%). However, in October 2013, 25% of interviewees described the economic situation as rather bad while 57% of interviewees defined it as very bad. Yet, since Tunisia's democracy was still enjoying its honeymoon period, social discontent about the economic situation and the political elite have not changed their preferences regarding democracy as the best political system. According to a poll released on 30 April 2013 by the Pew Research Center, 75 percent of respondents still preferred democracy as a means of solving the country's problems, with only 22 percent opting for a strong leader to do so (Alianak 2014, 54).

Indeed, democracy cannot flourish without economic and social development. The country's financial performance directly affects Tunisians' belief in the democratic system and the degree of their political participation and social cohesion. Thus, continuous failure to achieve economic and social development during the democracy consolidation phase may lead to severe social and political instability, further youth uprisings, labor revolts, or even a reversal towards an autocratic system (Kaboub 2011, 74).

The democratic transition phase was marked by internal and regional instability, which placed the stage at risk, deepened economic hardship, and consequently influenced public trust in political forces. Amidst this turmoil, Tunisia has completed its democratic transition thanks to internal and some external actors' interests in keeping the democratization process on track. Following the promulgation of the Constitution and the announcement of the next election dates the way toward consolidating democracy in Tunisia has begun.

**CHAPTER FOUR**  
**DEMOCRACY IN TUNISIA: THE WAY TOWARD**  
**CONSOLIDATION?**

The legislative and presidential elections, which took place in October and December 2014, respectively, officially ended the transitional phase. Yet, these elections witnessed heated contests and high polarization between Nidaa Tounes and Ennahdha. Later, these two parties adopted a consensual approach to lay focus on the urgent socioeconomic need of the country (Yerkes and Ben Yahmed 2019). This consensus among Islamists and secularists has been presented as a ‘Tunisian success story.’ However, this approach “has transformed Tunisian politics from a zero-sum game to politics as a bargaining game” (Boukhars 2017, 2), deepened governments' ineffectiveness in dealing with socio-economic issues and the public discontent with democracy as well as the political parties.

The following part aims to grasp the pattern of consolidation in Tunisia by examining the political landscape of the post-2014 elections, the consensus origins and operationalization, and political and economic outcomes, obviously, without ignoring the internal-external dynamics role in shaping this phase.

**4.1. 2014 ELECTION OUTCOMES**

The 2014 parliamentary and presidential elections were a significant event in the democratization process and the consolidation process in particular. After a highly polarizing political campaigns - in which Nidaa Tounes used anti-islamist rhetoric and emphasized the need for a strong state to ensure stability and security, and Ennahdha, on the other side of the spectrum, emphasized the idea of protecting the revolution from the anti-revolutionary forces and agendas- Nidaa Tounes was able to win the first place in parliament with 85 seats of 217. As for Ennahda, it continued to be present in Parliament after losing 20% of votes, with 69 seats. For

the CPR, the party could keep only four seats, and the Ettakatol party failed to ensure representativeness in parliament.

Social dissatisfaction with the performance of the troika during the democratic transition period led to the decline/disappearance of its constituent parties in Parliament. This paved the way for some parties that used to have a representative minority or were not elected in the NCA to become among the first ten parties in the new parliament. For instance, the Free Patriotic Union (UPL), led by the businessman Salim Riahi, who participated in the organization of the "Paris Meeting" that brought together Ghannouchi and Essebsi during the political crisis of 2013 (Hasri 2013), increased its presence in Parliament from 1 to 16 seats, ranking as third. Just behind the UPL the Popular Front, the prominent opponent of the Troika, became present in Parliament with 15 seats. Afek Tounes, a social liberal political party led by the businessman Yassine Brahim, doubled its presence from 4 seats in the NCA to 8 seats in Parliament.

Regarding the presidential elections, Beji Caid Essebsi defeated the caretaker, President Moncef Marzouki, after obtaining 55.68% of the vote.

The results of the 2014 elections did not only result in a significant shift in the balance of power among political actors, but also sent signs that the battle has been shifted from engineering political institutions and setting the rule of the game to drafting and implementing economic reforms. The fact that the former elite was able to survive the change and reposition themselves as critical players in the political scene, the businessmen became directly present in the political life<sup>13</sup>, which meant that deepening and keeping these forces' (along with their domestic and external allies) interests will be at the heart of all negotiations and political decisions.

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<sup>13</sup> Under Ben Ali, the palace maintained economic actors out of the direct political sphere (Kchouk 2017, 120). Their role was limited to supporting the regime and benefiting from economic opportunities and policies in return.

In light of this new political composition, persistence polarization, diverse preferences and interests and new dimensions of the “power struggle”, from drafting the rule of the game to safeguarding/gaining economic privileges, how will the newly established democracy function?

## **4.2. FROM POLITICAL POLARIZATION TO CONSENSUS**

### **4.2.1. The Consensus’ Origin**

As Ennahda continued to be a prominent component of the political scene, the party was expected to join the opposition and form a counterweight to the state power majority’s operation (Boukhars 2017, 3). However, immediately after the government's first vote of confidence failed, the cards were reshuffled, and Ennahda became Nidaa Tounes' first partner! What are the origins of this shift, and how was it developed?

Since Nidaa Tounes won the majority in parliament, the party nominated Habib Essid as head of the government. However, Essid’s first government, composed of Nidaa Tounes (85 seats) and the UPL (16 seats), could not obtain the required votes. The failure of this government compelled Nidaa Tounes to reconsider its coalition policy. Mathematically, to get parliamentary majority, Nidaa Tounes could have expanded its current coalition to Afek Tounes (8 seats) and thus ensured that the threshold of 109 votes would be crossed. In case of need, the coalition could be expanded to include the Popular Front (15 seats) or other pro-old regimes parties in parliament. However, Nidaa Tounes’ leader, Essebsi, had a different perspective.

Indeed, Essebsi’s decision to give Ennahda a place within the parliament and the governmental coalition was based mainly on economic motivations. Even though Essebsi established strong relations with and enjoyed support from Saudi Arabia and the UAE during the 2013 political crisis and his presidential election campaign to eliminate the presence of political Islam in the region, he was well aware that Algeria, which maintains an excellent personal relationship with the leaders of both camps, along with the US that supports Ennahda reject the existence of a dominant party, either from the right or the left, and that a wrong move will deprive the

country of economic benefits and aid. As quoted in Grewal and Hamid's (2020) article, Essebsi acknowledged that Tunisia's economy was in a critical situation, and to get the country out of the crisis, he needed support (Grewal and Hamid 2020, 6). Also, Tunisia was obliged to adhere to the increasingly strict recommendations set by the IMF (International Crisis Group 2018). Embarking on these reforms (such as reducing state expenditures, subsidies, inflation, etc....) would generate the UGTT resistance, affect social peace and the government's popularity, and thus, Nidaa Tounes' chances in the coming elections. Hence, being backed by the second political forces and sharing the burden of these reforms would save some honors for the party. Thus, consensus was the magic formula to overcome economic hardship and attract financial support and investment. Based on this logic, Nidaa Tounes "has to live with the Islamists" (Ben Salem 2016).

Ennahda, on the other edge, shared the same economic concerns. Yet, joining the coalition was also fueled by survival concerns. Witnessing the aggressiveness of its political opponents during the 2013 crisis, the regression in its political presentation within the parliament, and the loss of its political allies in these elections, heightened the party's fear of exclusion and even elimination. Another view within Ennahda was that consensus would enable the party to safeguard the revolution by maintaining its negotiating powers within the coalition. However, in both cases, leaving the opposition asserted that despite holding transparent and fair elections, democracy in Tunisia remains unstable.

Internationally, the coalition between the two parties incited a sense of trust about the Tunisian experience (Grewal and Hamid 2020, 9). Yet, nationally, the coalition seemed fragile and unwanted among many both parties' militants. How has the consensus been implemented, and what are its political and economic outcomes?

#### **4.2.2. The Operationalization of the Consensus**

When Ennahda joined the coalition, Nidaa Tounes secured approval of the new government's composition led by Habib Essid, with 166 votes. It is worth mentioning that the coalition between Nidaa Tounes, the UPL, Ennahda, and Afek

Tounes presented a parliamentary majority of 82% (179 seats), leaving about 18% to the opposition (Grewal and Hamid 2020, 6). This situation reflected the absence of an opposing force that could counterbalance the legislative dominance of the majority and the restriction of Ennahda's negotiating power.

It is accurate that the consensus between Ennahda and Nidaa Tounes has partially, alleviated the tension of polarization that overwhelmed the previous period. Yet, the stability of the agreement is related to the extent to which consensual behavior among leaders enjoys support within parties (Pridham 2000, 153). A year and a half later, the fragility of the political pact began to surface in Tunisia.

Even though the constitution provided for the resignation of the elected president from his party, Essebsi could not sever the link with his party. He kept interfering in the party's internal affairs, thus influencing the parliamentary bloc's decisions and votes. His designation of his son, Hamed Essebsi, as his predecessor in the party, his nomination of an independent figure acceptable by Ennahda in the premiership, Essebsi's consensual behavior with Ghannouchi, and finally, his exclusion of the party's parliamentarians from government positions due to the consensus, created disappointment and schisms within Nidaa Tounes.

Over time this internal schism escalated, leading to the formation of two clans; Hamed Essebsi's clan and Mohsen Marzouk's Clan. The competition between these two entities ended by disrupting governmental and parliamentary affairs. On the governmental side, each clan sought to control government composition and agenda. When Essid resisted their pressure, severe criticism emerged pointing to the government's failure and the urgent need to make a reshuffle. On the parliamentary side, as the dispute between Essebsi's son and Marzouk rose, the bipolarity within the party deepened and affected the parliamentary scene. More than 20 deputies of Nidaa Tounes resigned from the party and the parliamentary bloc to later form a new one in opposition to Nidaa Tounes. As a result, Ennahda became a majority in parliament.

Faced with these challenges, Essebsi launched the National Dialogue Initiative, later known as the Carthage Agreement. The initiative aimed to overcome the failures of the Essid government by establishing a NUG and designing a new road map jointly with all political actors.

In the context of this initiative, Ennahda announced its support for Essid, as well as its willingness to join the National Dialogue, to take later a decision to withdraw confidence from Essid's government. Despite Essebsi's repetitive violation of the constitution, Ennahda, even after becoming the majority party in parliament, kept a passive role in safeguarding the executive-legislative balance of power and solving the intra-executive conflict. This stance mainly originated from the agreements between Essebsi and Ghannouchi in 2013 and 2014. The first agreement stipulates that Ennahda must allow members of the old regime to be part of political life by not voting on the revolution immunization law and support Essebsi in his presidential elections. In exchange, Nidaa Tounes should withdraw from the sit-in and support the return of the NCA. While the second settlement focused on convertible bonds asserting the basic survival of Islamists and safeguarding of the influential old regime elites' vital interests within Nidaa Tounes (Boukhars 2017). Based on these calculations and restrictions, Ennahda allowed the presidentialization of the political process. Hence, the deviation from the power-sharing logic stipulated in the constitution made the consolidation of democracy a fragile process.

Returning to the National Dialogue, the initiative succeeded in gathering different political parties, among them Mohsen Marzouk's party (Machrou Tounes) and four other opposition parties, as well as the leading civil society organizations; the UGTT, the Tunisian Union for Industry, Trade, and Handicrafts (UTICA), and the Tunisian Union of Agriculture and Fishery (UTAP). All the participants agreed on the dialogue outcomes and signed the Carthage Agreement on July 13, 2016. The agreement permitted expanding the government's representation to include members of the opposition parties. It also specified the main work axes for the next government, which were identical to Essid's government program.

Since the intra-executive conflict remained unsolved, the outcomes of this dialogue were rejected by the head of the government, who refused to resign and asserted that only the parliament had the authority to decide the government's fate. Accordingly, he called for a vote of confidence. Yet, since the signatories to the Carthage Agreement represented the majority in parliament, they withdrew confidence from Essid on July 30, 2016,

During these events, it was clear that the president aimed - through political accommodation - to alleviate the fierce conflict within his party, hold tight control over the executive branch, keep the legislative majority, neutralize the opposition and thus protect the interests of his economic class.

The political consensus and National Dialogue provided a means to align the opposition, contain Ennahda, and secure majority support for Essebsi, as well as his party and its economic allies. This measure revived Ben Ali's pattern of consolidating his regime, reflected the unwillingness of former regime's members to accept the power-sharing-logic stipulated in the new constitution, and constituted a real concern about the fate of democracy. The question that arises here is how these practices will affect the functioning and consolidation of democracy.

#### **4.3. THE VICIOUS CIRCLE AND THE END OF CONSENSUS**

After removing Essid from the government, Essebsi nominated Youssef Chahed to lead the NUG. Nationally, the fact that the government was the outcome of a broad elite consensus and enjoyed the support of the UGTT<sup>14</sup>, UTIC and UTAP presented a glimpse of hope that the country is getting closer to political stability, hence economic reform and social peace, mainly in the interior regions. Internationally, for the US, Youssef Chahed, who was part of the high-level training offered by the

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<sup>14</sup> For "several foreign diplomats and experts at international organizations, the UGTT is mainly to blame for blocking economic reforms, fragmenting the chain of command within public administration and encouraging an explosion of corporatist pay claims, which have generally been met and which place a burden on the state's budget." (International Crisis Group 2018). Hence, being a signatory of the Carthage agreement and a supporter of the new government means that the UGTT will ensure social stability and the economic reform program.

National Democratic Institute (NDI), was considered an exceptional representation of modern politicians in Tunisia (Marzo 2020, 156). Furthermore, France and the EU considered Chahed a vigorous politician capable of implementing Tunisia's engagement with its donors (International Crisis Group 2018). Yet, despite the national and international support for Chahed's government, the political dynamics and economic outcomes ended up undermining these hopes and further deepening social disillusionment.

#### **4.3.1. The New Government, New Ambitions**

As mentioned earlier, the choice to dissolve Essid's government was that the latter did not cooperate with the party that appointed him. Hence, for Chahed to prevent Essid's fate, retaining Essebsi's support was essential. Therefore, by staying bound to the President, the features of the semi-presidential system stipulated in the 2014 constitution became increasingly blurred. Moreover, Carthage Agreement and the NUG government offered the President the privilege to manoeuvre the parliamentary scene.

Based on these factors, on April, 26, 2017, the Presidency resubmitted the revised version of the conciliation law to parliament, which had previously been withdrawn in 2015 and 2016 due to its opposition (Ben Brik 2017). The law was part of Essebsi's electoral program, where he pledged to grant amnesty to figures from the former regime, state employees, businessmen, and execution agents accused of corruption and other economic crimes. In return, they have to give part of their money to the state to revive the economy and develop the interior regions. In 2015 and 2016, the law triggered high political tensions, social opposition, and protests in more than 15 states. On the other hand, international organizations such as the International Center for Transitional Justice and Venice Commission called for the withdrawal of this law for its unconstitutionality and considered it an attempt to undermine the transitional justice process. However, with the absence of checks

and balances institution, mainly the Constitutional Court (CC)<sup>15</sup> in this case, the revised version of the conciliation law has been approved by 117 votes on September 13, 2017, amidst significant discontent and protests in front of Parliament. The revised version stipulates amnesty to about 1500 senior officials, ministers and figures affiliated with the former regimes and 400 businessmen involved in cases of corruption. (Ouanes 2017). Actually, the law didn't only sought reconciliation without trial, but also demolished the Truth and Dignity Commission's authority (IVD), depriving it from its jurisdiction over corruption (Grewal and Hamid 2020, 12).

For Ennahda, which tried hard to control its hard-liners who wanted to sue old regime figures under the process of transitional justice, voting for the reconciliation law was important to keep consensus and depolarize the political landscape (Grewal and Hamid 2020, 12). Meanwhile, while Ennahda was occupied with safeguarding the consensus, Youssef Chahed was occupied with gaining authority, within the government and the party, and popular legitimacy. With Chahed gaining ground, both Hamedh Essebsi and the president felt threatened. Thus, it was necessary to remove the head of government from power. Benefiting from the broad social opposition to the conciliation law, Chahed embarked on a selective war on corruption and arrested and confiscated the property of six businessmen and merchants with close ties to Ben Ali-Trabelsi clan and Nidaa Tounes. This campaign enabled Chahed to gain wide social support, new economic allies, and most importantly to weaken the position of Hamedh Essebsi and Beji Caid Essebsi.

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<sup>15</sup> According to the 2014 constitution, (from article 118 to article 124), the resolution of intra-executive and executive-legislative conflicts, the maintenance of checks and balances and the look into the constitutionality of draft laws is entrusted to an independent constitutional body, the Constitutional Court (CC). The CC also deals with the problems related to the interpretation and application of the constitution. The latter sets a one year period for establishing the CC, and stipulates that it has to be composed of 12 members appointed by Parliament, the President, and the Supreme Judicial Council, with each institution having to nominate four members. However, due to political conflicts and parliamentary dividedness the CC has not been established. In the meantime, a temporary body has been forged: the 'Provisional Instance to Review the Constitutionality of Draft Laws', but it has no authority to decide on the disputes over the border of powers, nor the diverse constitutional interpretations. The absence of this constitutional body will be among the origins that exacerbated the political tensions and undermined democratic institutions in the country.

Since stakeholders have certain options that may expand or undermine the regime's stability and persistence's probability, the resulting events or actions apt to a reinforcing and cumulative effect that undermine or expand the democratic politics' survival probability (Linz 1978, 4). In Tunisia, actors' choices sparked an intra-executive conflict, revived political instability and polarization, and gradually paved the way for the decline of democratic institutions.

#### **4.3.2. The Battle over Political Power**

As the relationship between the head of the government, Nidaa Tounes, and the President began to deteriorate and the balance of power began to shift in favor of Chahed, Essebsi decided, in March 2018, to hold the second edition of the Carthage Agreement with the same motives as the first agreement; establishing a new NUG and drafting a new political roadmap. Consequently, both Ennahda<sup>16</sup> and the UGTT supported the president initiative. The latter, considered that Chahed's insistency on implementing the economic reform called by the IMF such as freezing assignments in the public service, restructuring public institutions and enterprises, revising public-private partnerships, and reviewing the support system for basic materials, will negatively affect the purchasing power of the worker class.

However, in the midst of Carthage II negotiations, Ennahda leaders shifted their stances and claimed their support to Chahed. This shift could be explained based on two factors. The first was related to the municipal election results that strengthened the political weight of the party and thus its negotiation power contrary to the weak position of Nidaa Tounes. The second factor was related to the international attitude towards Chahed. The internal degradation of Nidaa Tounes and the eagerness of the latter to protect the former economic elite and reproduce Ben Ali's economic policies. This made the main actors, the EU and US, re-

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<sup>16</sup> Through the 2017 summer, Beji Caied Essebsi, Ennahda, and Nidaa Tounes agreed on removing Chahed (International Crisis Group 2018). As a result, in the fall of 2018, Youssef Chahed's membership in Nidaa Tounes was suspended. However, this procedure led Youssef Chahed's supporters in Parliament to left the party, dropping Nidaa [Tounes] to the third largest bloc in the parliament (Grewal and Hamid 2020, 17).

evaluating their support to the party. Meanwhile, Chahed succeeded in gaining external actors' support and confidence. For instance, and through its vice president, the US welcomed Chahed' latter efforts to fight corruption, and encourage him to keep holding sustainable reforms that will bring investment and create jobs for the citizens (U.S Embassy in Tunisia 2017). On the other hand, after visiting Brussels on April 28, 2018, Chahed pledged to conclude an expanded and deepened association agreement with the EU in 2019. Hence, the external support for Chahed's government strengthened his political position and led Ennahda to revise its calculations.

Accordingly, a new agreement emerged between Ennahda, Youssef Chahed, and the anti-Hafedh Essebsi clan, which later formed the nucleus of Chahed's party, Tahiya Tounes. Ennahda's new position led to the fall apart of the multi-party coalition that backed Essebsi's decisions and forced Essebsi to repeal the Carthage II initiative. However, as Essebsi sought to dominate the entire executive branch and Chahed sought to assert his constitutional powers as well as his continuation in power, the intra-executive struggle continued to dominate the political scene, generating a major reorganization of the political landscape.

To widen his parliamentary support, and on late July 2018, Chahed succeeded in forming a new parliamentary bloc "The National Coalition" (38seats), which was composed of the resigned members from Nidaa Tounes, the UPL, Afek Tounes, and other independents deputies<sup>17</sup>. By ensuring the parliamentary majority, Chahed announced the need for a cabinet reshuffle, which was the outcome of the Carthage Agreement, to tighten his grip on the executive branch as a prelude to the presidential elections. With intensive opposition from the President to the reshuffle, the intra-executive conflict has exacerbated and turned into a constitutional crisis that led to a deadlock. Although the constitutional text in Article 89 explicitly stipulates the responsibility of the head of government in forming, amending, and

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<sup>17</sup> Later on November the new coalition was able to attract more deputies and achieved 40 deputies. On January 2019, the National Coalition became the second parliamentary power with 44 seats after the resignation of 4 deputies from Nidaa Tounes parliamentary bloc.

dissolving the government, except for ministers who require consultation with the president of the republic (the ministers of defense and foreign affairs), Essebsi and his supporters insisted that the head of government should consult with the president as a constitutional custom' that has been in place since 2014. Once again, the absence of the Constitutional Court kept the constitution open to subjective interpretations and, thus, disputes. On November 12, 2018, the new parliamentary majority settled the battle in favor of Chahed, putting an end to the President's ambitions to extend his constitutional prerogatives.

In fact, cabinet reshuffle not only deepened the intra-executive conflict but also highlighted the fragility of democratic institutions in the country and the willingness of the old-regime actors to remodel the rules of the game. On the other hand, the cabinet reshuffle generated political consequences. Fact that Ennahda decided to agree and cooperate with Chahed, in October 2018, Nidaa Tounes-Ennahda consensus came to an end, and ended 'the miracle' of consensus between Islamists and secularist.

The experience of political consensus failed, in some extent, to achieve democracy consolidation in term of the constitutionally and behaviorally dimensions. How about the attitudinal dimension then?

Since the strategic motivation of the consensus was tackling costly and controversial economic issues, the consensus in Tunisia became "an end in itself... anything that threatens that consensus is avoided" (Grewal and Hamid 2020, 20). When the structural economic reforms seemed to be avoided by the coalition, a shift in the preferences of international actors occurred. This change affected the internal political dynamics and actors' calculations and interactions, in the way that happened in Ennahda's stance from supporting Essebsi in replacing Chahed to supporting Chahed maintaining his position. However, the successive governments did not succeed so far to fulfill the most important demands of the 2011 revolution; dignity and work (Yerkes and Ben Yahmed 2019).

The economy has experienced a sharper decline in its most economic indicators. Since the 2014 election, the economy growth struggled to achieve 2% and the GDP annual growth increased from 3.1% in 2014 to 1.2% in 2019. The unemployment rate remained around 15.1%. However, unemployment amidst high educated aroused from 23% in 2010 to 30% in 2018. Inflation increased from 4.6% in 2014 to achieve 6.7% in 2019. In short, the socioeconomic situation has declined since 2014 and “expectations for a better economic future have plummeted” (Colombo 2021, 12).

The inability of the elected government to address socio-economic problems, led to growing internal mobilization, and public disillusionment which negatively impacted government and political actors’ legitimacy. In just 2018, more than 9000 protested, indicating a huge trust erosion between the political and public cores (Yerkes and Ben Yahmed 2019). In this regard, the (Afrobarometer 2018) revealed that 56% of Tunisians labeled the economic situation as “very bad”, which created a confidence crisis in the political parties and democratization process as a whole. A growing number of Tunisians started to believe that only technocrats can conserve the state and institutions. (International Crisis Group 2018), 81% did felt apart from any political party, and 79% announced their reluctance to participate in political life. Regarding democracy, the Afrobarometer survey illustrated the decline of democracy support among Tunisians. In 2013, 71% of Tunisians preferred democracy as a government system, in 2018 this percentage retracted to achieve 47%.

Although democracy is a political and economic order, a consolidated democracy cannot occur without improving socio-economic conditions. In short, economic performance and policy will set the rules of the democracy’s future (Haggard and Kaufman 1997). The lack of governments’ performance in managing the paramount economic issues (unemployment, regional inequality, corruption, etc...) generated public disillusionment with not only political parties, but also the entire democratization process. As Linz and Stepan (1996) and Huntington (1991) mentioned, if successive governments during the honeymoon period failed to

achieve economic development, citizens' faith in incumbents and democracy's ability to overcome existent issues would fall apart. Hence, the probability of democracy backsliding would increase.

Although the 2014 elections ensured a safe embark on democratic consolidation, the latter's behavioral and constitutional dimensions remained fragile. Essebsi attempted to restructure the ruling style of the previous regime, under the umbrella of consociational democracy, with regard to executive power and economic allies' interests. This weakened the democratic institutions and made them vulnerable to violation. On the other hand, Ennahda's constant fear of the Egyptian scenario and exclusion made it unable to play an adjustment role. On the contrary, its keenness to maintain its alignment with Nidaa Tounes and involvement into its agenda made the distinction between the two parties blurred and hindered the initiation of economic reform. As for the external dimension during this phase, the internal-external interactions were notable in shifting the balance of power and the domestic players' calculations regarding their alliances and policies. These political dynamics negatively impacted the economic situation, therefore, the development of the democratic consolidation's attitudinal dimension. So, in which way will the outcomes of this stage shape the coming elections' political landscape and thus the pattern of democratic consolidation in Tunisia?

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DEMOCRACY BACKSLIDING: THE ORIGINS OF THE STORY**

The public loss of faith and disappointment was reflected in the reconfiguration of the political landscape after the 2019 parliamentary and presidential elections. The new composition of the political sphere influenced the nature of internal dynamics and internal-external interactions, and shaped the democracy evolved, hence determining the pattern of consolidation. This part aims to understand the significant shifts in the political landscape aftermath 2019 election, the origins of political instability and conflicts, the way the economic hardship shaped the political scene, and the nature of internal-external interactions and how the interaction of all these factors ended up generating a democracy crisis that started with the 25th July 2021 as of this writing.

#### **5.1. THE SHIFTING POLITICAL LANDSCAPE**

##### **5.1.1. Parliament Mosaic**

Disappointment with the political parties and the economic outcomes of the previous periods led to a decline in the election turnout, emergence of anti-incumbent reaction, and a deep shift in the political landscape. After the turnout in the 2014 parliamentary elections reached 67.7%, it decreased to 41.3% in 2019. Ennahda retained 52 seats, while Nidaa Tounes was represented only with 3 seats.

Moreover, voter preferences allowed new political parties to be an important component of the new parliamentary mosaic. Qalb Tounes, a political party led by the businessman and Essebsi's supporter Nabil Karoui, came in second place with 38 seats. In addition, two new and contradictory parties arose as a reaction of Nidaa Tounes-Ennahda consensus; the Free Destourian Party (PDL), an anti-revolution party that represented the old regime, and the Dignity Alliance (Al Karama), a conservative and pro-revolution party. These two parties won 17 and 21 seats,

respectively and became prominent actors in Parliament. The other new party was Tahya Tounes, Youssef Chahed's party. The latter won 14 seats to be among the first 10 parties in parliament and later played an influential role in the government formation process.

The other political parties that existed in 2014 parliament succeeded in raising their presence in Parliament were The Democratic Current Party and People's Movement party, which were among the opposition in the 2014 parliament. They came in third and sixth places with 22 and 15 seats, respectively. To strengthen their negotiating position during the government formation process and parliamentary sessions, the two parties with some independent deputies formed the Democratic Bloc (38 seats).

For the rest of the previous ruling parties, they dramatically lost their vote ratings. The Popular Front kept one seat from the 15 seats in 2014 Parliament. Afek Tounes got 2 seats, while the UPL did not get any seats (Rahman 2019). "Five other parties were also present in parliament with a representation between 4 to 3 seats, and the remaining seats have been allocated to the other parties and independent candidates as one to two seats each" (Rahman 2019).

In short, the electorate's attempt to punish the elites that shaped previous political periods and their desire to give opportunities to new actors created a highly fragmented parliament that will be unable to either ensure a stable majority nor a political stability.

### **5.1.2. The Outcomer's Victory**

The 2019 presidential elections reflected the antiestablishment response of the electorates. The win of the outsider Kais Saied in the second round with 72% of votes against Qalb Tounes Leader Nabil Karoui was a clear indicator. However, the overall voter turnout remained low marking 57.8% in the second round, compared to 64.5% in the second round of the 2014 presidential elections.

In fact, Saied was an unknown constitutional law assistant "marginalized in the academic field" (Gobe 2020). During the democratic transition period, he appeared

as a consultant and expert by participating in the Constitutional Drafting Committee in the NCA and speaking in the media about the constitutional drafting process and his evaluation of the 2014 constitution. During the consolidation period, when the intra-executive conflict between Essebsi and Chahed emerged, he explained the constitutional prerogative of each actor and emphasized the unconstitutional way in which Essebsi behaved.

However, during his election campaign, Saied used a different rhetoric. He based his statements on his willingness to represent the popular will and his determination to encounter the corrupt and dishonest elite that confiscated the people's hopes and the revolution. Thus, to restore power to the people, Saied suggested reversing “the pyramid of power” by replacing the existing institutions. The parliament should be replaced by a politico-administrative organization that would replace the partocratic Tunisian parliamentary that expropriated people’s sovereignty (Gobe 2020). The electoral law should be modified to an Individual voting system, to make the deputy accountable to voters, not political parties. The 2014 constitution, which is the result of bargaining between the political elite, has to be replaced by proper constitution which Tunisians wrote on the wall (Saied 2019). Although Saied’s “program” reflected the existence of a potential demagogue and presented warning signs regarding his undemocratic orientation, he was able to win the electoral race.

The 2019 parliamentary and presidential elections presented a crucial moment in the country’s path toward democratic consolidation. The presence of populist outsiders with an anti-establishment orientation, the fragmented parliament, and the incomplete state-building process hindered the ability of the political class to deliver the needed political stability. The economic reforms also seemed limited. Accordingly, in which way the new political landscape will shape internal and external actors’ dynamics and thus the fate of democratization?

## **5.2. THE GOVERNMENTAL INSTABILITY AND POLITICAL DEADLOCK**

With a divided government, where the president, prime minister, not a party or coalition were enjoying a comfortable legislative majority (Skach 2005), both the legislative coalition and the government are unstable and fragile. This situation could easily escalate into a governmental gridlock and a constitutional crisis and encourage the president to intervene and use his/her power beyond the constitutional text. This state would make democracy vulnerable to collapse. Regarding Tunisia, the government's instability and power conflicts remained the main characteristics of the political scene following the 2019 elections. Three successive governments took place before Saied decided to seize power. In each phase, the fractions between the domestic political actors extended, making democracy not the only game in town. The following sections will examine the political behavior, calculations, and preferences in the government formation process, the way it influenced government performance, and how all these factors opened the gate to external interference to subvert the democratization process in Tunisia.

### **5.2.1. Habib Jemli Government (12.2019 – 02.2020)**

Within the highly divided parliament, Ennahda suggested a National Salvation Government and the nomination of an independent premiership: Habib Jemli. This initiative was welcomed by three parties: Qalb Tounes, the Democratic Current, and the People's Movement. However, the Quadruple Alliance, as well as the government, soon fell apart.

Shifts actors' dynamics, calculations and alliances were behind the main reasons. The Democratic Current and the People's Movement withdrew from the government formation process, despite the progress of the negotiations in their favor. This shift was due to the tight interaction between these two parties and the president, and their willingness to handle the question of the government's formation to the president. Their main argument was that Saied enjoyed greater

electoral legitimacy than Ennahda. Hence, they launched “the president government” initiative in which they succeeded to convince Qalb Tounes, Ennahda’s first partner, to join them and vote non confidence for Jemli government.

Meantime, tension arose between Ghannouchi and Jemli over the composition of the government. While Ghannouchi opted for a politicized government, Jemli chose a technocratic one. With Jemli insisting on acting independently of the party that nominated him, the tension continued to mount. Yet, When Jemli’s loyalty started to tilt in favor of Saied, who has been interfering in the selection of cabinet members, Ghannouchi was ready to sacrifice Jemli’s government, hoping to direct government formation negotiations with the President in his party's favor.

With changes in all actors’ stances, parliament voted, on January 11, 2020, with no confidence in the Jemli government, transferring the power to appoint the prime minister to the president based on Article 89.

The first challenge faced by the divided minority government highlighted that the deep divisions, distrust between leading participants, and limited consensus (Linz 1978, 28) made building a stable and large coalition out of the question. In addition, the political elite’s lack of commitment to the democratic rules sent signs that the democratic process in Tunisia could ultimately lead up to a limited democracy or an authoritarian regime (Burton et al. 1992, 30). These features will impede the upcoming governments to deal effectively with the existing and coming problems and increase dividedness within parliament. This will reinforce the President’s role in the political scene and pave the way for “disloyal opposition”, in Linz’s words, “to take advantage of crisis situations and modify the rule of the game” (Linz 1978, 27).

### **5.2.2. Fakhfekh Government (02. 2020-07.2020)**

By taking advantage of the constitution article giving the president the authority to name the head of the government, Saied was supposed to consult with the parties about the best candidate. However, based on his stance on political parties and his

high symbolic and popular standing, Saied tried to bring the government closer to him and distance it from the parties or any other source of influence (Sbitli 2020). In this regard, the nomination of Elyes Fakhfekh<sup>18</sup> as a prime minister was an unexpected move. It is important to mention that Fakhfekh was proposed by Chahed's party, hence for Ennahda and Qalb Tounes, this choice was a clear practice of marginalization. Yet for Saied, keeping Youssef Chahed by his side means keeping Chahed's internal and external allies close. According to Boussen, (2020) the two men closely cooperated from October 2019 to February 2020, and later met on many occasions to handle pivotal issues the country was facing.

With the power balance tilted in favor of Saied, who frequently emphasized the urgent need to constitute a government and overtly threatened to dissolve the Parliament in case the majority was not gained<sup>19</sup> (Boussen 2020), Ennahda voted of confidence to the government in the hope of making amendments later.

Actually, the government was composed by 6 political parties: Ennahda, Nidaa Tounes, People's Movement, Democratic Current, Tahya Tounes, and Tunisian Alternative. However, it excluded Ennahda's main ally and Saied primary opponent, Qalb Tounes. The fact that the parties that the government included are operating in a merely complete collaboration with the prime minister and presidency at the same time (Sbitli 2020), raised Ennahda's fears of being weakened and then excluded. Hence, it expressed its dissatisfaction with the composition of the government, and demanded the expansion of the coalition, referring to the Heart of Tunisia.

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<sup>18</sup> Elyes Fakhfekh is a politician from Ettakatol Party. He held the position of the minister of Finance during Hammadi Jbeli Government and served as the minister of Tourism during Ali Laareyedh's period. Fakhfekh's party failed to win any parliamentary seat in the 2014 elections as well as in the 2019 elections. He also run for the presidency in 2019 but he lost in the first round with 0.34% of votes.

<sup>19</sup> The 2014 constitution stipulates, in the second paragraph of Article 99 that if the second attempt's period expires without the formation of the government, or if the government does not obtain the confidence of the Assembly, the President of the Republic may dissolve the Parliament and organize early legislative elections after a minimum of forty five days and a maximum of ninety days.

Meanwhile, a conflict emerged between the President and the Speaker of Parliament, Rached Ghannouchi. This conflict was triggered not by the government's reshuffle demands, but by the shift in regional dynamics mainly in Libya. After 2019, the armed conflict in Libya took another shape that shifted the regional balance of power. From the revolution, regional players such as Algeria, Egypt, Turkey, the UAE, and other actors like the US, France, and Russia have shown interest in Libya, fueling the internal armed conflict. The military intervention of Turkey in Libya between 2019-2020, led to the victory of the Government of National Accord head by Faiez Essaraj, backed by the US, over General Khalifa Haftar, backed by Egypt, UAE, and France. Throughout this military conflict, Saied, same as Marzouki and Essebsi has chosen to remain neutral. Yet, the speaker of the parliament, who visited Turkey in January 2020 and met President Erdogan, congratulated Essaraj for his victory. By doing so, a power struggle emerged between Ghannouchi and Saied, who repeatedly manifested his discontent with Ghannouchi's foreign relations, the embarrassment he engendered to Tunisian diplomacy, and the weighty constitutional violations he made (Emirates Political Center 2020). Furthermore, the opposition (most of them supporting Haftar), protested against Ghannouchi's act and called the President to take a firm stance on him and his party, who are trying to involve Tunisia in the Libyan conflict along with the Muslim Brotherhood organization and their allies.

Under power struggle between Ghannouchi and Saied, the opposition's pressure and the continual rejection of the government reshuffle demands, Ennahda - supported by Qalb Tounes- declared its intention to withdraw confidence from the Fakhfakh government. In response, the PDL and other opposition parties that refused Ghannouchi's visit to Turkey and his contact with Sarraj, launched an attempt to withdraw confidence from the Speaker of Parliament.

Amidst this context of political tensions, accusations of corruption and conflicts of interests, tax evasion began to surface over deals the state had made with companies in which Fakhfekh has shares. In fact, the timing of these accusations reflected the severe conflict between Ennahda and the president from one side, and Ennahda and

the president's allies within parliament from the other side. For Saied who raised the slogan of anti-corruption during his electoral campaign, these accusations put pressure on him, since he chose Fakhfekh to form the government. Hence, after actively trying to postpone or avoid the withdrawal of confidence from the Fakhfekh's government, these accusations prompted Saied to announce the resignation of Fakhfekh, without the latter's knowledge. By doing so, the head of the government was obliged to submit his resignation to the president, who in turn, and according to the constitution, have to nominate a new candidate to form a new government amidst a critical economic and health situation.

The continuous power struggle between the different actors, the attempt to eliminate Parliamentary authority and the act beyond what is written in the constitution by the president, the parliament majority's struggle to reinforce its control over the government, and continuous shift in political parties' calculations and preferences, led to a serious weakening of the political institutions. Moreover, the interrelationship of political forces influenced the effectiveness of achieving the power-sharing logic stipulated by the constitution, and the possibility of moving towards democratic consolidation. What happened during the governments of Jemli and Fakhfakh reflected the fragility of democracy and absence of constitutional and behavioral commitment to democracy by most of the main players. On the other hand, the subordination and support of most of the opposition political forces to presidential decisions and moves contributed to the exacerbation of the political crisis. So, what will the political dynamics be during the next government and how will it lead to the 25th of July?

### **5.2.3. Mechichi Government (09. 2020-07.2021)**

After the resignation of Fakhfekh, the president nominated Hichem Mechichi<sup>20</sup> to form the third government after the 2019 elections. Mechichi was appointed from outside the lists submitted by political parties. This choice reflected a clear

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<sup>20</sup> Hichem Mechichi is a technocrat who was Saied's legal advisor and then the interior minister following Fakhfekh's government resignation.

challenge to Ennahda and its allies, who agreed to present unified names to the President to choose from, and clear message from Saied that he would constitute a non-partisan government.

Following the announcement of the new premier candidate, political tensions within parliament have exacerbated. At the beginning, the democratic bloc, the DPL, other liberal parties with little representation in parliament, the UGTT, and the UTICA welcomed and supported the presidential choice. As for Ennahda and Qlab Tounes they accepted cautiously the choice. While Al Karama coalition expressed his refusal to Mechichi and openly declared that "the President of the Republic has turned into a real burden on the democratic transition in Tunisia, and he [the president] effectively denies the constitution, deputies, and parties". Accordingly, the coalition announced its intention to vote no confidence for the government and withdraw confidence from the president.

Indeed, by appointing a loyal figure, the president asserted his authority over the government and gained a large margin of maneuverability. In the face of this situation, Ennahda must either grant the government confidence and admit its failure or withdraw confidence from the government and thus give the president the right to dissolve parliament and organize new legislative elections. However, since Ennahda's popularity is shrinking the party, according to Sigma Conseil Survey, will only win 24% of vote comparing to 29% for the PDL, it decided to stay and wait until the official announcement of the government composition.

Actually, before officially presenting the government formation to parliament for approval, a shift in the power balance and actors' preferences occurred. The Mechichi government was composed of academics and civil servants close to the president. (Agence France-Presse 2021). Yet, and before the approval session, Mechichi abandoned the Minister of Culture appointed by Saied. This decision was strongly rejected by the president, who reappointed the minister to his post in a clear violation of the constitution and sought to prevent the cabinet's approval. As a result, the emerged intra-executive conflict affected political parties' voting

preferences. Those who had previously supported Mechichi voted against his government. Some political party officials highlighted that the president pushed toward voting against the Mechichi government and proposed to continue instead in the caretaker government (Salem Abd Aziz 2020). While Ennahda, Qalb Tounes, Tahya Tounes, some deputies of Al Karama and other parliamentary blocs took advantage of this tension and voted in favor of the cabinet. Hence, in September 2020, the government was approved with 134 votes.

Following the government's approval, the crisis between Mechichi and the President ensued and the shift of Mechichi from Saied's control towards parliament majority (Ennahda and Qalb Tounes) was clear. This shift resulted in a government reshuffle, which moved all the ministers nominated by the president, triggered a constitutional conflict, and created a government deadlock situation.

Similar to what happened between Youssef Chahed and Essebsi, Saied refused the reshuffle claiming that it does not respect the constitution from a procedural point of view, and that the new government contained ministers suspected of corruption. Although the parliament approved the new government, the president refused to invite the appointed ministers to take the constitutional oath. This refusal raised questions about the constitutionality of the president's stance, and the possible constitutional ways to resolve this problem. In this regard, the establishment of the Constitutional Court seemed to be the only way to resolve the problem. Accordingly, after years of dispute regarding the appointment of the Court members, the parliament approved a draft to facilitate and accelerate the process. Threatened by the ability to get impeached, the president refused the bill and sent it back to parliament for a second reading without citing the rejection reasons. Yet, even with the approval of the draft by the absolute majority (141 votes), the president refused to sign the bill, complicating the crisis. At the same time, the polarization rhetoric re-emerged. Saied considered this move unconstitutional and accused his opponents of corruption and treason while stressing the democratic element of his attitudes and statements, and his role in maintaining respect for the constitution and people.

Although the CC may be the only way to resolve the intra-executive dispute and the governmental deadlock, the fact that Saïed felt threatened by Ennahda, Qalb Tounes, and Al-Karama motives to agree to the court at this time, led him to reject the draft. Meanwhile, Saïed's political belt in the parliament led by the PDL, the People Movement, and the Democratic Current opened a new chapter of conflict and polarization which deepened the political crisis. On the one hand, Abir Moussi, the leader of the PDL party, increased the frequency of her oppositional speeches and hostile behavior, which amounted to exchanging verbal and physical violence within Parliament, thus disrupting its work. This behavior generated an overall impression that the Assembly was totally disconnected from the life and interests of ordinary people Policy (Arab Center for Research and Policy Study 2021). On the other hand, the democratic bloc appealed to the president to activate the article 80<sup>21</sup> and end the political deadlock.

In light of these circumstances and without checks and balances mechanisms, Saïed continued to escalate the crisis. After visiting Cairo and meeting Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi in April 2021, Saïed freely interpreted Article 77 of the 2014 constitution and announced himself as the commander-chief of the military and the internal security forces. Saïed seemed to strengthen and safeguard his position by extending his influence over the armed forces. For his opponents, this move raised serious fears about state unity, the impartiality of the security and military establishments, and the fate of democracy in the country.

With the escalating constitutional brinkmanship external actors and institutions called for a National Dialogue and a clear roadmap to end up the current multidimensional crisis (political, economic, social and financial). For instance, the IMF, the US and the EU have stressed the importance of a peaceful political dialogue in Tunisia. On the other hand, France advocated for urgent political and

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<sup>21</sup> The first paragraph of Article 80, in the 2014 constitution, stipulates that in the event of imminent danger threatening the nation's institutions or the security or independence of the country, and hampering the normal functioning of the state, the President of the Republic may take any measures necessitated by the exceptional circumstances, after consultation with the Head of Government and the Speaker of the Assembly of the Representatives of the People and informing the President of the Constitutional Court. The President shall announce the measures in a statement to the people.

economic reforms (MondAfrique 2021). In tandem with these stances, The UGTT and Ennahda urged to hold an unconditional National Dialogue between all the political actors to overcome the political deadlock and reach political consensus. Yet, since the conflict stems from competition for power and interests, and the battle is between the "pure people" and the corrupt elite, according to Saied, the latter rejected the initiative, exacerbating the political crisis and turning it into a process of reversing the path of democratization.

A new political landscape with a variety of dynamics and conflicts emerged from the 2019 elections. The fragility of parliament majority, the dividedness of political actors and parliament, and the weak commitment of some political actors to constitutional limits, set the ground for president to get involved in day-to-day politics. This generated a strained relationship between the president and parliament majority –Ennahda and Qalb Tounes, an intra-executive conflict, and tension within parliament. With Saied rigid approach to these issues, the conflict has grown worse and prolonged the already unstable political situation. The escalation of these conflict became a constant obstruction of the parliamentary process and governmental performance.

### **5.3. THE GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE AND ECONOMIC HARDSHIP**

Theoretically, new democracies enjoy “an 8-year breathing spaces (4 of which for an initial government and 4 for its substitution) (Linz 1978, 21), before poor economic performance begins to threat regime survival. Hence, the performance of successive democratic governments in coping with economic challenges would increase or decrease the vulnerability of democracy to breakdown. In Tunisia, the twin political and economic crises that persisted all over the 10-year left both fields fragile. According to statistics from the Tunisian Institute of Statistics, by the end of 2019, the growth amounted to 1.4 %, compared to 2.62 % in 2018, inflation rate reached 6.8% and public debt achieved 75.7% of GDP. In 2020, the economic growth was expected to achieve 2.7%, and the budget deficit rate was planned to

achieve 2% at the end of 2022 compared to 5.3% for the year 2019. However, the persistent political instability and the health crisis exacerbated the situation.

The total/ partial lockdown and the widespread of the pandemic have impacted the engines of growth and consumption. For instance, in 2020, the activity of the industrial sector witnessed a sharp decline of about 9.3%, the worldwide travel restriction measures led to paralysis the service and tourism sectors. Passenger's arrivals dropped to 80% causing a decline in transport and tourism. Moreover, the business pulse surveys notably indicated that nearly a quarter of formal firms in the sector of services (23.6%) were temporarily or permanently locked down by the end of 2020 (World Bank 2021). As a result, the disruption of the economy led to an increase in the unemployment rate. The latter kept raising from 15% prior to the pandemic to reach 17.4% by the end of 2020.

Politically, in order to alleviate the economic and social impacts of the pandemic, the government injected \$850 million in the market. Meanwhile, the economy contracted by 8.8%, while the wage aroused to about 17.5% of GDP, which created pressures on public spending and a sharp increase in fiscal deficit and public debt that reached 10% of GDP in 2020.

In view of these challenges, Fakhfah government pledged to rebalance public finance and seriously embark on economic reforms with an aim to negotiate with the IMF and obtain a new loan<sup>22</sup>. Yet, those negotiations were suspended with the resignation of Fakhfakh. With the economic crisis on the verge of driving the country to bankruptcy, Mechichi resorted to the IMF and WB to obtain a \$4 billion loan. Hence, in April 2021, he presented a reforms program draft to his international partners. The program was in harmony with the IMF's five main conditions. These conditions were based on liberating the economy from anti-competitive practices, and improving the business climate, as well as reducing the wage bill and

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<sup>22</sup> From the revolution, Tunisia has signed two agreements with the IMF, the first one was under A Larayedh's government in 2013, and accordingly the Fund granted Tunisia a \$1.7 billion loan. The second loan, \$2.8 billion was obtained in 2016 under the Habib Essid government. In April 2020, the IMF approved a \$745 million to help the government tackle the COVID19 challenges.

restructuring or privatizing bankrupt public enterprises. This, besides the endorsement of a competitive fiscal strategy (Ziadia 2021). However, the inability of political forces to resolve the political conflict alongside the government deadlock after Saied's rejection to approve government reshuffle, the negotiations with the IMF did not reach any significant result.

Socially, the poor governmental performance in dealing with the pandemic and its economic outcomes, led to the increase of social unrest and thus protests despite the restrictions. The Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights monitored more than 7,600 protest movements in Tunisia during the year 2020. During November only, Gafsa and Tataouine (interior regions) organized 298 and 127 protests respectively, asking for employment and the improvement of economic conditions.

In "the Arab opinion index" survey of 2019-2020, directed by the (Arab Center for Research and Policy Study 2020), 85 percent of Tunisians assess the economic situation as bad. More than half of them (53%) described it as "very bad". The perception of the economic situation mirrored the general social discontent with the political situation; 63 percent evaluated the political situation as bad, 36% of which considered it as very bad.

The interrelationships and feedback complicated set that is occurring between the social and political systems (Linz 1978, 12) continued their interactions to shape the evolution of the democracy crisis. At the beginning of 2021, and despite the relaxing quarantine measures and a modest recovery in tourism (Coface 2020), the country faced dire economic predicaments. The economy contracted by 1.7 percent in the first quarter of the year, and the unemployment rate continued its upward trend from 17.8 percent in the first quarter, 17.9 percent in the second quarter, and then 18.4 percent in the third quarter, with a higher rate among women (24.1%) and higher education graduates (30.1%), and in the interior regions (African Development Fund 2021). To alleviate the risks of this situation, the EU and the African Development Bank lent Tunisia, (EUR 300 million) and (EUR 60 million),

respectively, for economic recovery and social integration. These loans partly compensated for the amortization of maturing loans and the pressure on foreign exchange reserves, which still stand at around 4 months of imports (Coface 2020).

These economic challenges and the government's poor performance in dealing with them led an essential sector of the population to strike and shift allegiance from government to opposition. Thus, a wave of demonstrations spread almost all over the country calling for economic development and opportunities. These demonstrations weakened the authority of the regime by pinpointing its inability to keep order, forcing it to fall for an unwarranted tyrannical and haphazard use of power, which led to a further drop of (Linz 1978, 15). The high level of social discontent enabled the PDL and a combination of several supporters and close supporters of Kais Saied, mainly active on Facebook (Arabicpost 2020), to the crowd through social media and mobilized the mass to initiate the "Revolution of Hunger." Subsequently, the demands turned from socio-economic demands to political demands calling for dissolving the government and the parliament, suspending the constitution, amending the government system, trial of the corrupt political elite, etc...On the other hand, the president continued his polarizing rhetoric by emphasizing that the outbreak of the epidemic in the country resulted from several political choices supported by lobbies and unsuccessful choices.

As disillusionment with the government performance spread, so did disillusionment with the democratic system's ability to solve economic problems and implement effective economic reform. Indeed, mass discontent combined with political conflicts, polarization, disloyal behavior, and anti-revolution external actors' intervention paved the way for Saied's takeover and the undermining of democracy.

#### **5.4. THE EXTERNAL VARIABLE IN DEMOCRATIC DECONSOLIDATION IN TUNISIA**

Although democratic consolidation requires indigenous conditions and a broad elite commitment to democracy, external variables remain significant in forming the

political struggles and consequences that are occurring, as democracy is going towards or did not succeed in being consolidated (Grugel 2002, 67). The internal-external actors' interactions and actions during the political and economic crises of 2019-2021 affected the democratization in the country, radically changed the internal balance of power and then the form of the regime.

Since 2011, the widespread of Tunisian revolution has been considered a threat to some regional power regimes, mainly Saudi Arabia and Iran. The 'Arab uprising' challenged these actors "both domestically and regionally in terms of their political practices and alliances" (Sarker 2014, 59). Later, the emergence of key regional actors; Qatar and Turkey, shaped the regional geopolitical calculation and competition. In this regard, as discussed in chapter 3, Tunisia became a potent ground of contention between Qatar (with Turkish support) and Saudi Arabia and UAE on one side. The ascendance of political Islam forces supported by Qatar and Turkey in Tunisia and Egypt presented a common threat to Saudi Arabia and UAE. Since none of these Gulf countries holds tolerance regarding the Islamic influence at home. Accordingly, the Islamist elites will face many challenges back home, by right and left forces of center (Khoury 2013), which was clearly the case in Egypt in 2013. Regarding Tunisia, after the successful coup in Egypt the UAE and later the Saudi Arabia did not hesitate to grant a financial helping hand to the former president Beji Caid Essebsi and his party; Nidaa Tounes (Kadura 2021). This support enabled the domestic actors that were eliminated by the revolution to return to the political scene and strengthen their stance in shaping the course of the democratic transition in Tunisia. However, due to external pressure mainly from Algeria and the US, and to some extent domestic actors' preferences, democracy continued to operate despite the 'ebb and flow' during 2013-2019.

The 2019 elections and their aftermath marked a turning point in the country's democratic prospects. Internal political strife, economic hardship, and social discontent have eroded the legitimacy of political parties and government, fueled populism, and strengthened Saied's political standing. With the international institutions emphasis on political stability as a condition for financial support,

finding an alternative was crucial for Saied. As for Arab nationalists and far-left activists, they started to contact the UAE and Saudi Arabia wishing to solicit their support against Ennahda (International Crisis Group 2019). All these factors have provided the opportunity for the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Egypt to take their turn in the domestic scene.

Since April 2021, during the dispute over the government reshuffle, the coordination between the Tunisian presidency and its Egyptian counterpart has been strengthened. After his return from his visit from Egypt, Saied, who has been repeating since his election, that there is no room an external interference in the country's decisions and choices that stem from the peoples' will, announced his authority over the internal security power. Furthermore, contacts between Sisi and Saied have resulted in increasing the influence of Egypt upon Tunisia's political and military decision-makers day after day. This state heavily fueled Algeria's fears, which held a little view of the continuous cooperation between Cairo and the Tunisian army's most influential officers, as General Habib Dhif who was promoted to lieutenant general. General Dhif held close relations with the Egyptians as well as their Emirati allies (Beau 2022).

By reinforcing the ties with Egypt, which is the key facilitator of UAE's policies in North Africa and the Mediterranean, these actors supported by Saudi Arabia and to a lesser extent France, appeared to be willing to uphold a strategy in Tunisia as the one adopted in Egypt (Telci 2021). In the same context, a leaked document <sup>23</sup> appeared to approve these expectations. The document revealed the occurrence of talks between the head of the Egyptian intelligence, the foreign ministers of Tunisia and Egypt, and the Emirati prince's advisor along with a representative from the PDL. The meeting, held on April 11, 2021, suggested a roadmap to deal with current political situation, remove the Islamists from the political scene, and successfully dissolve the parliament. The Egyptian side expressed its readiness for any logistical support for the plan, while the UAE side announced its readiness to finance this

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<sup>23</sup> A copy of this file is ANNEX3.

plan and its consequences through promising a \$5 billion to Tunisia in case the coup succeeds (Watan 2021).

Hence, with the support of the armed forces, disloyal opposition, and external actors, what was initially considered an internal conflict of power has turned into a fully-fledged democratic crisis. Accordingly, on July 25, 2021, Saied announced, amidst an emergency meeting with senior leaders from the military and security forces, the activation of Article 80. Based on this Article, he announced the freezing of the Parliament, to be subsequently suspended for 30 days, and the lifting of the immunity of parliamentarians. Furthermore, he appointed himself as head of the Public Prosecution and announced that he would assume executive authority. On the governmental level, he dismissed Mechichi and declared his intention to appoint a prime minister and a cabinet that works under his direct supervision. The statement was not only limited to announcing measures, Saied also threaten his 'hypocrites, treacherous and thieves' opponents and promised that anyone who dares to challenge the state or its symbols, or fires a single bullet would face back a hail of bullets (Tunisia Presidency 2021) Hours later, military vehicles surrounded the parliament building, where members of parliament and other demonstrators gathered to denounce Saied's coup.

Saied's "exceptional" measures provoked different stances. Domestically, Ennahda and Al Karama, as well as major non-governmental organizations, lawyers and public figures, considered these measures as a Coup, announced their rejection of Said's interpretation of Article 80 arguing that these measures are unconstitutional<sup>24</sup> and that the concentration of executive, legislative and judicial powers in the hands

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<sup>24</sup> For the president to take exceptional measures during exceptional circumstances, he must consult with the Head of the government and the speaker of Parliament and inform the President of the Constitutional Court. However, neither of these conditions has been respected. Moreover, Article 80 stipulates that "the Assembly shall be in permanent session throughout this period" and that "the President shall not dissolve the Assembly, nor shall he impeach the Government". In this regard, Yadh Ben Achour, a Tunisian law professor, has defined Saied's reference to Chapter 80 as 'meaningless' – in fact, a total and explicit violation of the conditions of the Tunisian Constitution, since the fundamental and legal conditions have not been met (Arab Center for Research and Policy Study 2021).

of one man is a real danger to the hard-earned democratic gains. The Democratic Current, the party that appealed to the president to invoke Article 80, avoided labelling the measures as a coup. However, the party rejected the President's interpretation of Article 80 and the consequent decisions and procedures that resulted from it (Courant Démocrate 2021). While the People's Movement fully supported the President's decisions, considering them a step towards adjusting the revolutionary course which was ruined by the counter-forces, particularly Ennahda and all of the ruling system (Deputés Movement Echaab 2021) The UGTT, which has played a role in the pre-25 July Street protests and visited Saied just after the announcement, tacitly endorsed Saied's actions, expressed its support to protestors, and emphasized the need to guarantee abidance by the constitutional legitimacy in any action taken at this fragile phase the country is undergoing (UGTT 2021).

Externally, the regional and international powers' stances varied regarding Saied's measures. Saudi Arabia, although many Egyptian, Saudi and Emirati media applauded Saied's decision as a cardinal blow to Ennahda and consequently political Islam in the region (Jacobs 2021), the Saudi official announcement called for security and stability, while it rushed to provide health aid to Saied. Explicitly, contrary to Saudi Arabia and through its diplomatic advisor who visited Tunisia the day after Saied announcement, The UAE assured that the country support the Tunisian president and state in this constructive agenda (Reuters 2021b). On the same day, Egypt and France's stances have been revealed. After a call between the Foreign Ministers of France and Egypt, the two countries stressed "the importance of respecting the will of the Tunisian people and supporting the institutions of the Tunisian state in its quest to achieve stability and security for the people" (Skynews Arabia 2021).

The positions of Qatar and Turkey were different from the previous actors. Qatar has called for dialogue between various political actors to consolidate the foundations of the state of institutions and establish the rule of law in Tunisia (Reuters 2021a). Turkey quickly confirmed her rejection of what happened in Tunisia. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan stressed, in a telephone

conversation with his Tunisian counterpart Kais Saied, that the parliament's continuation of its work despite all difficulties is essential for Tunisia's democracy and the region. Algeria, which played a crucial role in every political crisis the country faced after the revolution, chose neutrality by emphasizing the strong relationship between the two countries. In addition, the country decided to limit its communication to the Tunisian president, for the exclusion of other political parties, while keeping high coordination with the Turkish side in order to avoid the Libyan scenario, mainly since both sides held the same road map in Libya in standing against the Emirati-Egyptian expansion under the banner of the militias of Khalifa Haftar (NoonPost 2021).

On the level of the international actors, the US and the EU adopted “wait-and-see” approach, while manifesting concern and prompting dialogue and restraint (Grewal 2021). Days later, especially after Saied dismissing the ministers of defense and Justice, announcing a month-long curfew, banning gatherings of more than three people and arresting several members of parliament, the US, and through its Secretary of State Anthony Blinken, contacted Saied, urging him to respect the principles of democracy and human rights, encouraging him to hold an open dialogue with all of the Tunisian people and political parties, pledging his support to the country’s economy, and his intention to help Tunisia in the face the Covid19 (BBC News Arabic 2021). From its part, the EU urged Saied to quickly return to institutional stability, resume the work of Parliament, and preserve democratic gains and legislative frameworks.

Indeed, the pre-25 July context generated significant political, institutional, and economic crisis which have been exacerbated by the Covid-19 epidemic. The latter underlined the government mismanagement, and the ‘irresponsibility’ of the political elite. This crisis presented an opportunity for Saied and his domestic and external allies to overthrow the existing political system. Furthermore, the persistent failure of democracy to fulfil citizens’ economic expectations led them to accept and even support undemocratic measures. In the aftermath of the 25th of July, (Al Qatiba 2021) magazines and Insights in Tunisia posted an online survey

of 3,191 Tunisians to grasp their views regarding the 25th July measurements. Answering the question of “How do you evaluate the exceptional measures announced by Saied on July 25?”, more than 60% considered it as a step towards correcting the course of revolution and democracy and holding accountable the rampant political corruption in Parliament. The other 39% described the measures as a coup against the constitution and parliament, and a step towards one-man rule and tyranny.

In fact, for democracy to be consolidated, political stability has to be maintained and socioeconomic conditions have to be ameliorated. During a crisis, these two elements combined with international and regional context and the solidity of democratic institutions drafted during the transition phase, will influence the behavior of the contending political actors. For a populist outsider, who feels constrained by democratic institutions, crises often present the opportunity to “break free, both swiftly and, very often, “legally” (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018, 94) from these constraints and expand their executive power. When this occurs, the outcome can be the demise of democracy. Indeed, two months after his legal takeover, which employed the constitutional institutions against their explicit content (Linz 1978, 77), Saied dissolved the parliament, suspended the 2014 constitution, started ruling by decree, and announced, under international pressure, the composition of the new government and his political road map regarding the referendum over the new constitution, and the legislative and presidential elections. Accordingly, the critical question here is where the democratic experience in Tunisia is going?

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **DEMOCRACY IN TUNISIA, WHERE TO?**

For O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986), democratization is understood as a process of historical accumulation in which the stages of liberalization, democratization, consolidation, and ultimately deconsolidation are empirically interrelated but analytically distinct. This study aims to understand the accumulation effect and its role in triggering the legal takeover and shaping the fate of democracy in the country. By analyzing each stage separately in Tunisia, taking into account the internal-external overlap, it became clear that democratization in Tunisia is no exception as it follows the same patterns mentioned by O'Donnell and Schmitter, Huntington, and Pridham in Chapter 1, and that the origins, actors dynamics, and outcomes of each phase impacted the dynamics and course of the following stage. This part aims to provide an overview of the interactions between the different stages of democratization, and the way they led to Said taking over the reins. It also seeks to define the nature of Said's new regime and answer the question of Democracy in Tunisia, where to?

#### **6.1 THE ACCUMULATION EFFECT AND DEMOCRACY BACKSLIDING**

Historically, the economic, political, and international variables have been acting in tandem in Tunisia. Accordingly, it sounds to understand democratization in Tunisia by examining the interaction between all these variables to accurately identify the process's origins, actors, and outcomes.

The critical economic situation along with increasing political opposition movements –leftist, Islamists, and UGTT- and international pressure on Bouguiba's government to adopt a neoliberal economic and political model, pushed him towards accepting, in 1986, the IMF's Structural Adjustment Programs as a way to safeguard his position and avoid state bankruptcy. However, significant schisms

within the ruling elite delayed the implementation of these reforms until the soft-liner bloc gained solid ground. This allowed them to lead the constitutional coup that brought Ben Ali to power on November 7, 1987. Politically, regime change, although it took place through a coup, constituted hope for the opposition to achieve political openness and democracy. Years later, this change turned out to be a well-planned transition that contained political agitations inherited from Bourguiba's period, eliminated the Islamist threat, and co-opted the opposition and the leading social actor, the UGTT, to Ben Ali's political and economic project.

The internal and regional context and international actors' preferences offered Ben Ali a suitable environment to intimidate/ subordinate other opposition groups and parties, restrict freedoms, and abandon political liberalization. When political liberalization made room for the Islamists to be part of the political scene in the 1989 elections, eliminating any threatening power source became Ben Ali's priority. The regional context -the civil war in Algeria and the Iraqi war, pushed the international community to relinquish democracy promotion in the region. Therefore, with global high-security concerns, backing the existing regimes to ensure political stability was a favorable policy.

By upgrading its authoritarian power, the regime managed economic and social situations. In this regard, Ben Ali actively implemented the SAP program recommendations to establish credibility within the international community and guarantee international financial support. Yet rather than achieving a free and open market, economic prosperity, and economic society, the implementation of neoliberal monetary policy consolidated the regime's repressive power, deepened corruption, clientelism, and corporatism, created a subordinate market, and reinforced people's dependency on the state. When the country's economic environment and resources seemed to be a "Domaine réservé" to the Ben Ali inner circle and their allies, the equation of obtaining maximum economic benefits while accepting an authoritarian system became ineffective for external players. Accordingly, supporting and empowering the west-friendly alternative center of power to withdraw Ben Ali became a severe option for the US. Thus, by

transforming the internal relations, Ben Ali's ability seemed threatened by his historical rivals, the Islamists and the left.

However, even with the shift in the international stance regarding the Ben Ali regime and the emergence of an internationally "protected" opposition that weakened the regime, these variables were not as decisive as the economic and social variables in dismantling authoritarianism in Tunisia. Despite the social welfare programs, the socio-economic situation of the middle class continued to deteriorate, especially in the interior regions, and the unemployment rate continued to rise, mainly among those with higher degrees. These outcomes and the regime's weakness triggered the 2010-11 revolution that overthrew the Ben Ali regime.

Embarking in the transition towards democracy carried the hope of breaking with the Ben Ali regime's practices, figures, and political and economic system, to establish a democratic and accountable government, and achieve a prosperous economy. Driven by these hopes and expectations, citizens widened voter turnout after toppling Ben Ali and through demonstrations, started participating in civil and political society, etc.... This actively influenced the initial terms of democratic transition and paved the way for establishing new democratic institutions. Once the National Constituent Assembly was in place, it became the role of the new political elite to build inclusive political and economic institutions and push democracy toward success in a state of local and regional uncertainty.

Tunisia, indeed, managed to overcome the fatal turmoil of the transitional period, institutionalize democracy and thus become an exceptional case in the region. However, this outcome was only achievable with two significant components. 1) International support of democratic transition in Tunisia, and 2) International pressure to push political rivals to resume the democratic transition process amidst a deadlock situation. As discussed in chapter 3, the Tunisian revolution generated a series of regional transformations and brought the region back under the spotlight of various competing countries; the US, France, Qatar, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, etc...The chaotic situation in Libya, the fear that the wave of demonstrations

destabilize Algeria, and the potential economic and security effects of these events on European and American interests, were among the main incentives that prompted both the US and EU to support and safeguard a smooth and safe democratic transition in Tunisia. Furthermore, for the US, the existence of a western-friendly transitional elite committed to democracy and willing to cooperate presented a suitable ground to promote democracy in Tunisia.

Theoretically, political parties play a crucial role during the democratic transition process. At the same time, during consolidation, trade unions, state agencies, business organizations, and external factors become critical players in determining the nature of democracy (Karl 1990). In Tunisia, the democratic transition indeed started to be shaped by domestic players' interactions, preferences and conflicts. Yet, when the military Coup in Egypt occurred, polarization and political deadlock took place in Tunisia as part of the transnational effect. For foreign anti-democratic actors such as the UAE, which empowered counter-revolutionary forces in Egypt, this situation was an opportunity to reverse the wave of democratization and curb the expansion of political Islam in the region. For other external actors, mainly Algeria, the US, and the EU, thwarting the democratization process in Tunisia meant increasing security risks and thus destabilizing the region. Hence, minimizing the influence of the anti-democratic foreign actors in Tunisia and mediating between political rivals to ensure a return to stability became the main objective of these actors. These external preferences conditioned and shaped the pattern of domestic elite dynamics and resulted in the organization of the National Dialogue, which achieved consensus among the political rivals and reached a settlement on the resumption of the democratic transition process.

The internal-external interactions during the democratic transition phase allowed the institutionalization of democracy in Tunisia and the moving forward toward the consolidation phase. However, the political circumstances surrounding the democratic transition influenced the economic outcomes of this phase. After hoping to achieve economic development, Tunisians faced a decline in economic activity and rising inflation and unemployment. Despite these unsatisfactory outcomes,

democracy enjoyed another chance to prove its ability to overcome the inherent problems but with some modifications in political players' composition. Accordingly, with the election of new political parties in the 2014 parliament, the democratic consolidation phase was expected to prioritize economic reform, suggested by the IMF, and the revolution demands. To achieve these objectives, consensus rather than conflict between Islamists and Secularists became the tenet of democracy in Tunisia between 2014- 19. However, this consensus was a kind of mutual pledge between the Islamists and Nidaa Tounes to guarantee the survival of Ennahda and to safeguard the economic and vital interests of the old regime elite within Nidaa Tounes.

During this phase, the external variable was an "adjusting power" that intervened to protect its economic and security interests in the country during crisis periods. As discussed in Chapter 4, when the intra-executive conflict increased, and when Essebsi appeared to reproduce the policies and practices of Ben Ali and show some resistance to economic reforms to protect his economic allies, the US and the EU changed their ally in government from the presidency to the prime minister. This shift influenced, in return, Ennahda's stance and thus the fundamental dynamics of the political landscape.

Socially, citizens considered that the consensus between Nidaa Tounes and Ennahda had revived the pattern of the old regime's rule (e.g. corruption, patronage, and protectionism through the passage of the reconciliation law...) and that changes in the political system were not followed by changes in political practices and economic conditions. Thus, the failure of the new political elite to break with the old regime, and to ameliorate the socioeconomic situation, which unfortunately kept declining since 2014, created a state of mistrust in the political elite and produced substantive disenchantment regarding democracy. These conditions paved the way for a demagogue outsider to take place in the political scene and accelerate backslide of democracy. In this vein, as mentioned in chapter 5, the 2019 fragmented parliament and a populist president prolonged political and government instability, revived polarization and created a stalemate. With the persistence of

political deadlock, and the lack of broad acceptance of the new political framework and game rules, solving the political crisis through dialogue and consensus seemed unattainable.

Meanwhile, economic distress continued and was even get aggravated by Covid-19. As the theoretical part highlighted, the critical financial situation often influences people's perception of democracy, destabilizes it, and makes it vulnerable to breakdown. The case in Tunisia was not that different. The successive failure of democratic governments to achieve economic progress triggered social unrest and mass disillusionment.

Within these domestic conditions, political deadlock, economic hardship, and social discontent, the external variable entered the scene and contributed to subverting democracy. Through financial incentives and know-how exchanges, the UAE, and Egypt, played a crucial role in transforming the internal political crisis into a full-fledged democratic crisis, which paved the way for the collapse of democratic institutions.

By grasping the roots of the current democracy crisis, understanding the new implemented political system's features will help to map up a preliminary picture of where the democracy is going in Tunisia.

## **6.2 SAIED'S NEW POLITICAL REGIME**

After his legal takeover, Saïd launched the course of establishing a new political system. For more than a year, he inaugurated a new constitution, redrafted the electoral law, and reconfigured the political sphere. Hence, to understand the fate of democracy, determining the nature of Saïd's political system is essential. To do so, this section will assess the behavioral and institutional aspects of the actual political realm.

To identify the nature of Saïd's behavior, the "litmus test" proposed by Linz and developed by Levitsky and Zablatt (2018) will be used. Although this test is often used to identify a would-be-authoritarian to keep it out of power, it will be used to

decide whether Saied is a democrat or an authoritarian. If a politician fulfills one of these behaviors “1) rejects in word or action, the democratic rules of the game, 2) denies the legitimacy of opponents, 3) tolerates or encourages violence, 4) indicates a willingness to curtail the civil liberties of opponents, including the media” (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018, 21-2), then he/she is a potential authoritarian.

**Table 5.1:** Measuring the Authoritarian Behavior of Saied

<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Saied’s behavior</b>
<p>1.Rejectiond of (or weak commitment to) democratic rules of the game</p>	<p>During his electoral campaign, Saied’s anti-establishment statements were obvious. He openly expressed his dissatisfaction with the 2014 constitution and the whole political system.</p> <p>During the pre-July 25 period, Saied violated the constitution on several occasions. He also, collaborated with disloyal opposition and external anti-democratic powers, monopolized armed forces, and then used a unilateral interpretation of the constitution to change the government and system.</p> <p>After he seized power, Saied continued to violate the constitution and finished by suspending it.</p>
<p>2. Denial of the legitimacy of political opponents</p>	<p>Whether during the executive-legislative conflict, intra-executive conflict, or after his legal takeover, Saied only speaks in terms of the extermination of his political opponents who are for him pandemics, viruses, microbes, corrupt, foreign agents, etc...</p> <p>He also classifies politicians as "pure people" and evil and corrupt political elite that has no right to exist within the political scene. In addition, he often baselessly charges his opponents with attempting to undermine state security, and ignite chaos.</p>

	In short, Saied’s terminology is loaded with words that attack and humiliate his political opponents and fuel polarization.
3. Toleration or encouragement of violence	After the 25th of July, the security forces were allowed to use violence against the discontent masses. Which resulted in the death of Ridha Bouziane after he was seriously wounded during January 14, 2022, opposition-led demonstrations, while Saied remained silent about it.
4. Readiness to curtail civil liberties of opponents, including media	In the context of civil liberties, Saied imprisoned his opponents, enacted a decree restricting media freedom, arrested activists and journalists on social media for crimes of expression, arrested and tortured several demonstrators, and cut off official television broadcasts to opposition political parties and groups, along with arbitrary travel bans and house arrest.

Despite all behavioral warning signs being met, Saied continued to identify himself as a democrat and savior of the revolution and openly criticized those who described him as an authoritarian.

Aside from Saied’s authoritarian behavior and rhetoric, the institutional building process often determines the regime type, whether to become a democracy or something else. Under Saied, this process has been characterized by a personalized way of drafting the new game rules, although the façade of participation has been used.

After the abolition of the 2014 constitution, creating the framework through which political life would be regulated and implementing the “new republic” was a priority for Saied. After excluding all political parties and his critics from the process, Saied handpicked the members of the Advisory Committee to write the new constitution, in light of the online consultation’s outcomes. The content and manner in which the latter was conducted were more akin to a public opinion poll

than to a national consultation as an instrument of participatory democracy, as (Grubman 2022) pointed out. Unfortunately, the committee failed to fulfill Saïed's aspirations. As a result, he published his draft of the constitution to be put to a referendum.

The Committee president announced his opposition to the draft constitution, pointing out that it establishes an authoritarian regime, and urged Tunisians to boycott the referendum. Despite the criticism and the lack of consensus on the constitution, the referendum, which witnessed a participation rate not exceeding 30%, resulted in the approval of Saïed's constitution, mainly due to the absence of any threshold for acceptance or rejection. Thus, if the constitution-building process was controversial, how was the outcome?

The 2022 constitution establishes a presidential system that eliminates all forms of checks and balances whether from parliament, judiciary, or civil society. The court has become a simple administration that falls under the executive's authority, as Saïed always emphasized in his statements. Meanwhile, the legislation that will play the role of "a politico-administrative organization" Gobe (Gobe 2020) has been divided into two bodies; the parliament and the National Council of Regions and Districts, as promoted in his electoral campaign. Regarding the executive branch, the constitution gives the ultimate power to appoint, reshuffle, or remove the government. In addition, the government is responsible only to the president for implementing the general policies defined by the president.

In short, the new system reflects the dominance of one person over the political sphere. This means that Tunisia is facing a personalized regime with authoritarian traits. The persistence of such a regime is likely to lead to disastrous consequences. As (Frantz et al. 2021) mentioned, personalist dictators can stir up crises within their own countries due to the rise in polarization. They can ignite interstate conflicts due to their aggressive foreign policies. Moreover, as experienced in Libya, Iraq, and Cuba, personalists "are less likely than those of military and one-party regimes to give up power voluntarily" (Huntington 1991, 121). Their

overthrowing is “often violent and protracted” (Frantz et al. 2021), and their replacement by another authoritarian regime is probable. Hence, is there any chance to provide these outcomes from occurring? To what extent are the actual internal and external actors capable or willing to challenge Saied’s power?

## **6.3 THE FATE OF DEMOCRACY IN TUNISIA**

### **6.3.1 The Divided Opposition**

Theoretically, the return to democracy requires an “internal restoration process” (Stepan 1991, 65). This process consists of building a broad oppositional front to weaken and overthrow the authoritarian regime and set the ground for a democratic one. Hence, restoring democracy entails that the pro-democratic forces temporarily lay aside their old conflicts, interests, and ideological divergences to find common ground on overcoming the crisis and defending democracy. If a wide range of dissimilar actors succeeds in forming a solid coalition, then social division and political polarization that preceded democracy collapse may be partially addressed.

For Tunisia, the opposition has yet to reach this situation. After ten months after the 25th of July, ten political forces, Ennahda, Qalb Tounes, and Al Karama, established the National Salvation Front (NSF) to end up the personalized and authoritarian regime of Saied. The NSF organized several demonstrations, either confronted by police suppression or harassment of demonstrators.

On the other edge, the Democratic Current, which supported Saied and appealed to him to activate Article 80, along with Ettakatol, and the Republican Party announced their establishment of a new political entity that would defend democracy and cut out with the previous scene of July 25, 2021, and after it.

Another significant political actor also exists in the scene; the UGTT. Initially, the organization supported Saied and considered his measures a step towards breaking with the previous “black decimal” and an opportunity to establish “true democracy.” However, when Saied excluded his supporters and started drafting and

implementing the “corrective path” on his own, the UGTT became one of his prominent opponents. Hence, the organization began criticizing Saied’s political roadmap, reiterated its call for early elections to exit the crisis, and refused to participate in the National Dialogue. It also considered that the 2022 constitution opens the way towards monopolizing power, abolishing the opposition, and marginalizing other adjustment forces. The almost broken relationship between Saied and the UGTT concerns the president and the IMF, which requires the organization’s approval of economic reforms to grant the \$1.9 million loan. In this regard, Algeria, currently the leading external actor supporter of Saied, intervened to mediate between Saied and the UGTT, but to no avail.

In light of this scene, to what extent can these forces shake Saied's regime? First, the fact that the NSF is composed of political actors and figures who have experienced a decline or loss of legitimacy in the pre-July 25 period will make its ability to convince the public of its cause a challenging goal. Second, a critical factor that could rebuild public trust for political actors is to reform the internal establishment of Ennahda to give way to new political generations rather than Ghannouchi, Bhiri, and Laareydh, etc... to lead the scene. This transformation, even under the current challenging circumstances, may help the party restore the citizens' trust, regain legitimacy and catalyze the rebuilding of democracy. Third, the inability and/or unwillingness of pro-democratic political and social opposition groups to keep aside momentarily all the conflicts and convene under the same framework significantly affects the effectiveness of the internal pressure that these groups can exert on the regime. This enables Saied to resist the sporadic demands for change and weaken his divided opponents.

In short, triggering an internal restoration process requires overlooking semi-loyal actions and miscalculations of the political actors, overcoming the mistrust between them, and conducting risky internal reforms. Unfortunately, achieving all these

requirements depends mainly on the readiness of the political leaders to do so and the extent to which they learned from the mistakes and experiences of the past.

### **6.3.2 The Social Component**

As in every stage of democratization, political actors are one variable among others that determine the fate of a regime. Economic outcomes determine the legitimacy of the regime, the extent of social support or rejection of it, and thus its sustainability or collapse. When democracy could not deliver an economic dividend, Tunisians demanded the regime's fall, and authoritarian nostalgia emerged. However, the economic conditions that triggered social discontent and facilitated Saied's seizure of power continue to deteriorate. Difficulties in accessing international financing aftermath of the coup along with the dual problem of increasing commodity prices and the war in Ukraine worsened the country's budget deficit. In light of the worsening socioeconomic situation, how is the government acting? Theoretically, Huntington (1991) pointed out that populist presidents resort to austerity programs and unpopular economic policies. Empirically, this was the case with Saied. To finance the budget deficit and rebuild trust with international donors, Saied's government resumed meetings and negotiations with the IMF without revealing any detail or information about the IMF conditions and the government's program. Yet, what is experienced these days and what has been mentioned in the WB 2022 report could reflect the tenor of these reforms. The top recommended measures are gradually lifting energy and food subsidies, replacing the latter with compensatory transfers for vulnerable households, reducing imports, and reducing the civil service wage bill. Hence, by inactivating the subsidy system, which used to keep price stability, inflation rose from 6.4% in July 2021, to achieve 9.8% in November 2022, the highest level since the early 1990s. In addition, state pressure on the budget to adjust its trade balance, along with its intervention to set goods' prices, led to the scarcity and absence of some essential consumer goods, such as milk, bread and sugar, which directly affected citizens' course of life.

Accordingly, the weakness of political and economic institutions and the inability of the state to invest and activate the subsidy system due to its severe budget deficit deepened unemployment and poverty. Nearly 6 million Tunisians in 2022, almost half of the population, live below the poverty line, according to the Minister of Social Affairs, and unemployment reached 15,3% in the third-Second 2022.

In this context, could the economic crisis that allowed Saïd to topple democratic institutions weaken or overthrow his regime? The answer to this question is very complex. It is mainly related to the psychological readiness of the social component to destabilize the political scene and conduct expanded nationwide protests to weaken or topple Saïed's regime. Although the Saïed regime is witnessing a decline in popular support, from 87% in July 2021 to 55% in late December 2021, the current social responses reflect weak chances that this discontent can overturn the balance of power, at least at this moment. The citizens' reactions ranged between; 1) Sporadic and spontaneous demonstrations in the capital and several economically marginalized regions, which led, in most cases, to violent confrontations between the security forces and demonstrators. 2) Surge of legal and, mainly, illegal immigration of highly skilled and unskilled professionals. According to a Bloomberg report, no less than 45,421 Tunisians attempted to cross the Mediterranean Sea by boat as of October 26 (Karam 2022). In addition, more than 22,000 doctors and professors legally left the country this year for Canada and European countries.

The actual social reactions to the deterioration of economic conditions may increase frustration with the regime, weaken its legitimacy, and increase demonstrations and irregular/regular migration. Yet, only some of these social outcomes can foster the position of the opposition due to the legitimacy crisis the latter is facing. Hence, the possibility of combining opposition pressure and social unrest to generate anti-regime reactions is still being determined. Furthermore, it seems challenging that social discontent could evolve into a regime collapse process because of the prevailing sense of the futility of the revolution, the tolerance of the collapse of

democracy, and the public indifference regarding political life –as was reflected in the referendum and 2022 legislative elections turnouts: 30% and 8.8% respectively.

### **6.3.3 The External Adjusting Role?**

The patterns of democratization in Tunisia reflected the adjusting role played by external actors in times of crisis. Yet, this role fluctuated between reinforcing Ben Ali's authoritarian regime, empowering the opposition coalition during Ben Ali's reign, and supporting democratization in the pre-revolution period. As discussed in Chapter 1, the attitudes of external actors are often determined by assessing threats related to regime change or continuity. If the presence of Saied is a threat to regional stability and the US, Algeria, and EU interests, supporting alternative centers of power and/or knocking the barracks may be on the table. Building links with it is desired if the Saied regime would not threaten these actors' vital economic and strategic interests. A third alternative has been adopted for regional security reasons, explained in chapter 3. Even though Saied's behavior has reflected apparent authoritarian streak, these actors decided to support the regime and exercise, at the same time, pressures and conditionality to prevent the escalation of conflict between the opposition and the regime. Domestically, this international stance prompted Saied to put a clear political agenda - welcomed by the US and the EU- to refrain momentarily from extreme repression of his opponents and to embark on economic reform in return for financial support seriously.

Algeria, uncomfortable with the rapprochement between Tunisia and Cairo, quickly regained its leading position in North Africa through close security cooperation and adequate financial support for the Saied regime. In December 2021, Saied obtained a \$300 million financial loan from Algeria to strengthen economic relations between the two countries. In December 2022, the two countries agreed on another loan, but without revealing details about the context or the amount of this loan. The WB also granted a \$130 million loan to Tunisia to help mitigate the impact of the war in Ukraine on food security. This loan allowed the government to finance grain purchases while initiating the recommended reforms (World Bank 2022).

Suppose Saied, as was the case for Ben Ali, can maintain positive interaction with external pressures and recommendations. In that case, he may secure financial support, gain international acceptance, not legitimacy, and tighten his grip on the regime. As of writing this thesis, the international community is dealing with Saied as a *fait accompli*. However, any mistake he might make, such as not committing to economic reform, suppressing the opposition, and crossing red lines in international relations, such as cooperation with Tehran, will hasten the end of his regime.

The internal-external interaction at this phase tilts towards reinforcing Saied's position and does not make one optimistic about the democracy's near-term prospects in Tunisia. However, even with elite schisms, widespread social movements, and/or military intervention, the return to democracy is uncertain.

## CONCLUSION

As the democratization path in Tunisia changes, democracy is facing a rapid shift that created a prolonged sense of crisis. This study has argued the importance of linking the internal and external dimensions of the democratization to make sense of the Tunisian democracy's changing shape in a wider context. It has done this by trying to develop a new understanding of the Tunisian democratization case as a bunch of internal-external interactions which outcomes paved the way for the ongoing democracy crisis.

While this attempt is far from the way the literature used to tackle democratization, it tries to provide a wider image of the origin, actors and outcomes of democratization patterns in Tunisia. To do so, this thesis has drawn on different democratization literature and combined them to try to analyze the democratization in Tunisia in a broad and multidimensional manner.

This first handshake in grasping democratization from an internal-external linkages' perspective may open up the way for future research regarding the North African countries' democratization experiences and fate within a dynamic and shifting regional and global context. Accordingly, this conclusion part highlights the main findings made throughout this research journey. These findings suggest that democratization in Tunisia is, definitely, not an exception: its course from the 90s to the current period tends to be in harmony with democratization theories and literature. It also claims that the international/regional context and internal-external interactions and dynamics are crucial in determining the pattern and prospects of democracy. The research closed with an attempt to sketch out the future of democracy in Tunisia based on the nature of internal and external components.

The first part of this thesis aimed to set the ground of the study's theoretical framework regarding the concept and processes of democratization. More often, the democratization has been understood from either a pure domestic perspective such as in (Rustow 1970; Weiner 1987; Karl 1990; Linz and Stepan 1996; Grimm and

Weiffen 2018; Diamond and Linz 1989; Castoriadis 1997, Mainwaring 1992) works, or as an outcome of external actors and factors that impacted a country's political agenda, like in (Whitehead 1991; Huntington 1991; Haggard and Kaufman 1997; Levitsky and Way 2005; Mansfield and Pevehouse 2006; Yilmaz 2010; Mansfield and Snyder 2013) works. This categorization was also true for analyzing the way the democratization has evolved in Tunisia from Ben Ali to Saied eras. This separation of internal and external dimensions, although important for simplifying and defining the focus of studies, risks offering an incomplete image of the complex dynamics that shape and influence the course of the democratization in Tunisia. The research has aimed to dig a little bit deeper in the Tunisian democratization case to fill this gap. Building on the previous theoretical and empirical studies about democratization in general and Tunisian case in particular, this research set out the need for a nuanced examination of the way the internal-external interactions shape the process of democratization.

Thinking of democratization as a process that involves a nexus between internal and external dimensions paved the way for trying to understand the mixed origins and the different internal and external actors and factors that made Tunisia oscillate between authoritarian and democratic systems. The examination of the democratization patterns in Tunisia from the 1990s to the current period has been based on this logic. By mapping the nature of domestic conditions and dynamics, international and regional context, and the two-way interactions between these variables, this study aimed to establish a more comprehensive framework for the democratization experiences in Tunisia and the democracy prospects.

The initiation of the liberalization process, as discussed in chapter 2, has resulted from internal and external pressures. The weakness of the Bourguiba regime due to internal schisms, social upheavals, and economic hardship triggered by internal and external factors, enabled Ben Ali to seize power. Moreover, the international political economy context and the interconnectedness between the political and the economic spheres shaped the internal political and economic agendas of Ben Ali. Both political and economic liberalization took place. Yet, their outcomes neither

lead to economic nor resulted into political openness. On the political side, the consolidation of a one-party system under an authoritarian electoral regime, the elimination and suppression of the opposition, and the subordination of social organizations and other political parties were the main features of the Ben Ali era. On the economic side, rampant corruption, clientelism, corporatism, and economic monopolization eroded socioeconomic conditions over time. These results, along with the shift in the international position on the feasibility of the survival of the Ben Ali regime, presented the main factors behind the regime's weakness and later, the outbreak of the revolution.

By toppling the Ben Ali regime, Tunisia and other MENA countries entered a phase of uncertainty and instability. The snowballing effect triggered by the Tunisian revolution shaped the regional balance of power, to a certain degree, and influenced regional stability. These factors made the stability and thriving of democracy in Tunisia a pivotal component in ensuring peace and safeguarding hegemon actors' interests. In fact, and as was detailed in Chapter 3, the international support, transitional elite commitment to democracy, and significant social support for democracy created the necessary international and national cover to safeguard the democratic transition from collapsing, and achieve a successful democratic transition experience. However, the transitional phase highly concentrated on establishing political institutions and quite marginalized the economic side. As a result, the economic outcomes of the democratic transition phase did not level up to the aspirations of the Tunisian people. This made the economic component one of the main challenges for the political elite in the democratic consolidation stage. This stage, as illustrated in chapter 4, failed to meet people's expectations despite the political consensus. The governmental instability, the return of old regime figures and their attempts to preserve the interests of their economic elite, and Ennahda's fear of repeating the Egyptian scenario along with its eagerness to maintain the consensus, made the conduct of economic reform a far-reaching goal. Moreover, the emergence of Ben Ali's regime practices, such as corruption and clientelism, created widespread anti-incumbent and anti-establishment reactions

that led to the election of a highly fragmented parliament and a populist outsider. The interaction between these two variables, as examined in chapter 5, resulted in governmental instability, profound political deadlock, and the President's repeated violation of the constitution.

Although disenchantment with democracy as well as political and social actors is in part a natural outcome of the accumulative effect from the liberalization to the first stage of democracy consolidation, the intensified and prolonged economic decline led to increased unemployment and a loss of faith in the political elite. This social stance helped Saied to capitalize on the situation of crisis and chaos exacerbated by Covid-19. Yet discontent is not the only origin behind the democracy backsliding. As the chapter 5 has shown, the political style of Saied made the resolution of the democracy crisis out of reach. In light of these conditions authoritarian nostalgia emerged and made room for disloyal opposition to gain power internally and externally. The linkage and interaction between the disloyal opposition and the anti-democratic regional forces during the 2020-21 political crisis paved the way for Saied to conduct his legal takeover and change the pattern of democratization in Tunisia.

By seizing all powers and establishing his new political regime, Saied settled the debate regarding the prospect of democracy in Tunisia. The political style of Saied makes the resolution of the democracy crisis out of reach. His acts, rhetoric, and ruling style act as an aggravation of the ongoing crisis and fueling enmity between "the people" and the "elite". As emphasized in Chapter Six, Tunisia is facing a transition towards a personalist regime with authoritarian tendencies, the dismantling of which will be linked to the ability and willingness of both internal and external actors to cooperate and create a united front to protect democracy. While the final chapter has briefly described the features of the new political regime implemented by Saied, it opens up a number of directions for future research. The first scope of interest involves the fate of democracy and social peace in Tunisia under a populist leader. The second scope may focus on the opposition- regime interrelation, the ability of the social actors, mainly the UGTT, in overcoming the

crisis and the way the socio-economic conditions will shape the regime 'stability'. The third scope may concentrate on regional context to analyze and compare democratization and populism experiences in the region. It would be important to dig more into the way this new regime - with its new institutions, ruling style, power distributions, antidemocratic tendencies, etc... has manifested in other countries and contexts, and how they determined the prospects of democracy. The other significant avenue may be the nature of internal-external interactions and their role in maintaining or toppling the Saied's regime.

Through examining the origins, actors, and outcomes of each stage of democratization, the study emphasized the essential link between the internal and external dimensions of democratization. The overlap and interaction between the internal and external components, from Ben Ali to Saied, underlined the fact that the patterns of democratization in Tunisia are, undoubtedly, shaped by the combination between these two dimensions. It is accurate that the extent of each dimension in influencing the course of democratization vary based on the democratization stage, internal and/or external conditions, and actors' dynamics, preferences and calculations. Yet, analyzing them separately would result in missing a piece of the puzzle and thus gives an incomplete picture about the country's democratization path and prospects.

What this research highlighted is that throughout the democratization experiences in Tunisia, the internal-external linkage has always been present. As represented in the theoretical framework of this study and confirmed by Tunisia's case, the paths of democratization in Tunisia has been shaped by 1) the preferences of international actors -the US and the EU- regarding democracy promotion or democratization movements in the MENA region and Tunisia, 2) the regional context and actors and to which extent they support democratization, 3) the domestic conditions, particularly the economic situation, that shape the social perception of the regime's legitimacy and the political system's efficiency, and 4) the internal actors' dynamic, interests and preferences, and their Western and regional linkages. The

interlinkages and interactions of all these variables determine the timing, evolution, and prospects for democratization in a given country as well as Tunisia.

This study aimed at contributing to the democratization studies in the North African region, and pave the way to a multi-dimensional analysis regarding democratization or de-democratization in this region. Despite the importance of this approach in mapping a broader and multi-dimensional image regarding the democratization in Tunisia, the examination of the international dimension, notably the impact of the geopolitical competition, the new emergent powers in the region, such as Turkey, and the INGOs, remained understudied in this research. In addition, the international political economy of democratization requires more research regarding hegemonic actors' interests, foreign policies, and domestic dynamics. The other limit hinged on the time limit surrounding this research and the novelty of the event under study. Searching beyond the Tunisian case is essential to answer the question "where to?". Hence, using a comparative perspective to well-design the possible outcomes and the required steps to return to democracy can be explored in future research. Other questions can be raised based on this study in relation with 1) the role of the UGTT during the different stages of democratization and the ongoing crisis, 2) the way the corruption influenced the regime legitimacy and efficiency, during Ben Ali's era and how it influenced the course of establishing democracy and economic reforms, 3) the role of Turkey and France precisely in supporting or subverting the democratization in Tunisia. All of these questions, and more, are of significant importance to understand the different dimensions and aspects of the Tunisian democratization.

Contemporary political transformations in Tunisia are, in fact, a natural result of successive socio-economic disappointments which ended up in a widespread rejection of political actors and democracy as a whole. Meanwhile, at every stage, from Ben Ali to Saied, external actors and factors played a crucial role in shaping the regime-democracy relationship. This study aimed to show how the interactions of internal and external variables are essential in explaining the initiation, survival, and collapse of democracy. As Saied's populist style and regime are here to stay and

become a feature of the current Tunisian political landscape. Democracy continues to be threatened. What was a political crisis is persisting and widespread to generate more economic hardships and threaten social peace. Thus, by expecting populist style to be a permanent character of the Tunisian political life, a multidimensional analysis of the current crisis and its fate became vital to define the possible scenarios and steps to prevent dreadful outcomes.

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## Annexes

### Annex1

#### بلاغ إعلامي

التنم اليوم الجمعة 2011/02/11 بمقر الهيئة الوطنية للمحامين بقصر العدالة بباب بنات تونس اجتماع ضم ممثلي الهيئات والأحزاب والجمعيات والمنظمات الموقعة أسفله.

وقد تدارس الحاضرون المقترحات المتعلقة بتأسيس هيئة وطنية لحماية الثورة وفاء لدماء الشهداء وانتصارا لطموحات شعبنا وتكريسا لمبادئ ثورته ودرءا لمخاطر الانتكاف عليها وإجهاضها وتجنيب البلاد الفراغ.

وقد اتفق المشاركون رغم اختلاف مواقفهم من الحكومة الحالية قبولاً أو رفضاً، على أهمية تأسيس هذه الهيئة التي أطلق عليها اسم "المجلس الوطني لحماية الثورة" وفقاً للمبادئ التالية:

- 1/ أن تكون لها سلطة تقييرية وذلك بأن تتولى السهر على إعداد التشريعات المتعلقة بالفترة الانتقالية والمصادقة عليها (إلغاء القوانين المنافية للحريات الخ...).
- 2/ مراقبة أعمال الحكومة المؤقتة التي تتولى تصريف الأعمال وإخضاع تسمية المسؤولين في الوظائف السامية لتزكية الهيئة.
- 3/ إعادة النظر في اللجان التي تم تشكيلها من حيث صلاحياتها وتركيبها حتى تكون حصيلة وفاق على أن يُعرض إليها ما تطرحه من مشاريع على المجلس للتصديق عليها.
- 4/ اتخاذ المبادرات التي يفرضها الوضع الانتقالي في كل المجالات وفي مقدمتها القضاء والإعلام.
- 5/ تتركب الهيئة من ممثلين عن الأطراف السياسية والجمعيات والمنظمات والهيئات الموقعة أسفله ومن ممثلين عن مختلف الجهات على أن يتم ذلك بشكل توافقي.
- 6/ يصادق على بعث الهيئة بمرسوم يصدره الرئيس المؤقت.

الإمضاءات:

الترتيب	الاسم واللقب	الإمضاء
1	الهيئة الوطنية للمحامين	محمد الزاوي كلالين
2	الاتحاد العام التونسي للشغل	حسين الجاسمي
3	التكفل الديمقراطي من أجل العمل والحريات	محمد بن جعفر
4	حزب العمال الشيوعي التونسي	هبة العياشي
5	تيار البعث	خير الدين الصواني
6	حزب حركة النهضة	نور الدين البشير
7	حركة الشعب	عمر الشاهد
8	حركة الوطنيين المنقراطيين	سكركي بلعيد

9	حزب حركة البعث	خديجة الماهري
10	الجمعية التونسية لدراسة التاريخ السياسي	عمرو دبلو
11	رابطة الطلبة التونسيين	نزار عاصم
12	المنتدى من أجل الديمقراطية	عبدالقادر الجادوي
13	الحركة الوطنية للتقدمية	زهير نجوي
14	حزب العمل الوطني الديمقراطي	عبدالرزاق الخماصي
15	جمعية القضاء التونسيين	أحمد بوحديف
16	اتحاد اصحاب التجار الممثلين في العمل	سالم العماري
17	منظمة "شباب وانقلاب"	الاستاذ محمد الكوي
18	حزب تونس الحضراني	فوزي اللدناوي
19	ال نقابة الوطنية للمهنيين التونسيين	منجي الخراوي
20	الجماعة التونسية لدراسة المقاومة	علي بن سباع
21	تغيير الإصلاح والتنمية	محمد القوماني
22	الاتحاد العام لطلبة تونس	عزالدين زعيوا
23	الحزب الديمقراطي للحرية والتقدم	منير كفتحي
24	الميساريون المستقلون	طارق مشايخ
25	مركز تونس لدراسة استقلال القضاء والجماعة	المختار البصياوي
26	الوطنيون الديمقراطيون الوحد	جمال الأزهر
27	رابطة الكتاب الاذاعي	جلول كمنونة
28	الجمعية التونسية لمقاومة التعذيب	راضية نوراوي

Source <https://www.facebook.com/cnpr.tn>

## Annex2

بعد مرور سنة على نجاح الثورة التونسية في إحداث تغيير حاسم فتح الأفق أمام تحقيق طموحات التونسيات والتونسيين في الديمقراطية والكرامة والعدالة الاجتماعية. فإن روح المسؤولية تحملنا واجب إبداء الرأي فيما ألت إليه اوضاع البلاد واقتراح سبل تجاوز المخاطر التي تبدو محدقة بها. خاصة وان الضبابية واختلاط المهام التي سادت عمل المجلس الوطني التأسيسي تبدو وكأنها أحدثت ازمة ثقة سياسية من شأنها ان تعمق المخاطر التي تهدد الامن والاقتصاد والوضع الاجتماعي عموما

وللتذكير فقد انتخب المجلس الوطني التأسيسي لمهمة وضع الدستور والإعداد لانتخابات مؤسسات الحكم الدائمة وذلك في ظرف سنة واحدة من تاريخ انتخابه غير اننا لاحظنا ضياع نصيب هام من الوقت في وضع تنظيم مؤقت للسلط العمومية وقانون داخلي هو اقرب إلى قانون مجلس نواب منه إلى مجلس تأسيسي وفي تقاسم المناصب بين الاطراف الحاكمة بطريقة تتخالف مع طبيعة المرحلة الانتقالية التأسيسية.

ومما زاد في ريب شرائح هامة من المجتمع التونسي إبحام المجلس عن التأكيد الرسمي لمدة عمله المقررة بسنة واحدة وغق ما حدده الامر عدد 1080 لسنة 2011 المؤرخ في 3 اوت 2011 وما اكده الاتفاق الحاصل بين الأحزاب الأحد عشر. حول نفس المدة. بتاريخ 15 سبتمبر 2011. فحدث هذا النكوص عن الالتزامات السابقة انطباعا بان المجلس والحكومة المنبثقة عده يعملان على استدامة الفترة الانتقالية الثانية.

ولوضع حد لمظاهر التازم المتفاقمة، فإننا نعتقد بضرورة العمل من أجل تصحيح المسار وذلك بـ

ضرورة قيام المجلس الوطني التأسيسي بالتحديد الرسمي والصريح لمدة عمله وعمل الحكومة المنبثقة عنه بسنة واحدة والشروع الفوري غيما بقي منها لإعداد الدستور وتنظيم الانتخابات المقبلة في أجل أقصاه يوم الثالث والعشرين من أكتوبر سنة 2012. وذلك في اطار خارطة طريق واضحة مثلما حدث في الدورة الانتقالية الاولى. مما ادى آنذاك الى إسترجاع الثقة بين مختلف الاطراف السياسية والاقتصادية والاجتماعية ومكن من اجراء انتخابات شفافة وديمقراطية ومن اعادة الحياة للاقتصاد الوطني وتشجيع المستثمرين الاجانب.

2- ضرورة اعادة تفعيل مؤسسة الهيئة العليا المعقلة للانتخابات بتمكينها من استئناف نشاطها حالا. بدأ باستكمال ترسيم الناخبين والإعداد للانتخابات المقبلة وإصدار قانون انتخابي جديد. ذلك ان انتخاب مؤسسات دستورية دائمة يتطلب إعدادا يفوق الإعداد لمجلس تأسيسي

3 - دعوة كل القوى السياسية والفكرية الوطنية التي تباى التطرف والعنف والتي تنخرط في المسيرة الإصلاحية التاريخية لبلادنا لتجميع قواها. المادية والمعنوية. حول بديل يعزز التوازن السياسي ويضمن تفعيل آليات التداول السلمي الذي بدونه لا يستقيم للديمقراطية امرا.

إن إجراء انتخابات 23 أكتوبر وما نتج. عنها من شرعية انتخابية للأطراف التي تسلمت السلطة في كنف الشفافية والتنظيم. الا يمنع من التذكير باننا بصدد قطع مرحلة انتقالية ثانية. مصحوبة بدورة انتخابية. لا تقل تعقيدا عن الدورة الاولى. سبقي بحاجة اكيدة إلى تكريس التوافق الوطني كقاعدة للأمن والاستقرار ونجاح (الانتقال الديمقراطي إن ما ألت اليه الاوضاع في المدة الاخيرة من تراجع خاصة من خلال بروز مظاهر تطرف عنيفة تهدد اس الحريات العامة والفردية. يدعو الجميع إلى تفعيل آليات الحوار الوطني الذي بدونه لن نسير بخطى ثابتة. لا رجعة فيها نحو إنجاز مهام الفترة الانتقالية الثانية وعلى راسها إهداء تونس دستورها المستقبلي.

( وَقُلْ اغْمَلُوا فَنَسِيْرَى اللّٰهُ عَمَلَكُمْ وَرَسُولُهُ وَالْمُؤْمِنُوْنَ ) صدق الله العظيم.

تحيا تونس

فى 26 جانفى 2012

الباجي قائد السبسي

Hafedh Caïd  
26 JANV. 2012

## Annex3

سري للغاية

تم التصوير

المخابرات العامة

القيد : ٦١٩٩

التاريخ : ٢٠٢١ / ٠٤ / ١١

مرفقات (قرص ليذري)

المخابرات المصرية

إلى فخامة الرئيس عبد الفتاح السيسي

تحية طيبة وبعد،،،  
بخصوص تكليف القيادة رقم ١٣٥ بتاريخ ١١ / ٠٤ / ٢٠٢١ حول الاجتماع الذي انعقد اليوم بمقر المخابرات العامة بحضور الآتي ذكرهم:

الجانب المصري:  
- معالي السيد/ وزير الخارجية سامح شكري  
- معالي اللواء/ رئيس جهاز المخابرات العامة عباس مصطفى كامل

الجانب التونسي:  
- معالي السيد/ وزير الخارجية عثمان الجرندى  
- معالي السيدة/ مديرة الديوان الرئاسي نادية عكاشة.  
- معالي السيد/ مستشار الرئاسة التونسية وليد الحجام عبر تطبيق الواتساب  
- معالي السيد/ عن الحزب الدستوري الحر بتفويض من رئيسة الحزب النائب مجدي بوذينة المكلف بالتنسيق مع الرئاسة والبرلمان التونسي عبر تطبيق الواتساب من تونس.

الجانب الإماراتي:  
- معالي السيد/ المستشار الأميري الدكتور عبد الخالق عبد الله عبر تطبيق الواتساب.

- مقتطفات من كلمة الوزير سامح شكري الذي عبر عن تضامن مصر وفخامة الرئيس عبد الفتاح السيسي وانشغاله العميق لما آلت إليه الأمور في تونس من تردي اقتصادي وصحي وفساد غير مسبوق تحت ظل حكم حزب النهضة الإخواني والفوضى التي أحدثتها الانتفاضات في الدول العربية والتي سمحت لأمثال هؤلاء من اختراق الدول وزعزعة أمنها واستقرارها والتجربة المريرة التي مرت بها مصر، والدور المتميز الذي لعبه فخامة الرئيس عبد الفتاح السيسي في وقف زحف الإخوان عبر مصر والوطن العربي والانتصار الذي حققه في تعزيز الاستقرار والاعتدال في مواجهة قوى الظلام والارهاب. وأكد للجانب التونسي استعداد مصر للتعاون الشامل في سبيل استرجاع الدولة التونسية من أيادي العابثين بأمنها واستقرارها. وأبلغ الوفد التونسي رسمياً فتح باب النقاش حول نية الرئيس قيس سعيد في اتخاذ إجراءات حل البرلمان واسترجاع الدولة من عبث العابثين.

- مغادرة اللواء عباس كامل للجلسة لأمر طارئ.

- مقتطفات كلمة وزير الخارجية التونسي عثمان الجرندى الذي أثنى على مجهودات الرئيس السيسي ورؤيته الإستراتيجية الثاقبة، واستعرض العلاقات المتميزة بين البلدين ثم تحدث طويلاً عن الوضع السياسي العام في تونس وعن جرائم حركة النهضة وائتلاف الكرامة الذراع العنيف للإخوان ومدى خطورة كليهما، كما تحدث عن تردي الوضع الاقتصادي والصحي والسياسي وعدم الاستقرار والفوضى المتواصلة داخل البرلمان والتأثيرات السلبية في أداء تسيير دواليب الدولة وتهديد الأمن القومي الشيء الذي جعل تونس عرضة لعدة عمليات ارهابية. وأن الرئيس قيس سعيد قد ضاق ذرعاً وعجل صبره ويستعد لفرض رؤيته السياسية وتفعيل إجراءات استثنائية عاجلة وأنه يأمل في التنسيق المتبادل والعمل سوياً لانجاح الأمر المزمع تنفيذه.

- مقتطفات من كلمة مديرة الديوان الرئاسي نادية عكاشة:  
عبرت عن إعجابها بنجاح التجربة المصرية وامتنتها للرئيس عبد الفتاح السيسي وتجاوبه السريع في مساعدة تونس  
وأكدت أن الظروف مهيبة حاليا للقضاء على حكم الإخوان وابعادهم عن مركز القرار السياسي مع محاكمتهم وتجفيف  
منايع الإرهاب الإخواني وعبرت عن انتقاد الرئاسة التونسية لجميع المقترحات التي من شأنها انجاح الخطة المزمع  
تنفيذها.

- عبر تطبيقه الواتساب: المستشار الأميري لمحمد بن زايد الدكتور عبد الخالق عبد الله. تم الإتصال به دام تدخله ١٥  
دقيقة ثم غادر.

تحدث عن الوضع العام السياسي في تونس طالب بمزيد للتنسيق والتشاور أهدى استعداد دولة الامارات لاي دعم مادي  
بما يضمن نجاح الاجراءات المزمع اتخاذها واقترح تصوره في حل للبرلمان وعلان حالة الطوارئ ونشر الجيش بما  
يضمن نجاح العملية وأن لا تتعرض لاي انتكاسة كما حدث في تركيا ٢٠١٧.

- عبر تطبيقه الواتساب: المستشار لدى رئاسة الجمهورية التونسية وليد حجام. تم الإتصال به دام تدخله ١٥ دقيقة ثم  
غادر.

تركز تدخله حول طلب الرئيس قيس سعيد بأن لا تكون هناك أي نتائج سلبية للاجراءات الاستثنائية أو أي إراقة للدماء أو  
اشغال لقتيل حرب أهلية وذلك لخصوصية المجتمع التونسي والخشية من تأثير أي اضطرابات أو فوضى على دول الجوار  
وفتح الطريق للمجموعات الإرهابية لتنفيذ أي عملية داخل التراب التونسي.

- التدخل الأخير عبر تطبيقه الواتساب: عن الحزب الدستوري النائب مجدي بوذينة مكلف بالتنسيق بين البرلمان  
والرئاسة واللجنة المكلفة بالاطاحة بحركة النهضة. تم الإتصال به دام تدخله ٥ دقائق ثم غادر  
عبر عن شكره وامتنته للدعوة في المشاركة في الاطاحة بالإخوان وعن التزام الحزب مواصلة العمل في تعطيل وكبح  
جماع حركة النهضة والتفاف الكرامة من السيطرة على البرلمان حتى إسقاط حكم الإخوان وعبر عن جاهزية الشارع  
للتحرك قصد إسقاط حكم منظومة الإخوان.

تواصلت النقاشات بين السادة:

- معالي السيد/ وزير الخارجية سامح شكري،
- معالي اللواء/ رئيس جهاز المخابرات العامة عباس مصطفى كامل بعد عودته إلى الاجتماع،
- معالي السيد/ وزير الخارجية عثمان الجرندي،
- معالي السيدة/ مديرة الديوان الرئاسي نادية عكاشة،

تم الاتفاق بين الجميع أن تتواصل المشاورات على أن يؤدي وزير خارجية مصر السيد سامح شكري زيارة عمل إلى  
تونس خلال الأيام القليلة القادمة مرفوقا بمجموعة من الضباط الأكفاء.

التسجيلات صوتا وصورة أرفقت منه نسخة مع هذا التقرير.

وتفضلوا فخامتكم بقبول فائق الاحترام،،



سري للغاية