

THE ARAB SPRING'S DOMINO EFFECT: ANALISYS AND EVALUATION OF EVENTS

The series of events known as the Arab Spring spread in a temporal chain that has fueled its geographical propagation throughout several Arabic countries. A so called “domino effect” has made it possible for events happening in a single country (mainly social instability) to extend their effects onto bordering countries. This was possible thanks to the circulation of news globally as favored by mass communication tools (tv, internet, social networks etc.) linking causes and effects and eliminating barriers of both time and space. The social turmoil in the Arab countries developed and spread facilitated by the fact the these nations share common or similar social, economic and political characteristics.

It is thus worthwhile retracing these events in their chronological order:

- **17 December 2010, Tunisia**
Mohamed Bouazizi, a street vendor in Sidi Buazid, sets himself on fire in front of a local government office protesting against the ban to sell his goods on the street. Protests spread across the entire country.
- **29 December 2010, Algeria**
The rise in food prices ignites a series of mass protests. In the following days 11 people try to suicide, 4 of them die.
- **14 January 2011, Jordan**
After Friday's prayers unions and left wing parties demonstrate against government policies in several cities across the country demanding for the Prime Minister to step down.
- **17 January 2011, Mauritania**
In order protest against the President, a demonstrator, Yacob Ould Dahoud, sets himself on fire in front of the presidential palace.
- **17 January 2011, Oman**
A few hundred protesters take the streets to demand higher wages and the decrease in the cost of living.
- **21 January 2011, Saudi Arabia**
The Shiite minority protests in the Eastern regions of the country to ask for the liberation of its imprisoned activists. Even though it was a peaceful demonstration, the promoters of the rally are all arrested. They were all clerics.

- **24 January 2011, Lebanon**
People take the streets to protest against the clerical power sharing system of the country.
- **25 January 2011, Egypt**
Following a series of local and limited protests, the first mass demonstrations take place across several cities (mainly in Cairo, Alexandria and Suez). Two days later an assault will set fire to the headquarters of the National Democratic Party.
- **26 January 2011, Syria**
A demonstrator, Hassan Ali Akleh, living in Al Hasakah, pours gasoline on his body and sets himself ablaze to protest against the Syrian government. Growing protests against the regime will follow day after day.
- **27 January 2011, Yemen**
Over 15,000 people gather in Sana'a and several thousand more in other parts of the country to protest against the regime and, mainly and foremost, against the possibility that President Saleh hand is power over to his son Ahmed.
- **28 January 2011, Palestine**
Protesters take the streets during the Hamas-Fatah talks.
- **30 January 2011, Morocco**
Demonstrators ask for democratic reforms.
- **4 February 2011, Bahrein**
Hundreds of people gather in front of the Egyptian embassy in a show of solidarity with the anti-government protesters in Cairo.
- **14 February 2011, Iran**
Following the news from Egypt of Mubarak's overthrow, protests in Isfahan degenerate into clashes and arrests. Similar demonstrations also take place at the same time in Teheran and elsewhere across Iran. Numerous opposition leaders are apprehended.
- **15 February 2011, Libya**
A few hundred people protest in Bengazhi against the arrest of lawyer Fathi Terbil, human rights activist and attorney for the families of the detainees that died in the Abu Salim penitentiary. Security forces brutally put an end to the demonstration.
- **17 February 2011, Iraq**
Rallies in Wassit, South of Baghdad, against the lack of electricity and water. Two government buildings are set on fire. Several people are wounded and arrested. Protests are also against corruption in government. In Sulemanyah, in Iraqi Kurdistan, demonstrators ask for reforms and protest against rising inflation. A protester is killed and 33 people are wounded.

- **18 February 2011, Kuwait**
To prevent mass demonstrations asking for economic reforms, Emir Sheykh Sabah al Ahmad al Jaber al Sabah decides to lavish 4,000 \$ to each subject of his rein (officially a contribution in the 20th anniversary of the country's liberation from Iraqi occupation). The following day thousands of people take the streets to protest against such a waste of money and against the government lead by PM Nasser al Mohammed al Ahmad al Sabah.

ANALISYS OF THE EVENTS AND OF THEIR CHRONOLOGY

The first observation is that the uprisings in the various Arab countries, even though closely litted in time (and thus linked by a cause and effect relation), have different starting points: a social unease, an economic demand, a democratic request, a need for rights, a civil liberties protest, a fight by religious minorities.

The domino effect is also in the forms of the protest: it is striking to witness the imitational behaviour that has lead to similar suicide attempts in Tunisia, Algeria, Mauritania and Syria. Another remark has to be made on the beginning of the demonstrations and the results they haven't always been able to obtain. The different national struggles have thus had different outcomes:

- in **Tunisia** a democratic process is underway in an overall peaceful manner,
- nothing has changed in **Algeria** (regardless of the fact that initially the protests were particularly violent)
- in **Libya** a civil war has lead to a regime change, but has yet to bring to a social reconciliation
- in **Marocco** popular requests have lead to Constitutional changes that have been peacefully piloted by the monarchy,
- in **Egypt** the role of the military and its influence on the country's political affairs has been replaced by a new theocracy-based leadership legitimated through an election,
- in **Mauritania** small economic concessions have toned down the demands from the street,
- in **Yemen** President Saleh has been dismissed without further bloodshed (to note the Saudi role in the negotiations and the fact that all popular demands have disappeared with the regime change),
- in **Syria** the government entrenched on radical positions using violence and allowing for a civil war to take place,
- in **Jordan** protests have lead to the fall of the Government, but the demands for greater Constitutional freedom has turned the struggle into a clash between pro-monarchy and reformists,

- in **Lebanon** demonstrations asking for a different institutional framework were overcome by the concerns over events in Syria and the potential repercussions home, as the recent killing of the head of the internal Secret Service Wassan Hassan has shown,
- in **Saudi Arabia** the Shiite rebellion was crushed by force and the demands for more freedom have been repressed with little gains (note the promise for women's right to vote),
- in **Oman** economic requests from the population were initially repressed by government, but were later granted since no one was questioning the authority of Sultan Qabus,
- in **Iraq** the endemic instability of the country has not allowed any room for economic requests, social petitions or adequate reforms (regardless of the fact that on December 15 2011 the US officially withdrew from the country),
- in **Iran** the struggle between reformists and conservatives, the tension between Khamenei and Ahmadinejad and among clerics and secularists have all watered down the requests coming from civil society involuntarily transforming them in an internal power struggle to the regime. The Security forces have all had a freehand in repressing the protests,
- in **Bahrein** the Shiite uprising was solved manu militari through the intervention of Saudi and Emirate units deployed to protect the Sunni regime of Hamad al Khalifa,
- in **Kuwait** protests have lead to the dissolution of Parliament,
- in **Palestine** the agreement between Hamas and Fatah has defused protests and contrasts even though the animosity between the two conflicting souls of the Palestinian diaspora is still ardent,

In all the above cases there has been no correlation between the level of violence in the protests and the quality of the results achieved. As a matter of fact, there is a marked correlation between the repression operated by regimes and the consequent limit in the gains obtained. This element is more evident if we consider that we are facing, in most cases, authoritarian regimes who have made an indiscriminate use of force.

Another remark can be made on the fact that the regimes lead by monarchies legitimated by religion have been by far more capable in facing the social turbulence of the Arab Spring. This has been the case in Morocco (Alawi monarchy), Oman (Ibadite sultan), Saudi Arabia (Wahabi monarchy), Jordan (Hashemite monarchy) and to some extent in Iran's theocracy.

On the other hand, military regimes (Syria, Egypt, Yemen) have shown a lack of suppleness during negotiations and have all been involved in bloody repressions of dissent.

A last remark should be made on the achievements obtained by popular demonstrations in Arabic countries. Putting Tunisia and Egypt aside (and Libya despite the external intervention), in other Arab nations, whether we are dealing with social and/or economic and/or political demands, a lot was asked for by protesters, but little has been achieved. The answer to this issue has to be found by focusing on the social context in which the protests took place. In fact:

– the miscellany, within the different national demonstrations, of both civil liberties and economic requests has penalized the first with respect to the latter and hence, prosaically, the obtainment of economic advantages has often defused the protests. A common denominator was lacking, both within the individual national demonstrations and in the Arab world as a whole. The domino effect was hence triggered by a common will to protest, not by common demands. As a consequence, the propelling push of the Arab Spring was dispersed in the specificity of national demands;

– overall the people of the Arab world lacked the consciousness on the aspirations and demands that are acquired only through a lengthy process of democratization of society. In the countries we are examining democracy is not a comparative value because the process has never started. Most nations went from the colonial phase onto the post-colonial one mostly ending up under authoritarian regimes. A democracy that has never been experimented cannot turn into a value, its advantages and limits are unknown, individual imagery is not sensitive to it. What mass media spread through global communications and news can feed the Arab with the concept of a society different from his own. But this is more on aesthetical terms, rather than having to do with civil liberties. And when you are not sure about what you want, it is difficult to ask for it or to obtain it or even, if it be the case, to allow for it;

– the kind of society the Arab protesters yearn to obtain after the revolt is not much different from the one they are fighting against. In most cases they are after a regime change. And were they to obtain it, the new regime would maintain the very same behavioral limits that characterized its predecessors: authority wielded with the use of force, the poor attention for opponents and protesters, the negation – if necessary – of those inalienable rights that are part of any social and democratic context. In other words, the demonstrators are after a regime change, but do not pose themselves the question (since they are lacking specific cultural experience on the matter) on how to shape the new one. On this subject their models are definitely limited. It is possible that after Khadafi's dictatorship a new authoritarian and scarcely democratic form could take over. When trying to figure out a new model for society, Arabs tend, on the basis of their past experience, to assimilate the management of power with the use of force and not, as would be desirable, on the search for consensus.

– What is defined in the Western world as “public opinion”, meaning the common feeling of the population and the will of the majority of the people, is another of those reference values lacking in most participants in the Arab Spring. Public opinion is identified in our fellow protester, but does not include the possibility that another public opinion could contrast my ideas.

Thus, overall these remarks postulate that the so called Arab Spring did not produce a significant benefit to the spreading of democracy, intended as a universal value.

We should also consider that any regime change, if obtained abruptly, through force and not through a slow process of assimilation, will generate instability. And this is potentially the major risk associated with the wave of protests of the Arab Spring. Until now, where change has been radical, firstly in Libya and to some extent in Egypt, peace and social security have been jeopardized. With the sole exception of Tunisia (that does not set a standard) due to a set of peculiar reasons (it is one

of the most socially advanced countries in the Arab world, it is subject to a strong European influence also through tourism and has benefited from a charismatic leader). Tomorrow if the same process should take place in other Arab nations, we have to expect more social problems than solutions. We could ask ourselves the question whether it is good or bad that some Arab Springs did not achieve their aims.

The Arab Spring, in its definition, implies an awakening of the conscience of the people in the Arab world and of their search for justice and freedom and should hence constitute, on the theoretical level, a positive event. If, in practice, this circumstance has been emphasized, lesser attention has been paid to the implications the Arab Spring could have on the stability of the Middle East and North Africa, on the oil market and the control for gas pipelines, on the clandestine migrations flows, on a geo-strategical context divided among conflicting spheres of influence, on the military balance among countries in the region, on the conflict between Sunnis and Shiites and, as a consequence, on the security of the Christians, on the protection of the maritime routes in the Gulf and through the Suez Channel, on the spread of terrorism fueled by the growing instability in the region, on the safeguard of national borders and of entities drawn on a map by colonial and post-colonial powers, on the impact on the financial markets of the immense capitals deriving from the sale of energetic resources, on the daily life of an ordinary Arab who expected an improvement in terms of liberties and security and which he will probably not obtain.

KHADAFI'S LIBYA AND TODAY'S LIBYA

After the coup d'etat of September 1969, Khadafi structured his power on a series of initiatives aimed at ensuring control over the Libyan territory and most importantly over its population. A rather small population living in a quite vast territory.

THE KABYLES

Khadafi's first move was that of obtaining the support of the Kabyles, the beduin tribes of Libya. Being a beduin himself, Khadafi made his moves in this context with particular agility.

He distributed prebends, favored weddings of interest and assigned offices with the only goal of guaranteeing the support of the heads of the Kabyles and their tribes. Being himself from a Kabyle of the central Fezzan region (which represents about 33% of the country's surface), it was easy for Khadafi to administer his power in a context of historical rivalry between the Cirenaic (50% of the country) population and that of the Tripolitan area (16% of the country). Those who did not adhere to this barter were either set aside (in the best case scenario) or eliminated (in the most recurrent scenario).

The Kabyles of the Cirenaic were the ones that could potentially be more hostile to the regime because they had ties with the Senussia confraternity and with the previous monarchy. These Kabyles immediately became the object of discrimination and persecution. Cyrenaica itself was – as a punishment – systematically excluded from any and all investment or financial benefit. It isn't by hazard that the 2011 revolt against the regime moves its first steps from this very region.

The Libyan Kabyles are about 50 in number, then there are the under-Kabyles, the federations of Kabyles and various minor groups. Khadafi managed to give all of these groups prestigious posts as representatives at the central level.

Apart from the Kabyle that Khadafi belonged to – the “Qadadfa” that was located in Sirte – which had the highest number of representatives in key offices (the cousins Ahmed and Said Gheddafeddami, Ahmed Mohammed Ibrahim, Mohammed Masoud Al Majdud, etc.), the following other Kabyles were the staunchest supporters of Khadafi's regime:

- the “Warfalla” of Bani Walid, the greatest Kabyle of the center-north of the country that was the backbone of the dictator's army and security forces;
- the “Magarha”, the greatest Kabyle of the south-west of Libya (north Fezzan) and the biggest in the country (about 10% of the population) to which belonged Abdel Salam Jalloud (former number two of the regime) and Khadafi's brother-in-law, Abdallah Senussi (husband of the sister of the second wife of Khadafi);
- the “Barasa”, a Kabyle from Cyrenaica (near Al Baida), initially hostile to the regime but later conquered through the marriage of Khadafi and Safia Sarkash, his second wife;
- part of the “Obeidat”, a Kabyle from Benghazi and Tobruk, whose main representative was the foreign Minister Abdullati al Obeidi;

- the “Jawari” from Tripolitan, whose members held posts in the Revolutionary Council (Kweldi al Humaidi and Mustafa al Kharroubi).

As we mentioned above, the other tribal factions that did not support Khadafi were de facto excluded from the division of power and / or money (ex. The “Magharba”, teh “Awlad Suleimann” in Cyrenaica, the “M'nifa” from Huan Waddan).

THE INSTRUMENTS OF REPRESSION

The other means used regularly by Khadafi to control the country was that of repression. The opposition, even when peaceful, had no room in the dictator's imagination. Those who dared challenge his power were eliminated or incarcerated. To render the repression more efficient Khadafi used the Security Services: The Internal Security Service (Jihaz al Aman al Dakili), headed by Khaled Tuhami, The External Security Service (Jihaz Al Aman al Kharigi), headed by Abu Zied Durda, The Military Security Service (Jihaz Al Aman Akaria), lately under the absolute control of Abdallah Senussi.

The first of these operated without bonds on the national territory, gathering informations on Libyan and foreign citizens and carrying out counter-espionage and counter-terroristic activity.

The second was dedicated to contrasting menaces from abroad, but mostly – especially in the first years of the regime – to the search and elimination of opposition members abroad. This second activity was flourishing when the E.S.S. was headed by Mussa Kusa, now hiding in England, between 1994 and 2008. The date in which the hunt for opposition members abroad began was June 11, 1980, the tenth anniversary of the chasing of Americans from the air base of Whelus Field, and the deadline set by the regime for the return home of Libyan dissidents residing abroad.

The military intelligence dedicated itself to the control of the armed forces. This agency was kept by Khadafi at a low operative level, perhaps because Khadafi himself had staged his coup d'etat from within that agency.

THE CONTROL OVER THE MOSQUES

Khadafi was afraid that the opposition could assume religious connotations because the preceding monarchy, which he overturned with a coup d'etat, identified itself with the confraternity of Senussia. The confraternity, strongly present in Cyrenaica, adopted an orthodox Islam (its founder, Mohammed bin Ali Al Senussi, had ties to Saudi Wahabism) and a social system built on work farms (generally agricultural) named “zawiya”. After expropriating the Catholic Church's possessions (with the exception of two modest churches in Tripoli and Benghazi – the present-day great Mosque in Tripoli used to be a Cathedral) because it was accused of collusion with the previous colonial regime, Khadafi had done the same with the possessions of the confraternity.

The confraternity's religious structures had been transferred to a newly-created organization, the “Dawa al Islamiya” (“Islamic Call”) that controlled the activity of the Mosques, presided the formation of the Ulamas, controlled the Islamic press, but most importantly which served as a transmission belt for consensus between the regime and the country's religious community. This

organization, which rose in 1970 as a Libyan part of the World Islamic Call Society, which in turn is a part of the OIC (Organization of the Islamic Conference), had the goal of diffusing Islam and the dictates of the Green book across the globe, of creating collaborations with other similar foreign organizations and mostly of being an element of political-religious penetration for the regime abroad. During its first years of activity, the Dawa Islamiya was a destabilizing instrument against the countries hostile to Libya and was also involved in the seek and destroy mission against dissidents living abroad.

As with all of the agencies created by the regime, in its varied formula of duties and functions, this structure too ensured the regime with internal and external support. It is not by hazard that the Dawa Islamiya was assisted in its activity by an “Office for Islamic Revolutionary Movements” and co-ordinated its initiatives with other agencies that supported the regime (Security Services, Revolutionary Committees, Center for Study and Research of the Green Book, Permanent Secretary of the People's Congress, Mathaba).

THE MILITARY SECURITY SERVICES

Having obtained his power through a military coup d'etat, Khadafi was always wary of a powerful and efficient army that could be a destabilizing element for the regime. For this reason, after 1969, the Libyan armed forces were always kept at a low level of operativeness. The chain of command was always held by the Rais through a General provisional Committee of Defense (like a Ministry) headed by a secretary general of the Provisional Defense Committee (Minister) in the person of one of his oldest and most faithful followers, General Abu Bakr Younes Jaber, member of the Council for Revolutionary Command.

From the military point of view the defense of the regime was presided by the so-called “security forces”, thus the elite forces, well trained and armed but most importantly made up by the most faithful followers of the regime (recruitment was tribe-based). These agents bypassed every hierarchy to refer directly to Khadafi himself.

There was the Republican Guard (c.ca 3000 men armed with tanks, missile systems and other armed vehicles divided into 2 brigades, one in Tripoli and another in Benghazi), the deterrence Force (for the defense of sensible targes, especially near the capital), the 9th regiment (stationed in Tripoli and armed with mechanized and anti-tank weapons), the Security Units (light infantry battalions in charge of guaranteeing security during the events attended by Khadafi), the 32nd brigade (c.ca 10.000 men) cammanded by Khadafi's son, captain Khamis Muammar al Khadafi (presumably killed in action on August 29, 2011). A total of c.ca 15.000 /18.000 men, all volunteers, out of an mandatorily drafted army (called “people in arms”) of about 60-70.000 regulars plus 6-8.000 Navy soldiers, 6-8.000 Airforce soldiers and 12-15.000 Air Defense soldiers. To these we must add c.ca 12.000 Policemen, Border Patrol and Coastguards (later merged with the Navy). Thus another 25-30.000 men that – with various degrees of loyalty – could support the regime.

THE INSTITUTIONAL SYSTEM

In December 1969, three months after the revolution, Libya drafted a new Constitution based on 37 articles that expressed the new inspirational principles of the new regime (Pan-arabism, anti-

imperialism, nationalism). The general principle of “power to the people” was introduced. Islam was designated state religion, social solidarity, equal rights for all citizens, right to labour, free mandatory education, the family as a founding element of society, the right to medical assistance, freedom of opinion (within the “bounds” of public interest and revolutionary principles), a socialist-styled economic system (property is mostly public, while private property is tolerated only if it doesn't exploit the people, the State can act directly on the private sector and dispossess private property for public use). There was also the introduction of the idea of a re-unification of the Arab masses that had been divided by false post-colonial boundaries. All of this within a vision of utopia that has marked the international initiatives of Khadafi since the early years of his regime.

On March 2nd, 1977, a declaration on the “Institution of authority to the people” was proclaimed. It introduced two fundamental principles: the authority is of the people (thus power to the masses) and direct democracy is considered the only form of administration for the public sector. From both of these premises there came the system of Congresses and Committees that was already mentioned in Khadafi's 1973 Green Book as the only solution to the problem of democracy.

The 1977 declaration specified (art. 3) that the power of the people must be exercised through People's Congresses, Syndicates, Unions, Federations, professional Associations and the General People's Congress. In practice what followed was the creation of a pyramidal system of aggregation and popular participation at various levels starting with the basic people's congresses (with their own secretariat and popular committee) all the way to the General People's Congress (aka the parliament, single-chambered and composed of 760 representatives with a yearly mandate), a Secretary of the General People's Congress (aka president of parliament) and a General People's Committee (aka the government) presided by a Secretary of the General Committee (aka Prime Minister) and made up of many General People's Committees (as many as the ministries needed and designated).

The pyramidal structure comprised neighborhoods (“mehallat”, c.ca 1.500), municipalities (over 400), districts (Sha'biyah, 32 in total) all the way up to the political head of the country. This structure involved – both voluntarily and forcibly – an enormous mass of people out of a relatively small population (6.173.579 according to data from 2008) and a huge territory (1.759.540 square km).

With this capillary structure laid out on the entire territory, Khadafi could not only gather “transfer” consensus to his people, but also monitor any manifest dissent in the country. No political party was authorized to operate in Libya.

The institutional system of Libya (the Great Socialist People's Arab Jamahiriya, as it will be officially called by 1977) did not envisage a head of the State, an office that was “indirectly” carried out by Khadafi in his role of “Supreme Leader of the Revolution of the Great Fatah”.

After the attempted coup d'etat of October 1993 and on the 25th anniversary of the revolution (September 1st 1994), Khadafi had also proclaimed the creation of the “Social popular Libyan Guides”. Headed by a general and formed by influential individuals from various Kabyles with strong loyalty to the Colonel, the Guides controlled the social life of every district (sha'biyah). This was yet another measure enacted by the regime to control the population through the integration of the tribal system in the complex Libyan administrative machine.

THE MATHABA

In 1982 Khadafi decided to constitute a new agency named “Mathaba” (Arabic for “gathering” or “reunion”) with the aim of creating a direct connection between the Jamahiriya and the various revolutionary movements around the world, including their support, both ideologically and financially. The Mathaba was also called “World Center against imperialism, Zionism, racism and fascism”. The foundation of the Mathaba happened simultaneously in other co-founding countries, namely Syria and Iran.

The Mathaba operated autonomously within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and had a direct connection to the External Security Service (operatively speaking) and with the “Office for the exportation of the Revolution” (dedicated to the diffusion of the Green Book – ideologically speaking). Its members were stationed in foreign diplomatic offices with the role of “political commissioners”. They also sought and eliminated dissidents abroad.

The Mathaba served as the primordial soup for the constitution of a “Revolutionary fighting force”, from which will stem the idea of an “Islamic Legion”. In September 1989, on the 20th anniversary of the Libyan revolution, a para-military corp called the “Guard of the Mathaba” was created. The group was made up of 4-500 individuals belonging to foreign revolutionary groups, yet affiliated to the Libyan organization. In time the Mathaba became a fundamental instrument for financing foreign revolutionary movements all around the world (the Spanish ETA; the Irish IRA; Poder Popular in Argentina; the revolutionary left in general across Latin America as a counter-USA force; the Muslim minorities in Guyana, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago; the ANC in South Africa; the Angolan MPLA; the Namibian SWAPO; the Mozambican FRELIMO etc.) The Mathaba was a strong vehicle for Libya's ideological interference on a global level, but also an instrument of repression and control of the regime.

THE REVOLUTIONARY COMMITTEES

A new batch of supporting structures for the regime were created in 1977 under the name of “Revolutionary Committees” which, at least at the start, should have worked at spreading the ideas of the Green Book by enacting a revolution as envisaged by Khadafi by monitoring public agencies, schools, institutions, the Congresses, the Popular Committees and the armed forces while at the same time recruiting new adepts.

The Committees were the keepers of the regime's orthodoxy. They were against tribalism, reactionary or foreign ideologies and opposition in general. Being made up mostly of youths that united more or less spontaneously, with the passing of time they evolved from being an instrument of support and proselytism to being one of intimidation and repression. They were the regime's military arm and were involved in the elimination of Libyan dissidents abroad. Their power constantly becoming more extended and less controlled, they gave way to an equal-sized escalation of abuses and injustices.

In the 1980's they were just a few thousands. Lately – according to the regime's official data – they were about 30.000. The Revolutionary Committees answered directly to Khadafi and had conquered ground within Libya's judicial system, thus creating the so-called Revolutionary

Tribunals.

Between 1987 and 1988 their overly invasive approach to the Libyan social system had convinced Khadafi to reduce their power by moving part of their activity under the control of a new agency called the “Secretariat for mass mobilization and revolutionary leadership”. Their activism within security structures and police forces was also dwarfed. Yet despite the highs and lows of their power, the Revolutionary Committees remained an instrument in the hands of the regime to be used when needed. During the last civil war they fought until the end together with the loyalist regiments in the guise of para-military entities, being often responsible for episodes of brutality.

THE ROLE OF THE FAMILY

Apart from the historical comrades of the Command of the Revolutionary Council (Kweldi al Jameidi, Mustafa al Kharroubi, Abu Bakr Youni) that ensured Khadafi an effective support in exercising his power (in a regime of reciprocity and complicity, of course), the Rais – whom did not officially represent any institutional power – could count on the members of his family for the enforcement of his will. Khadafi's family was a consolidated part of the system and of his personal power.

Khadafi had 8 children, 7 sons and 1 daughter.

The oldest was **Mohammed**, son of Khadafi's first wife (Khaled Nuri Fateya) from whom he had divorced. For this reason Mohammed did not seat in prestigious political posts. Engineer, he was considered to be an expert businessman. He exercised his activity mostly in the sector of telecommunications. Apart from working in a strategic sector such as telecommunications and the internet, Mohammed represented a trait d'union between the regime and the Libyan entrepreneurial class. He was married to his college sweetheart, the daughter of merchants.

Seif al Islam was the first male son of Khadafi's second (and last) wife and thus, in the Arab tradition, was the direct heir of his father's power. The attention of international analysts was often centered on Seif al Islam in order to understand his real standing within the regime as well as his idea and initiatives. He was the president of the “Khadafi Charity Organization and Development Foundation” and had started a series of international humanitarian initiatives around the world in order to underline the organization's international vocation and had staged similar national initiatives in order to defuse social malcontent (see the contacts with the relatives of the victims of Abu Salim, the contacts with international NGO's for the issue of human rights, the negotiations with the imprisoned former terrorists of the Islamic Fighting Libyan Group). Politically speaking, Seif professed rather reformist and innovative ideas (Constitution, Democracy, Human rights) that were nonetheless “dangerous” and frequently opposed more or less actively by other members of the regime. Seif has a degree in architecture, a master degree in International Management obtained in Vienna, Austria, and until the death of his father he never strove from his role of first male son of the dictator.

Politically speaking (lately, in order to assign more important political roles to Seif, Khadafi had created a new agency called the “Council for Social and Popular Guidance” that Mohammed was supposed to preside and represent) he joined the armed forces and was then accused – perhaps unjustly – of crimes against humanity by the International Tribunal in The Hague. His first and

foremost crime was surely that of behind the heir of Khadafi.

Mutassim al Billah was born after Seif Al Islam and had attempted to be a contender for the role of principal heir to his father's power. He presided the Council for National Security and as such played an important role in the security sector. If Seif was the “political” brother, Mutassim was the “operative” one. Perhaps it is because of this that he was eliminated right after being caught.

The two brothers **Saadi** and **Hannibal**, rather than creating support for their father's leadership, created problems for the family. Saadi was a colonel and had an unclear military role (he was accredited with the command of the “Joint Special Force”, made up of members of the Army/Navy/Aviation of which no operative instances are known). His notoriety was mostly tied to his foolish football ambitions. His biggest merit was that of having married the daughter of Kweldi al Hameidi, member of the Command of the Revolutionary Council. Their wedding (not an easy one) guaranteed the connection between powerful personalities within the regime. Hannibal, on the contrary, was famous for his intemperance, which he paraded both at home and abroad. Suffice to mention the Swiss hostage crisis, staged as payback for Hannibal's arrest in Switzerland (*)

Aisha Muammar was the only daughter of Khadafi and was very close to him. As lawyer she had participated in the defense of Saddam Hussein. Aisha had a strong and combative character, she was emancipated and dedicated to humanitarian initiatives. She ensured the indirect support of the regime among women.

Seif Al Arab did not meddle much with the family. No role inside the family power structure is to him accredited. He was the first of Khadafi's children to die in the civil war, in silence and unseen, just like he had lived.

Khamis was the “military” son within the family. He commanded a brigade of loyal soldiers, the most efficient within the armed forces, which ensured the security of the regime. As expectable, Khamis died (at least until the news will be proven false) during a military operation.

THE NEMESIS OF THE REGIME

Khadafi's power found its force in the above elements and structures that ensured its solidity and continuity. Otherwise, Khadafi's dominion could not have lasted over 42 years. After the death of the North Korean dictator Kim Il Sung and of Omar Bongo in Gabon, Khadafi became the longest lasting dictator still at the helm.

During the so-called “arab spring” that overran several North African and Middle Eastern countries, Libya would have surely maintained its regime if not for the negative circumstances that occurred in neighboring nations (circumstances that caused a domino effect in the region). Had foreign forces not intervened militarily to help the revolt, Khadafi would have probably survived. The war showed that Khadafi still had popular consent (even through the Kabyles) and the consequent military power.

The limit that caused the downfall of the regime – although a blood-thirsty one like Khadafi's – was in their lack of flexibility, the impossibility of accepting and facing new scenarios. This is a recurring parameter among all dictatorships where the logic of force and repression wins over

consensus.

In the Libyan case this circumstance was made worse by the fact that Khadafi thought of himself and his role on messianic terms. He could not accept the fact that his people did not recognize themselves in him. This is also shown by the fact that Khadafi did not run when faced with certain defeat, he stayed among his people until the bitter end. He preferred martyrdom to dishonor, he showed stupor in front of the rancor of his aggressors that had captured and were killing him.

Khadafi felt invested with a message and a universal role even in the international context. His initial philo-Nasserism, the pan-arabism of many years back, up until the final africanism and his self-procured title of “king of kings” by the various African tribe leaders. All of these elements traveled hand in hand with Khadafi's self-consideration.

Khadafi was not a frivolous operetta-type character as he is sometimes described because of his behavioral extravagance and his attire.

He had the acumen of the beduin, he could smell out situations and perils. For this reason, during his administration of power he moved from one line to the next and sometimes his policy was tagged as unforeseeable or histrionic, yet always motivated by the survival of the regime. He was a terrorist and a revolutionary, but he also fought terrorism. He was alternatively pro or anti-American, a layman, Islamic fundamentalist, then a moderate Islamic. He caressed the dream of a nuclear bomb then denied his fancy, he had the opposition abroad killed and then – in the final years of his reign – pardoned them. He fought the Muslim Borthers then pardoned them, fought against the Libyan Fighting Islamic Group then graced and freed them. He has been everything and its opposite. He was a dictator, but also a sophisticated politician. Surely an uncomfortable person, even for Italy, which has often had to face preeminent economic interests among difficult bilateral relationships.

His death does not pose – in principle – particular ethical problems. A dictator that dies theoretically leaves the world a better place. This would have even more value if there were an international justice system that would intervene with equity against the various dictators around the globe (the case of Syria shows that it isn't so).

TODAY'S LIBYA

A dead Khadafi invariably leaves behind himself a country torn by divisions and prevarications. Today's Libya has the same limits as with the preceding dictatorship (violations of human rights, injustice, abuses) with the addition of one more negative element: the lack of social stability which – although forcibly – Khadafi guaranteed. In practice today's Libya is not better off than yesterday's. In the last years of Khadafi's regime the number of political prisoners rose to over 600. Today the number of the imprisoned people (after the war) is even higher.

One could argue that there is an added value for a dictatorship which is no more, yet when speaking of a population that has never enjoyed democracy, this added value could be equal to zero. The risk is that Libya could go from a dictatorship to another authoritarian regime. This is a highly probable circumstance.

Also, a socially unstable Libya – as it is today – can become a stomping ground for terrorism that finds its justification in radical Islam. The murder of US ambassador Chris Stevens on September 11 in Benghazi by the members of “Ansar al Sharia” demonstrates this without any doubt.

Over a year after the death of Khadafi the armed militias that fought the regime continue to operate undisturbed without adhering – as requested by the new government – to a general dismantling of armed groups. Every one of these militias tends to represent the interests of its Kabyle, thus invalidating the social cohesion that was guaranteed – although in an informal manner - in Khadafi's time. Amidst a game of cross-vengeance and in application of the talion law that is rather popular among the beduin populations of the region, Libya continues to be plagued by abuses and bloodshed.

The Kabyles that were staunchest in defending the Rais' regime are still hostile to change as there is no room for national reconciliation. The recent case of the military attack against Bani Walid, which is inhabited prevalently by the Warfalla and still out of the government's control, is proof of this.

Corruption – an element that was used by Khadafi as an adjoint element of social cohesion is still widely diffused. The wealth accumulated by the Libyan Investment Authority – the agency that administered the regime's investments abroad with an estimated capital of over 60 billion US dollars – has all but vanished since its administration has shifted to the new government. There is bickering on the creation of a federal system, but mostly on the division of the oil profits between Libya's regions. The flourishing of social and financial chaos together with the spread of militant and subversive radicalism and the lack of security create further contrast in a society that is already divided and juxtaposed.

() July 15, 2008 : Hannibal and his wife Aline are residing in a Geneva hotel. Two housemaids working for them go to the police to denounce mistreatments. When the police show up at the hotel they are aggressed by the Khadafis and by their bodyguards (they are carrying weapons that were not declared when they entered Switzerland). After a brief fight, Hannibal and his wife are arrested. They are released on bail on the following day. Khadafi father feels he has suffered a slight. This will produce a diplomatic crisis between Tripoli and Bern that will last for over 2 years.*

TUNISIA, ANALYSIS OF A GOOD EXAMPLE

The Tunisian uprising came about by chance on December 17 2010. A street vendor of vegetables, Mohamed Bouazizi, had his goods confiscated by Police. It wasn't the first time this happened. But this was his only source of revenue. Mohamed was a graduate, he would and could have done better qualified jobs, but unemployment rates in his country, especially for youths, did not provide him with an alternative. He is exasperated. He goes in front of the government office in Sidi Bouzid and sets himself on fire. This is the spark that ignites the revolt against the regime. The people's rage spreads in other zones like Kasserine, Jendouba and arrives in Tunis.

President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali, former chief of the Secret Service, had risen to power on November 7 1987. Two years before, a coup d'état had defenestrated Habib Bourghiba, founder of the nation (he had lead Tunisia to independence from France on March 25 1956) but then sick and struck by the first symptoms of senile dementia. Ben Ali initially tackles the protest menacing an armed intervention, accuses foreign mass media, promises hard sanctions against the rioters. He does so from the screens of the State television airing menaces and statements.

Ben Ali had always managed power in an absolute manner, just like any other dictator, and with a heavy hand. Over time he has crushed any form of dissent and opposition. He knows no other method to handle crowds. His strongest opponent, Rashid Ghannouchi, an islamist who had received a death sentence from Bourghiba (for an alleged coup attempt) and successively had then been pardoned, founder of a party that was banned, had been forced to flee his country and live in exile in London.

Ben Ali had managed to gain Western support for having fought islamic fundamentalism, while no one had paid the necessary attention to the abuses perpetrated by his regime and, at the same time, cared about a President ruling his country with the methods typical of a dictatorship. As a matter of fact, Ben Ali had taken military courses in France (Chalon sur Marne artillery school), intelligence classes in the United States (anti-aircraft artillery school in Texas and a senior intelligence course in Maryland), had risen to power with the blessing and support of the Italian government (PM Bettino Craxi and former SISMI – military intelligence – chief Admiral Fulvio Martini), had served as a military attaché in Morocco and Spain and was a former ambassador to Poland. He was, to all effects, a reliable person.

On the other hand Ben Ali was also a tyrant hated by his own people. Much worse was his wife, Leila Trabelsi, who had an awful reputation. Her family clan was accused of corruption and embezzlement of public funds. Originating from a family of low lineage and limited culture (Leila was a hairdresser before meeting Ben Ali and marrying him in 1992), immediately after the wedding her family dedicated their efforts to enriching themselves regardless of the lawfulness of their acts. Surrounded by 10 among brothers and sisters, there wasn't any attractive business that would not go through the Trabelsis. Leila showed off a luxurious lifestyle and a scornful attitude. The strong age difference with her husband (he was born in September 1936, while she was born in October 1956) made her influence on her partner's decisions particularly effective.

Following the threats against the demonstrators and having become aware of the amplitude and determination of the protest, Ben Ali resurfaced on television using moderate tones. He promised institutional reforms, more individual freedom, use of internet without restrictions, but foremost

Ben Ali promised not to candidate for the 2014 elections (a Constitutional reform in 2002 had allowed his mandate to be renewed limitlessly).

His offers were turned down and protests continued: on January 14 2011 Ben Ali fled to Saudi Arabia with his wife and three children. He had initially asked for asylum in France, but it was refused. The former Tunisian president left behind a wave of violence that in less than a month had caused around 200/250 deaths among unarmed protesters.

Ben Ali's departure did not put an end to the violence: loyalist militias continued to shoot on people causing deaths, wounded and resorted to systematic abuse and torture.

On January 15 2011 Fouad Mebazaa, an old figure linked to the independence struggle and to Bourghiba's days and with a long pedigree of ministerial and diplomatic posts, was nominated President of the Republic ad interim (a post he will retain until December 12 2011).

On January 17 2011 a new government of national unity is installed including both people from the old regime and members of the opposition. The experiment fails: 5 ministers immediately step down.

Tunisia continues the dismantling of the old regime: the portraits of the former president disappear from the streets, the State television changes name (Tunisie 7 – the number referred to Ben Ali's take over – turns into Television Tunisi ne), the names of the streets associated to the dictator are removed.

On January 30 2011 Rachid Ghannouchi returns home after 22 years of exile spent between Algiers and London. A cheering crowd awaits him at the airport.

The new Tunisian authorities issue an international arrest warrant for Ben Ali and his wife. The accusations include: high treason, money laundering, embezzlement of State funds. Ben Ali is accused of having transferred funds abroad and having made real estate investments worth 5 billion euros over his 23 years of Presidential mandate.

The “Rassemblement Constitutionnel democratique” (R.C.D.), the regime party (heir of the old Socialist Desturian Party of Bourghiba), is suspended on February 6 2011 and dissolved the following month (March 9).

The social situation remains very critical, several young Tunisians attempt clandestine immigration via sea to Italy. On February 27 2011 waves of illegal immigrants onboard boats from Tunisia start reaching the Italian island of Lampedusa. Italy proclaims a humanitarian emergency.

Protests in the streets continue and PM Mohammed Ghannouchi resigns on February 27 (5 protesters will die on that day). Figure of the old regime, member of the RCD (from which he had resigned in January 2011), several times a Minister under Ben Ali (of Finances from 1989 until 1992, of International Cooperation and Foreign Investments until 1999 and briefly a PM), after Ben Ali's escape Ghannouchi had been charged with running (with 6 other people) the country's transition to democracy and national conciliation. But Mohammed Ghannouchi did not have the love of his people as he was too compromised with the old regime when he had gained the

nickname of “Mr. Oui Oui”, a Yesman for the dictator.

His post is taken over by Beji Caid Essebsi, an old lawyer (born in 1926) and one of Bourghiba's first counselors, several times minister (of Interior from 1965 until 1969, of Foreign Affairs from 1981 until 1986) and former Parliament Speaker (1990/1991). After Ben Ali's coup Essebsi had been Ambassador to Germany and had left Parliament and retired in 1994. It was always the same attempt: to facilitate a democratic transition. In this case, since the man was not as involved with the past regime, he obtains the people's approval.

On March 3 2011 President Mebazaa announces that Tunisia will hold parliamentary elections in July to elect a constituent assembly (with 217 members). The date will be postponed until October 23 due to difficulties in compiling electoral lists.

On June 20 2011, following a summary trial based on an old Tunisian code and without having the right to defense, Ben Ali and his wife Leila are condemned to 35 years for theft and embezzlement of public funds and jewels. Similar trials are held against other members of the Trabelsi family, many of whom have also fled abroad (France, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Canada). Ben Ali will total 66 years of prison sentences following other trials. His wife will allegedly go through a suicide attempt.

In the mean time protests continue with uninterrupted intensity: on July 17 2011 government buildings and police stations are assaulted wounding 4 agents. After clashes between police and protesters the following day a 14 year old boy is killed by a stray bullet in Sidi Bouzid.

On August 8 2011 a mass rally is held to ban former regime officials from re-entering politics and following more protests and clashes on September 2 a curfew is imposed on several areas of Tunisia. A 17 years old girl dies and several people are wounded.

Regardless of all of this, the democratization process continues. On October 23 2011 the elections for the constituent assembly are held with a high voter turnout: over 90% of voters. It is the first fruit of the social awakening and of the desire to move on. Tunisia had not held a vote since 1956.

Elections will see the presence of 500 foreign observers, fraud accusations are limited and overall the vote is deemed as fair and regular. Parliamentarians are elected on the basis of a proportional vote.

Ghannouchi's moderate islamist party Ennahda (The Rebirth) wins with over 1,5 million votes on the 4 million available and obtains 89 seats out of 217. The others winners are:

- the “**Congress for the Republic**”, a secular center left party, with **29 seats**
- the “Popular Petition for freedom, justice and development” (**Aridha Chaabia** in arabic), a populist party created a few months before the vote by a businessman living in London, obtains 27 seats (later reduced to 19 due to financial irregularities)
- the “Democratic Forum for work and freedom” (**Ettakatol**), a social democratic party, with 20 seats.

Lastly with 16 seats the “Progressive Democratic Party” (secular centrist party) and other minor parties.

On November 22 2011, the three biggest parties agree on power sharing: Hamadi Jebali from Ennahda becomes Prime Minister, Moncef Marzouki of the Congress for the Republic is nominated President of the Republic and Mustafa ben Jaafar from Ettakatol is named President of the constituent assembly. Other independents also join government.

There are still a number of problems haunting Tunisia: corruption, unemployment, public order. Protests and counter-protests follow one another in the streets of Tunis. On December 10 2011 the constituent assembly adopts a provisional Constitution (“Law on the provisional organization of public powers”) and two days later Marzouki is confirmed as first President elect of the country.

The latter will assign Ennahda's Hamad Jebali the task of forming a new government within three weeks. On February 1 2012 Habib Khedher is charged with drafting the new Constitution and on February 14 2012 the six members of the Commission in charge of the drafting are appointed.

THE CURRENT SITUATION

The democratization process in Tunisia is not complete. The Constitutional reform is not over while it advances along a bumpy road each time there is an attempt to reduce civil liberties with the inclusion of Islamic law (an amendment from Ennahda to introduce Sharia law was filed on March 3 and withdrawn on March 26. Another proposal that stated that women were complementary to men was submitted on August 6 and withdrawn following protests on September 28).

Not even the demonstrations and the protests that cyclicly take place are over because the economic crisis has not been overcome and unemployment, especially among the youth, is still high. Corruption has not been eradicated.

It is hence obvious that we should question where lay the positive elements that make of the Tunisian case a hope story and one of the most successful examples of the Arab Spring.

Firstly, we should underline that any transition from a dictatorship to an infant democracy is never painless. There are winners and losers, power is handed over into different hands, equilibrium and relations of power change, abuses are committed by those that have never benefited from liberties and don't appreciate their boundaries, institutions and State structures collapse and are not immediately replaced, social chaos. The way out of this can only come after a period of transition because modifications not only involve structures, political formulas and the state apparatus, but also the men charged with applying them.

There are people that have to go from relations and social behaviors in an authoritarian and despotic context to relations based on consensus, that take into account the importance of public opinion, the non-use of force and the relevance of dialogue. On top of that there are also individuals coming from abroad and that during previous lives acted in the role of illegal opponents and that now have to face new responsibilities. And, without going very far, this is the case of Rashid Ghannouchi.

The road to democracy is always long, it follows tortuous routes because it doesn't only have to change structures, but also people's minds. A popular vote in 2011, the second one in 55 years of Tunisia, cannot suffice as evidence of a common political denominator in a country, even though it still is per se a significant event. Time is needed to allow civic-minded people to evolve.

With such a premise it is worth underlining the positive aspects of the Tunisian experience:

the Ghannouchi case

his first political experience was under Bourghiba. He founds an Islamic party in 1981, the "Movement for Islamic Tendency" (Harakat al Ittihad al Islami) after an earlier political infatuation for Nasserism. He is then arrested and sentenced to 7 years in jail. Freed in 1984, Ghannouchi is arrested again in 1987. This time around he is accused of an alleged coup attempt. Freed by Ben Ali, he founds Ennahda, but after a few years is forced into exile. He is charged by Tunisian authorities of leading a terrorist group and this label is accepted by a good portion of the West.

Once returned home, his CV could have led Ghannouchi to take his revenge against the old regime and/or the West and to embrace extremist positions both in politics and religion. He doesn't do so even after elections results legitimate his leadership and would potentially allow him the political power to do as he wishes. From a symbol of resistance against the dictatorship, Mohamed Ghannouchi has become a man of dialogue. He immediately agrees with the secular parties in the Assembly to favor a transition to democracy. Ghannouchi is not even against, during the initial stages of the revolution, that people colluded with the past regime continue to temporarily occupy public posts. His political Islam is moderate. It preaches tolerance and continues to do so even after the Commission charged with drafting the new Constitution votes to maintain article 1 as it had been written by late President Bourghiba in 1959: "Tunisia is a free and sovereign State with Islam as its State religion, Arab is its official language and it is a Republic" (actually, as previously stated, there was a failed attempt by Ennahda to introduce Sharia in order to take cover from the extremist views of the Salafists). The secular structure of the State was basically confirmed. Ghannouchi knows that Tunisian society has strongly assimilated the concept of secularism and that tourism is one of the major financial resources for the country. He also knows that it wasn't Ennahda that started the revolution against Ben Ali, nor that it was inspired by religious demands. It was the people who kicked Ben Ali out, not a religious idea. Ghannouchi thus accepts that other social instances be part of this political changeover. He knows he has a political credit to spend due to his past experience (but he is not the only one with this pedigree) and that his party benefits from its philanthropism, but also that Tunisia ought to look ahead.

The role of the Armed Forces

Tunisian Armed Forces have never been, as opposed to nearby Egypt or Algeria, a central part of political relations. During the revolution the top military brasses watched political events develop and left their men in the barracks. The same can be said for security forces, except for an initial support to Ben Ali until his escape. This circumstance has allowed for a speedy progression towards democracy without major bloodbaths.

Ennahda's agenda

Ennahda has picked up the pragmatism of its leader.

Ghannouchi's party has won not only because Islam is and will remain, as identical developments in other Arabic countries have shown, the sole identifiable common element for populations in this part of the world. His rise to power was democratic and he democratically is trying to bring his agenda forward knowing that other secular stances also exist in Tunisia. The slogan that won Ennahda the elections was simple: integrity, honesty and muslim values. Islam as a guarantee of morality.

In other words, the party combined tradition and innovation and focused its attention on the country's endemic problems (corruption, social inequality, fight against the elites, unemployment, favoritism). Ennahda did not entrench in the position deriving from its religious appeal and wasn't only about rhetoric, but decided to tackle everyday problems. This was possible thanks to a widespread organization (neighborhood committees, charitable organizations, strong relationship with mosques) lacking in other parties and that allowed them to have a direct link with the people's demands and turning them into a political agenda. Furthermore, Ennahda could count on significant financing coming from the Gulf.

In the Tunisian political landscape, Ennahda did not put itself in contrast with other party's ideas, but rather assimilated both Bourghiba's secular nationalism and the reformist and modernization demands coming from the people. Concerning women's rights, Ennahda was clear about the freedom to choose whether or not to wear the veil and the right to divorce, introduced by the secular family code in 1959.

On the economic level, Ennahda is in favor of a free market economy, but intends to add a social welfare system. A sort of muslim socialism. Prior international treaties have also been confirmed.

Tunisia's democratic path

As part of the process of becoming a democracy, Tunisia has chosen to create a constituent assembly. Libya has done the same. Under this point of view, Tunis could become an example for other countries. It did not only swap a leadership with another, but has decided to modify its institutions looking at the future.

The role of the Salafists

As elsewhere, Tunisian Salafists represent a potential danger to the democratization of the country and have lately inspired extremist groups' growing episodes of violence and intolerance. This is mainly because Ennahda's moderate Islam does not allow fundamentalists the political space they would want.

The radical fringes of this movement have been at the centre of violent demonstrations, protest rallies, raids in universities and more. But it is also true that Tunisia has a long experience of secularism and of the associated liberties, gender emancipation and egalitarian laws.

In the Tunisian political landscape Salafists do not surpass 10-15 thousand followers (and thus their numbers are not that relevant) and are split between the “Hezb al Tahrir”, outlawed but tolerated group preaching for the institution of a Caliphate and the strict application of Sharia, and the “Front for the Reform” (Al Islah), lead by Mohammed Khoja and authorized under the Ministry of Interior on May 11 2011 (they were the 118th political group to be allowed to operate in Tunisia).

Some of their actions (attacks on women, ban on the use of alcohol, extremist preaching by its leaders, open anti-semitism) have gained these groups a media coverage that is probably above their true political weight in Tunisia. Nonetheless, the attack against the US embassy in Tunis on September 14 2012 by yet another fundamentalist group, “Ansar al Sharia” lead by Seif Allah ibn Hussein also know as Abu Iyad, is an alarm bell of the instability affecting both religious and political Islam. And this is an issue not only for Tunisia, probably more capable than others of metabolizing the phenomena through a pragmatic and democratic approach, but for the entire Arab world.

FUTURE CHALLENGES

Despite some initial successes, Tunisia still faces several challenges. The road is still long and difficult.

The first victory was making democracy work through a vote. And this was a major step in this part of the world.

The second success was including all parts of society in the democratization process. The third one was having reached these aims through hardship and struggle, but without excessive and indiscriminate bloodbaths.

There remain several challenges facing the new Tunisian leadership: the approval of the new Constitution, the judicial reform, the fight against corruption and favoritism, a push for the economy, reducing unemployment, fighting poverty especially in the country's inner regions, creating more social justice, reconstructing the country's security apparatus, renewing the country's ruling class allowing more room for the youth, rebuilding democratic institutions, systematically and not sporadically respecting human rights, eliminating indiscriminate arrests and torture used by the regime both under Bourghiba and Ben Ali, giving the country more security with respect to neighboring nations (it is the case of Libya whose refugees still station on Tunisian soil) and on the domestic front against the spread of terrorism (in February 2012 police dismantled an Al Qaeda cell in the country).

The spirit of moderation and social inclusion accompanying the democratic process gives us hope. And several social actors are to be praised for this. But the fight between the so called “modernists” and the “islamists” is not over yet.

The fact that Tunisia's moderate Islam is on the right path was indirectly confirmed by a recent statement by the current head of Al Qaeda, Ayman Al Zawahiri, that exhorted Tunisians to rebel against “the government of fake Islam”.

Several international analysts have found similarities in Ennahda's political approach and Turkish Recep Tayyip Erdogan's “Party for Justice and Development” (AKP). Both formations carry a moderate Islamic agenda, both came to power replacing secular military regimes, both are in favor of a multi-party system, both look to the West and both leaders are pragmatists ready for compromise and tolerance.

During public statements, Ghannouchi himself has often made reference to Ergodan as his Turkish model.

Yet there are specific differences among the two countries. Their political starting points differ, their history is different, national societies are structured in different ways, Tunisians do not have to face interference from the military as happens on a daily basis to Erdogan, they have different foreign policy priorities and regional contexts they fall into.

In this virtuous path towards democracy (the process should complete on June 23 2012 with Parliamentary and Presidential elections) Tunisia acts as a pacesetter for other countries involved in the so called Arab Spring. It represents an example, moreover a positive one, that could help other nations reach the same objective. Just like other Arab nations, it is the role of political Islam that has found in Ghannouchi a prudent political interpreter in the union of religion and state affairs that makes the difference. Unfortunately in the wider Middle Eastern landscape there aren't many other Ghannouchi in sight.