



BULLETIN

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Tunisia Is Not Egypt, But ...

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The political crises in Egypt and Tunisia are interlinked. The bloody upheavals in Egypt, however, may cause the parties in conflict in Tunisia to be more cautious, making them prone to de-escalate tensions there. As much as Egypt is reversing its transition to democracy, Tunisia still stands a chance of completing it successfully despite having similar divisions in its society. At the moment, the European Union has more leverage on developments in Tunisia than it does Egypt. It should devote at least as much attention to Tunisia in its aid programmes as it has to Egypt.

The Correlation between Tunisia and Egypt. The transition processes in Tunisia and Egypt are interlinked. In 2011, the fall of Ben Ali in Tunisia quickened the fall of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt. Since then, political actors in Tunisia have followed closely the events in Egypt and vice versa. In 2013, divisions in society increased and political conflicts in both countries escalated. In Egypt, they took the form of a fundamental political conflict that has morphed into a bloody defeat of the Muslim Brotherhood—the strongest organised political force in Egypt—by the army. While the conflicts in Tunisia have occasionally escalated into violence, i.e., political assassinations, they have not turned into radically undemocratic policies that would hinder the transition process. The events in Egypt that occurred after 3 July when the army deposed President Mohamed Morsi then crushed the Muslim Brotherhood's counter demonstrations, resulting in hundreds of fatalities, appalled both the ruling coalition and the opposition in Tunisia. In effect, and despite recent political assassinations (in February, Chokri Belaid, the leader of the Democratic Patriots' Movement was killed, then in July, Mohamed Brahmī, an opposition leader, was also assassinated), which radicals have used to try to further antagonise the political scene, both sides of the country's political spectrum are prone to compromise and to a de-escalation of the conflict between them.

As a result of the so called Arab Spring, Islamic parties received the most votes in the democratic elections that followed in Egypt and Tunisia. In the past, the party now in power in Tunisia, An-Nahda, was illegal, as was the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. But in contrast to the Muslim Brotherhood, which ruled Egypt almost singlehandedly until July 2013, An-Nahda has been forced to compromise with the opposition. Tunisia is the only Arab Spring country where an Islamic party has formed a coalition with secular parties, Congress for the Republic and Ettakatol. For example, but contrary to the process in Egypt where the new constitution was adopted amidst political turmoil and a quick referendum in December 2012, the process of drafting a new constitution for Tunisia is ongoing (thorny issues have included articles citing the position of women in society and agreeing on the date of the next parliamentary elections).

There is little probability that An-Nahda would be outlawed again due to the fact that the Tunisian army is much less powerful than its Egyptian counterpart and has no political aspirations. Also, An-Nahda is not part of the Muslim Brotherhood, and in fact its leader, Rashid al-Ghannushi, a Tunisian thinker living in the UK, has praised the Western model of democracy, saying that an Islamic component would only improve it. In contrast to the Muslim Brotherhood, An-Nahda does not limit civil rights and political freedoms. Freedom House assessed Tunisia as improving political freedoms and civil rights, and as a result in 2012 it changed Tunisia's status from "not free" to "partly free" (the country's freedom rating improved from 6 to 3.5, on a scale of 7 to 1, with 1 indicating the highest degree of freedom). The status for Egypt was also changed, but the improvement ranking there was much less significant (from 5.5 to 5).

There is little probability that the Tunisian army would play the same role as the army in Egypt. In the past, the Tunisian army did not engage in politics. In contrast to Egypt, members of the security forces who were found to be loyal to former President Ben Ali were removed from the army. More politically powerful than the army is the

Tunisian Labor Union (UTT), which with its 600,000 members currently mediates between the government and the secular opposition. As a result, the UTT has far more influence than the army on the future shape of Tunisia's political system.

The future of democracy in Tunisia is uncertain, however. The ruling, moderate Islamist political party will have to speed the process of political and economic reforms. What is most important now is that it presents a draft of the constitution that would be acceptable to the opposition. The diminishing public support of the government makes the implementation of these reforms even more difficult. According to an opinion poll conducted by the Gallup Institute, the majority of Tunisians expressing confidence in their Islamist-led government evaporated in the last year, dropping to 32% in May 2013 from 56% in March 2012. Similar to Egyptian society, Tunisians are deeply divided into camps of supporters and opponents of the Islamists. But in contrast to Egypt, an Arab Democracy Barometer survey found that a strong majority of Tunisians favour secular democracy (in 2011, 69% expressed support for secular democracy and 23% for democracy with an Islamic component, compared to 51% and 27%, respectively, in Egypt). This means that keeping in mind An-Nahda's majority in the government, in the short-to-medium term we can expect more clashes between the rival political factions, with extremists occasionally taking advantage of this dispute.

To consolidate the democratisation process in Tunisia and get it back on track in Egypt, both countries need to speed up development of their economies. Tunisian society is richer than Egypt's (in 2012, GDP per capita was \$8,680 and \$6,684, respectively); however, people in general do not feel they are benefiting from the change of regime. Even with almost the same level of economic growth as in 2010 (GDP growth in 2012 was 3.6%, compared to 3% in 2010), the unemployment rate in Tunisia grew from 13% in 2010 to 17.4% in 2012. To make the situation worse in both cases, the internal conflicts may discourage European tourists, not only temporarily but also in the long term, from choosing either country as a holiday destination. The crisis in Egypt has already greatly affected revenue generated from tourism. The largest European tour operator, TUI, suspended operations in Egypt. Companies in other sectors, such as GM, Toyota and Electrolux, have done the same. Tunisia is in a better position than Egypt for now, so if the country can manage to calm its internal political dispute and the EU economy continues its slow recovery (the destination for 2/3rds of Tunisian exports), its economy has a good chance to grow faster in the coming years.

Recommendations. The transformation of the Egyptian political system has been disrupted and in fact may go back to the Hosni Mubarak era if the army does not allow civilian control. In the short term, Egyptian society may even support this scenario in some way, but in a longer perspective this would limit democratisation. Tunisia, however, has a chance to successfully proceed with its democratic transformation. While the European Union compared with the Gulf countries has much less impact on the developments in Egypt, its influence on Tunisia and the country's strong links to the European continent can and should be used more effectively. In order to ensure that EU activities bring positive changes in Tunisia, the EU should give it at least the same status as Egypt in aid programmes, despite Tunisia's smaller size.

More attention should also be given to increasing the level of cooperation in EU projects on the ground. Third countries and international organisations responded to the Tunisian transformation with so much enthusiasm and directed so many activities (and much money) to it that now there is no effective coordination. Exchanges about projects and information do not even take place among the diplomatic missions in Tunis at a high level. This means that most probably the donors are duplicating projects or are even distributing money to beneficiaries who will not necessarily spend it in a proper way. This situation offers room to manoeuvre for the European Endowment for Democracy, which recently has started to distribute its first grants. The fund, which was designed to act in a flexible and effective manner based on a situation in a given country, can play an important role in identifying and directing financial support to those actors who could help make the transformation process successful.

Poland, for its part, should continue supporting Tunisia in its democratic transformation, at both the governmental (e.g., assume the leadership from Slovakia of the Community of Democracy Task Force on Tunisia) and non-governmental levels, such as support projects run by experienced organisations such as the Helsinki Foundation.