

BACKGROUND OF THE TUNISIAN REVOLUTION

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the uprisings in Tunisia by examining the country's historical transition from Ottoman Empire rule to the recent events of today. The main focus of the article is to demonstrate how Tunisia has evolved historically by focusing on the Ottoman Era, French protectorate, early independence years, the transition from one party system to a multiparty system, and opposition movements. In this respect, the article aims to serve for a more effective analysis of recent uprisings and the democratic transition of the country.

Key words: Tunisia, Ottoman Empire, France, Economy, Foreign Policy, Uprisings.

TUNUS DEVRİMİNİN ARKA PLANI

ÖZET

Bu çalışmanın amacı Tunus'taki ayaklanmayı Osmanlı'dan bu yana dönüşüm süreci içerisinde analiz etmektir. Tunus'un Osmanlı'dan, Fransız sömürgeciliğine geçişine ve daha sonra bağımsızlık döneminden çok parti deneyimine kadar olan dönemi ve muhalif hareketleri çalışmanın ana hareket noktalarını oluşturmaktadır. Bu çerçevede çalışma, bugünkü ayaklanmaları ve demokrasiye geçiş sürecini tarihsel arka planı da göz önünde bulundurarak değerlendirecektir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Tunus, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, Fransa, Ekonomi, Dış Politika, İsyanlar.

Introduction

The ongoing uprisings in the Arab world began in Tunisia, where earlier in 2011 President Ben Ali's 23-year-rule ended when he fled the country after several weeks of popular protests. The uprising did not subside until the protesters received assurances that politicians associated with Ben Ali's rule had been excluded from the interim government. The persistence of the Tunisian public was the most determinant aspect behind the transition process, meaning the chances for a successful democratic transition are high. Such a conclusion is based on many reasons, but the most significant one lies in the country's

political history, which includes mobilization, long-term struggle for a multi-voice political atmosphere, and social mobilization.

The economic policies that have been highlighted by many in order to analyze the uprisings in Tunisia deserve special interest. Tunisia's economic structure and structural issues share many common features with the rest of the Middle East and the North African region. The unemployment rates, sectoral problems, and scarcity of supply of the increasingly young population can be counted as general examples. However, the economic explanations have some limitations to understanding the recent developments in the country narrowly and in the region in general. The political discontent fed by the region's authoritarian regimes is another significant determinant, while the historical process gives many clues in analyzing the factors behind the uprisings. At this point, this article provides a broad historical perspective, including a briefing on Tunisia's foreign, political, and economic policies.

Historical Process in Tunisia

Ottoman Rule in Tunisia

Northern Africa and the southern Sahara, which covers the area from Egypt to the Atlantic Ocean, including Libya, Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, and Mauritania, is named Maghreb in Islamic texts. This region became an object of competition for dominance between Spain and Portugal in the 15th century (Şeyban, 2007: 16). As the struggle between these two countries continued, the Ottoman presence in the region emerged by the beginning of the 16th century. Navarch Sinan Pasha, Aruj (Oruç Reis), Hizir Khaired-Din Reis, and Turgut Reis embarked on expeditions to Tunisia, Tripoli, Algeria, and Egypt on behalf of the Ottoman Empire starting in 1513. Khaired-Din Reis ended Hafsid rule in Tunisia by forcing al-Hasan, Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad's son and his successor, into exile in 1534 while Sinan Pasha and Uluj Ali (UluçKılıç Ali) Pasha ended the Spanish dominance and ensured the Ottoman rule over Tunisia in 1574 (Maksudoğlu, 1966: 189-190).

Sinan Pasha left a unit of Janissaries in Tunisia before he left the country and appointed Haydar Pasha as beylerbeyi (governor). During Ottoman rule, Tunisia was divided into 22 sub-districts: Bizerte, Kal'a-iTabarka, Kâfmaa Amdûn, Mikne, Sinan, Testûr, Tabarsûk, Ifrikiyyemaa Bâce, Matar, Dâhilmaa Süleyman, Kal'a-iKalîbiya, Kal'a-iHamâme, Sâhilmaa Sûsa, Lecm, Mehdiye, İsfakusmaa Kekrene, Kayrevân, Cerîd Cerbe, El-Araz, and Zarzîs. The political and administrative system structured by Sinan Pasha remained in place until 1591, when the era of beys and deys started. The junior-level janissary officers, called dey (dayı/bölükbaşı), gained more power and limited the authority of beylerbeyi; in this

process, Dey Othman provided stability and achieved relative control over Tunisia (Maksudoğlu, 1966: 194,196-198). This political situation continued until the 18th century. In 1702, Husain bin Ali ended the political fragmentation and the prominence of deys by forming the Hussainid Dynasty, which governed Tunisia until its independence. (Nasr, 1987: 173).

Turkish nobles who settled in regions far from the central government in Istanbul established strong provincial orders and ruled autonomously. Under contemporary conditions, the region was neither controlled to the full extent nor governed directly from Istanbul. In particular, the Karamanlı Rule in Tripoli, the Husainid Rule in Tunisia, and Muhammad Ali Pasha (Kavalalı Mehmet Ali Paşa) and the Khedive rule in Egypt had been granted a kind of autonomy from other provinces of the Ottoman Empire with their own dynamics. Great Britain, the Netherlands, and Spain created a collective initiative to block champions of Ottoman mariners in North Africa to Mediterranean coasts, especially coasts of Italy and Spain, and secure the Mediterranean for their own interests. France's occupation of Algeria in 1830 ended the champions of Ottoman mariners in North Africa (Şeyban, 2007: 135-136). In addition, France became a neighbour of Tunisia, which paved the way for the rise of French dominance over Tunisia ruled by the Hussainids. Great Britain reacted to France's occupation of Algeria, generating fears that the French invasion would spread to other North African parts, resulting in France becoming a dominant power in North Africa that would lead to French dominance in the Mediterranean. This fear prompted Great Britain and other European countries to counter France (Swain, 1937: 359-361). The European countries had competed for domination over North Africa throughout the 19th century. This struggle brought a total change in the power balance in the region.

French Rule in Tunisia

The French impact on Tunisia stemmed from France's occupation of Algeria. The impact, which started as good and close relations between France and the Husainid Dynasty, was changed by the power change in France—namely, Napoleon's ascension to the throne, the policies of Ahmad Bey, a Tunisian bey, and his support of the Ottoman Empire in the Crimean War. Napoleon moderated his country's foreign policies because he thought that the French policies in North Africa were creating a disturbance for Great Britain. Meanwhile, Tunisian governor Ahmad Bey made reforms to strengthen the central administration. In addition, he sent military units to support the Ottoman Empire in the Crimean War—a decision that meant the recognition of Ottoman supremacy over Tunisia. These developments

affected the French foreign policies in the region while leading the European presence in North Africa to direct the local leaders to reform movements. This interactive relation played a prominent role in changing balances in the region (Nasr, 1987: 274).

The control and balance instruments enabled the Tunisian province to survive France's occupation of Algeria. It is hard to accept these instruments as a kind of "separation of powers" as they were defined or limited by law, yet they functioned until the 19th century (Brown, 1975: 111). The concept of internal and external threats delineated by the French presence in the region pushed Ahmad Bey to enact reforms, legal definitions, and regulations. The balances existing in Tunisia were affected by the weak reform process, which ensued as a result of the external threat

Three prominent developments took place after Ahmad Bey's death in 1855. First, Tunisian Bey Mohammed accepted the Fundamental Pact (Ahd Al-Aman), which protected the rights of non-Muslims living within Tunisia. With this pact, joined courts and new property regulations were formed and work on the Tunisian Constitutional Law was started (Perkins, 2004: 18-19). The Constitutional Law, which was established by a council appointed by Mohammed Bey, was accepted in 1861, thereby forming a Tunisian constitutional monarchy. Second, Tunisia entered a rapid process of integration into the European economic system after the constitutional reforms that began in 1857; the new regulations in the taxation system created dissatisfaction among local producers. Third, the first reaction to this rapid socio-economic change was uprisings, which began in 1861. Oppressing the uprisings with force, arresting protestors, and appointing some members of ulama (compromised of bey) to official posts simply postponed the uprisings, but did not prevent them from reappearing later. In 1864 the population once again revolted to protest against heavy taxes and demand the abolition of the Constitutional Law. The uprisings rapidly spread to the coastal part of the country when the army lost control over the rebellion (Perkins, 2004: 28-29). The Ottoman Empire sent a high-level diplomat to Tunisia with a financial contribution for the campaign against the rebels. Although the uprisings were quashed, the Tunisian bey recognized the fact that the domestic dynamics could not completely ignore popular demands and thus abolished the Constitutional Law, with the support of France and Great Britain.

The rise of Germany under Bismarck rule as a European power changed the balance of power in both Europe and European countries' domains. In 1873, Germany later became involved in the struggle among Great Britain, France, and Italy over Tunisia. Although Italian and French officials met to find a joint solution in 1881, France opted to use military pressure

against the Tunisia bey to maintain its control over the country, asserting that frontier tribes had transgressed the border (Langer, 1926: 261).

French occupation lasted from 1881 to 1956; the Husainid Dynasty provided the beys of Tunisia within the framework of the French protectorate. France took charge of domestic political issues, foreign affairs, and the military, leaving jurisdiction and taxation of the Muslim population to the Tunisian beys while European settlers came under the realm of French authority. France's policy to leave a jurisdiction area to the beys was based on two prominent reasons. Initially, France estimated the regulation of the jurisdiction to be expensive and requiring functionless investments given its experiences in Algeria; it did not desire the re-emergence of uprisings like those in 1860. However, limiting the old jurisdiction in the framework of family law despite establishing new regulations created a base for a dualistic structure in jurisdiction. In the educational system, contrary to early French colonies, the attempts to use the education mechanism as a tool for social transition were not applied in Tunisia; the protectorate did not force the colony to teach French. New schools opened in the country for the education of European settlers; these schools were also used to create a Tunisian elite class of educated aristocrats. This policy succeeded in making the French language one of the symbols of privilege, spreading it throughout the region without much resistance (Perkins, 2004: 65-66). The intellectual class who both spoke French and Arabic played a dominant role in the future of Tunisia. In addition, the judicial dualism created by the Foncier Law on property and land in 1885, the Civil Code of 1906 established and approved by French lawyers and Tunisian ulama, and the juridical laws of 1921 (Perkins, 2004: 47-48) framed the historical background of the fundamental tension in Tunisia's politics.

Independence Movements and the Destour Party

The first generation to be educated in French schools propounded the belief that the ideals of the French Revolution would make Tunisia a state like France. This belief revealed the group Young Tunisians, which existed in North Africa before World War I and demanded equal rights for both Tunisians and foreigners in the country instead of complete independence; they called for democratic reforms and a republic instead of a monarchy. Labour unions were formed, gaining limited rights between 1919 and 1923. In addition, the Destour Party, which marked an important turning point for Tunisia's modern history, was established in June 1920. Under Abdelaziz Thâalbi's leadership, the Destour Party mainly sought to establish a parliamentary based on general elections, a national government that would be responsible to that parliamentary, freedom of the press, a right to education, and

equal rights for Tunisian civil servants (same as the French). Initially, the Destour Party did not address the end of the French protectorate's rule or Tunisia's independence; but the arrest of Abdelaziz Thâalbi and many members of the party on 31 July 1920 led to the party making such demands (Ataöv, 1977: 116-117; Ashford, 1965: 215).

The arrest of Abdelaziz Thâalbi led to mass uprisings; when the French rule could not put down the masses, it had to release Abdelaziz Thâalbi on April 1921, give legal status to the Destour Party, and apply some rights to recognize Tunisians. By 1922, the social basis of the party had expanded due to the emergence of several divisions within the party. The left wing of the Destour Party insisted on broad constitutional reforms while the right wing chose to cooperate with the French protectorate under the name Hizb al-Islah. By 1924, the Destour Party was no longer a legally recognized party by the French protectorate. In addition to these divisions and the exclusion of the Destour Party from the political space, massive uprisings were brutally suppressed by the protectorate, resulting in the exile of many opposition leaders; this situation culminated in labour unions emerging in 1924 and 1925. The stability could be sustained through the 1930s, but uprisings re-emerged once again with the Great Depression (Ataöv, 1977: 117).

Habib Bourguiba and Neo-Destour

The Great Depression in 1929 particularly affected the Tunisian economy. The export of phosphorus, iron, and lead as well as the price of olives and wool decreased rapidly as a result of the global economic depression; meanwhile, the rate of unemployment increased as factories and mines closed. When these developments, a new group emerged with the Destour Party. Led by Habib Bourguiba, this neo-Destour group published the *Action Tunisienne* newspaper and separated from the main group in 1934. The arrest and deportation of Bourguiba, along with many prominent members of the neo-Destour, led to an increase in their popularity. In the same year, the neo-Destour demanded the release of those who had been arrested, the press, and the removal of laws limiting freedom of assembly as well as the alleviation of taxes. Considering the new principle, they called on the people to defy the French administration; support for this call reached its peak in 1938. The uprisings were suppressed in bloody ways and the neo-Destour was made illegal (Moore, 1962: 461-482).

On the other hand, Italy's claims over Tunisia emerged in the beginning of 1938, making Tunisia a battleground during World War II. In 1942, British and American troops landed in Morocco and Tunisia, eventually defeating the German troops there in 1943. Tunisia expected improved conditions in return for its support for the allied nations during

World War II and its refusal to cooperate with Germany during its occupation. However, after the end of German occupation, the newly inaugurated French National Liberation Committee discharged the Tunisian bey and sent him to exile, deployed the national government, and did not improve the protectorate conditions. All of these acts of French rule created disappointment and raised the support for the neo-Destour in 1946 (Nasr, 1987: 363-364; Ataöv, 1977:120).

The neo-Destour launched reform negotiations between the French protectorate and the government under Prime Minister Mohammed Shanniq's leadership by suggesting an "esteemed consensus program" in 1950. This program aimed to establish internal autonomy and Arab servants in state institutions. Mass protests arose in December 1951, and the political gridlock in the negotiations with the protectorate pushed the neo-Destour and labour unions to come together and create a national unity front. Meanwhile, in 1952 Shanniq's government applied to the UN Security Council for assistance with the crisis. Four days later, Bourguiba, leader of the neo-Destour, and Mohammed en-Nafaa, head of the Tunisia Communist Party, were arrested and exiled; Shanniq's government was avoided, and ministers were arrested (Nasr, 1987: 365; Ataöv, 1977: 121-122). In addition, General Garbay—known as the "butcher" because of his bloodshed in Madagascar—was appointed to command the forces in Tunisia (Ataöv, 1977: 121-122).

The Tunisian Liberation Army was established in response to General Garbay's use of extreme violence. France declared that it was ready to give Tunisian internal autonomy in 1954 when it could not get control over the country. However, due to developments in Algeria, the 1881 and 1883 agreements were outlawed by a protocol signed on 20 March 1956, thereby leading to full independence in Tunisia (Ataöv, 1977: 121).

Independent Tunisia

Bourguiba Period

a. Foreign Policy

Bourguiba's foreign policy can be considered in the context of developing relations with the Arab world, Africa, and the third world. During this period, Tunisia supported both the Non-Aligned Movement and the national liberation movements. In addition, the ties between Tunisia and the Arab Maghreb countries were strengthened and, as an extension of these policies, good relations with Arab states were built. Yet relations deteriorated in 1965 in response to the Tunisian détente in foreign policy on behalf of Israel, which was criticized

both inside and outside the country and resulted in the withdrawal of representatives in Egypt, Iraq, and Syria (Joffe, 1987: 181).

Bourguiba's foreign policy doctrines on the Palestine and Israel issue varied from other Arab countries. Bourguiba thought that political rights could be gained over time; thus, he had been accepting the UN resolution while calling the establishment of the state of Israel an injustice. He argued that Palestinians had to acknowledge this fact and discard their rigid policies to establish their own state. In addition to his radical position on the Palestine and Israel issue, Bourguiba stood apart from other Arab states by establishing diplomatic relations with West Germany. However, after the Arab-Israeli War of 1967, Tunisia tried to mend relations with the Arab states, and representatives were reopened reciprocally (Joffe, 1987: 182; Ataöv, 1977: 127-128).

Tunisia became a member of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963 and held anti-colonial arguments in the UN and OAU to intervene in developments in Congo. Bourguiba invited many African leaders to Tunisia to develop close relations with them. Two goals became prominent in Tunisia's foreign policy towards Africa under Bourguiba's rule: to increase cooperation among African countries and to end colonialism in the region. According to Bourguiba, these two goals were crucial for structuring and developing the Tunisian economy (Moore, 1962: 229-230).

The relations between Tunisia and Western states could be assessed as positive in general terms. The UN became an esteemed organization because of its positive impact in the solution to the Bizerte issue. In 1961, the Tunisian delegate was elected to the UN General Commission.

The relations with France were not cut in the post-colonial period. The customs union established during the colonial period morphed into a single market tying the two countries' economies. However, France's decisions in 1962 and 1964 negatively affected the Tunisian economy. Therefore, despite good relations with Western countries, close economic ties with the Eastern Bloc were established. During this period, many cooperation agreements were signed with Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Romania, the Soviet Union, and Yugoslavia (Ataöv, 1977: 131).

Tunisian-American relations were shaped within the scope of economic and military aid in general terms. Between 1962 and 1979, the US subsidized 130 million dollars in military assistance and 605 million dollars in economic and food aid. The annual average of American military aid was 18.8 million dollars between 1978 and 1981 (Liaison Office, 1992: 5-6).

b. Domestic Policy

The 78 years of French administration ended in 1956 when Tunisia became independent. However, independence brought about the repressive regime of Habib Bourguiba—a prominent leader of the Tunisian independence campaign in the 1930s and the neo-Destour Party established after World War II. Both became substantial and deterministic actors in the post-independence period. On 25 March 1956, the newly established constituent assembly was established and elected Bourguiba as president of the assembly on 8 April. The first government formed in independent Tunisia initiated a reform process that would change the country deeply. Through juridical reforms, single laic courts were established by removing kadi and tribal courts; reforms in family law led to women gaining equal rights with men, polygamy being forbidden, and the legal age of marriage being increased. Free and standard education was created while mosques and schools were separated and Quran courses were taken under control of the state through educational reforms (Moore, 1962: 465-466; Ataöv, 1977: 123-124; Nasr, 1987: 421). Bourguiba's goal in these reforms was to end dualistic structures in education and the jurisdiction established by the French protectorate while sustaining the control of the state over all instruments and institutions within the country.

On 22 July 1957, the Tunisian Republic was declared and Bourguiba became the first president of the country. President Bourguiba realized major changes in the country by nationalizing foundations and private property as well as many foreign industrial and transportation companies and by signing agreements with France in 1957, 1960, and 1963 and continuing the handover of lands taken by foreign settlers during the protectorate. The European population in Tunisia had to leave country during this time because of these reforms. In addition, several economic reforms were initiated in order to break France's monopoly over the Tunisian economy; negotiations focused on removing the remaining French troops. The last French troops in the country left Bizerte in 1963 (Ataöv, 1977: 124; Nasr, 1987: 348).

During the 1960s, the Tunisian economy was subjected to statist policies and development plans formulated under the name of Destour socialism. During this period, state-owned iron and steel factories, oil plants, sugar mills, glass factories, car and tractor spare parts, production facilities, peasant production cooperatives, and state farms were established; olive groves in Msaken were also nationalized. The opposition that emerged in response to these nationalization policies was suppressed by the use of force. In addition, while the policies implemented were not successful in creating enough job opportunities, a program of

compulsory labour with ill pay in such projects as the construction of dams, irrigation canals, and forestation led to the strengthening of the opposition among the population. The failure of the economic policies and other reforms, such as secular education, the outlawing of Shariah courts, the prohibition of wearing the hicab, and the closing of the Islamic University of Al-Zaytuna mainly were objected by Islamic opposition who did not recognize such reforms. This period was seen as a “period of marginalizing of Islamists”. However, during this period, not only Islamists but also all opposition groups were marginalized. The opposition groups encountered state oppression, and many members of the opposition were arrested or exiled (Moore, 1965: 50-53). After 1966, Tunisia fell into a range of economic and political crisis, and political Islam subsequently emerged as an actor in Tunisian political life. In 1978, massive protests began because of the high rate of inflation and unemployment; these protests were suppressed using force.

Political Islam in Sudan and Egypt was perceived as a global threat due to Iran’s Islamic Revolution in the 1980s. The perception of this threat expanded to include Tunisia after approximately 60 guerrillas trained in Libya entered Tunisia from Libya and attacked a police station in Gafsa in 1980. An important opportunity for transitioning the opposition into the legal political life was created by Bourguiba’s liberal initiative policies to end single party political life in 1981 and eliminate threatening elements. Since then, the Socialist Democrats, the Communist Party, the Socialist Union, and the Tunisian Human Rights League have become actors in the political scene. In addition, the leftist group the Islamic Tendency Movement under the leadership of Rashid Al-Ghannushi applied for admission as a political party, although it was not accepted.

Due to the systematic suppression policies of the Destourien Socialist Party over labour unions and secular opposition since 1956 and the disappointment of the political liberalization process in 1981, more dissidents gathered to support Ghannushi. In July 1981, the members of Islamic Tendency Movement and Rashid Al-Ghannushi were arrested. Their arrest was censured by the Socialist Democrats, the Communist Party, the Socialist Union, and the Tunisian Human Rights Union, all of which demanded their release. The bread riots in 1984 forced the government to soften politically, and political prisoners were subsequently released. In applying the 1984 amnesty, the Bourguiba government increased pressure on social life, forbidding civil servants from praying during working hours, women from wearing veils in universities and workplaces, and taxi drivers from having a beard symbolizing Islam and listening to Islamic music in their cars (Jones, 1988: 20). Bans on speech, writing, preaching, teaching, mosque attendance, and travel were imposed on Ghannushi in 1986.

However, Ghannushi refused to obey these bans and continued to offer courses in Islamic Tendency Movements' schools and write articles in newspapers. Ghannushi was arrested after a preaching that brought forth students riots. The arrest of Ghannushi was the fire for the riots in the country, where tensions already existed because of the economic recession and political suppression. This situation led to further pressure on the Islamists, and 3,000 members of the Islamic Tendency Movement were arrested for alleged connections with Iran (Jones, 1988: 21-22).

Zine El Abidine Ben Ali

a. Domestic Policy

In 1987, Tunisia entered an important and rapid change process. At that time, General Zine El Abidine Ben Ali discharged Bourguiba, who had been elected president for life, reasoning that his health status required his replacement. He replaced him through a bloodless coup. The period that began with Zine El Abidine Ben Ali also brought short-term relaxation for the opposition in Tunisia. Ben Ali promised to follow liberal policies and called back opposition members in exile. In addition, many political figures who had been arrested in 1988 were released (Encyclopedia of World Biography, 1998: 519). Al-Zaytuna, which had been closed by Bourguiba, was rehabilitated, radio and television were allowed to broadcast ezan, Hijri calendars were published, and the Islamic Supreme Council allowed publication of Al-Hedaya, a religious magazine. The name of the Destourien Socialist Party was changed to the Constitutional Democratic Rally (RCD) to refresh the image in the eyes of public. Ben Ali further declared that he accepted the Islamic cultural identity of Tunisia. Within the existing political atmosphere, the elections were held with the participation of many parties, with opposition gaining 19.6% of the votes. The Islamist Renaissance Party (en Nahda) won 30% of the votes in Tunis, while Gabes and Sousse won 14.6%; these groups formed the biggest opposition bloc. However, the party could not gain any seats in parliament because of electoral law (Esposito and Piscatori, 1991: 121). Similarly, no opposition party or candidate had the right of representation in parliament. Even so, the election results were perceived as an internal threat to their authority by Ben Ali and the Constitutional Democratic Rally; after a short time, opposition groups were suppressed, focusing on Islamists first. Al-Faj, the media organ of en Nahda, was closed and the veil ban reinstated (Esposito and Piscatori, 1991: 432); many members of en Nahda were arrested and Rashid Al-Ghannushi was exiled. Similarly, activities of the Republican Congress, one of the secular parties, were banned; its members were arrested and its leader Moncef Marzouki went abroad.

Ben Ali was successful in managing the discontent against him as a control mechanism in the domestic affairs until the end of his rule despite the fact that he brutally suppressed the opposition. Although election law reforms aimed to increase the participation rate in elections and facilitate voting, the electoral threshold for governor and opposition parties sustained the Constitutional Democratic Rally's overwhelming majority in the parliamentary and control the opposition in doing so. The reform process extended over a period of time by giving more quotas to opposition parties in parliamentary elections in 1999 and 2004 (King, 2009; 204-205), and the opposition was mostly eliminated. Tunisia's electoral system has not since been seriously criticized from abroad. Claims of gerrymandering in the elections and pressure on the media remained on the country's agenda (King, 2009; 204-205).

The former Tunisian electoral system ensured 75% of the parliament to the party who won a simple majority. The remaining 25% was shared by the opposition parties who made the grade. This system has guaranteed the government for Ben Ali and the Constitutional Democratic Rally in every election since 1989. The Constitutional Democratic Rally won the election by earning 144 seats in 1994, 148 seats in 1999, 152 seats in 2004, and 161 seats in 2009 (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2011). In addition, Tunisia did not allow the participation of international electoral watchdogs. In this respect, the US criticized 2004 and 2009 elections and called for removing the pressure placed on state institutions, the media, and political activities.

Ben Ali used the rhetoric of an "Islamist threat" to secure and consolidate his authority. In 1991, state pressure increased on the en Nahda, with allegations of a plot against the regime. Some 265 en Nahda members were arrested by the army, which alleged that they were preparing a coup in 1992. They were finally released in 2008. This rhetoric and the related activities gave Ben Ali defensible arguments and continuity for authority in both domestic and foreign policies (Kelly, Walker and Dizard, 2008: 465-466).

Another internal pressure that was applied during Ben Ali's rule was state control over the internet. A filter was imposed by the state to control all internet cafes. Local internet suppliers belonged to members of the Ben Ali family. Bloggers and journalists were on the list of those arrested during the Ben Ali rule.

b. Economic Policies

Ben Ali built his 23-year rule on his foreign policy, economic policies, and domestic policies. Tunisian economy under his rule grew in a limited but stable manner. Social

responses to unemployment were limited as unemployment rates did not rise rapidly. However, unemployment continued to be a chronic issue for the Tunisian economy under Ben Ali, just like in the Bourguiba period. This issue caused periodic riots in Tunisia, where the education level is high. According to a Global Employment Trends 2010 Report, North Africa is one of the regions where unemployment rates are highest. The report stated that the impact of the global economic depression has been limited in North Africa, which has faced high unemployment rates among the young and educated population. Together with the unemployment issue, the report concluded that the problems related to the quality of employment have become chronic for the country. According to the report, existing jobs have a low profile, are insecure, provide poor payment, and are ineffective for managing basic needs. As a result, the unemployment issue leads to sectoral deficiency.

Tunisia's gross domestic product (GDP) grew 6.3% in 2007, 4.6% in 2008, and 3.1% in 2009. Investments in energy and mining sectors increased during these years as well. Tunisia became an important tourism centre under Ben Ali's rule, and tourism income constituted a crucial share of economy. Yet inflation rates reached 5.1% in 2008 and 3.5% in 2009. The Tunisian economy was described positively in the African Economic Outlook 2010 Report. By addressing economic diversity, the banking system has become a strong institution that can protect the country's economy. Doing Business 2010 Report of the World Bank ranked Tunisia in the top ten list for doing business in the world. Thus, generally speaking, Tunisia's economy can be described as stable and strong, enabling it to fight the global economic crisis.

c. Foreign Affairs

Under Ben Ali, Tunisia's foreign policy has been "moderate" and never attempted to become a regional power. Ben Ali's foreign policy consisted of maintaining a careful balance of power between close relations with Western Europe and the United States along with increasing inter-Arab cooperation. In this respect, it would not be wrong to state that Ben Ali applied similar foreign policies as Bourguiba. France, Tunisia's biggest trade partner, supported Ben Ali during his 23-year rule. The historical ties and single market have intensified Tunisian-French cooperation as well. The tension between France and Tunisia that affected the economic policies of France were moderated during Ben Ali's rule. This cooperation and the close ties did not lose their intensity until the last day of Ben Ali's presidency. The advertising conferences held in October 2010 in Paris to appeal for investments in Tunisia, which had French support until the last moment, are important in this

context (Think Tunisia, 2010). Between 1995 and 2009, the EU provided 1.7 billion Euros in aid and loaned 2.8 billion Euros to Tunisia. The EU also accounts for 72% of Tunisian exports and 68% of its imports. Meanwhile, Tunisia offers cheap labour for European investments. Given this general picture, the EU paved the 'advanced status' of Tunisia in the context of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2010 (European Commission, 2010).

Tunisia had been the official home to the PLO since it was forced out from Lebanon in the wake of Israel's invasion from 1982 to 1994. Ben Ali's support of the Palestinian issue earned the respect of the Arab world. Ben Ali played an important role in the Arab Maghrebi Union (AMU) and the Organization of African Unity, serving as president of these unions and encouraging economic cooperation between Europe and Africa (Jhazbhay, 2004: 162-163). However, the relations—especially economic policies aimed at enhancing economic relations among African countries—have regressed in recent years.

Authoritarian domestic policies were ignored because of Ben Ali's foreign policy and did not face any opposition. An important reason for Ben Ali's continued authoritarian rule was his foreign policies, which were previously discussed.

2010 Uprisings

Considering the developments before and after the 2009 presidency and parliamentary elections, the process of the Tunisian uprisings in 2010 can be appropriately analyzed. The leader of the Progressive Democratic Party, Ahmed Najib Chebbi, was a candidate in the presidential elections, but ultimately withdrew by claiming Ben Ali's fake legitimacy. Meanwhile, the candidate of the Democratic Forum of Labor and Liberties, Secretary General Mustapha Ben Jafar, was disqualified based on new regulations in electoral law in 2008. Ben Jafar subsequently supported the candidate from the Movement Ettajdid (Renewal): Ahmed Ibrahim. In the 2009 elections, many political actors including Ahmed Ibrahim accused Ben Ali of rigging the elections and limiting and suppressing oppositions' election campaigns (Human Rights Watch, 2009). Ben Ali became president once more by winning 89.62% of the votes (Election Guide, 2009). The Progressive Democratic Party and Democratic Forum of Labor and Liberties protested the election results as some candidates were disqualified. The protests continued in municipal elections in May 2010 (Magharebia News, 2010; European Forum, 2011). The rising suppression of the opposition and continued arrest of members of en Nahda during 2010 ultimately affected the public opinion.

Mohammed Buazizi, a street vendor, was harassed by local police officers who confiscated his wares because he did not have the appropriate vending permit. Buazizi went to

the local governor to complain, but found that nobody would listen to his grievances; finally, he set himself on fire in front of a local government building and died. Through his actions, Buazizi did not just set fire to himself, but also sparked Tunisian unrest. Riots started near Sidi Buzid and spread to Kasserine and Thala on 24 December. Ben Ali criticized the opposition by arguing that the uprisings were politicized on 28 December. Although Ben Ali defined the uprisings as terroristic activities, on 10 January 2011 he declared that 300,000 people would be employed in 2012 to stop the uprisings. Tunis became involved in the wave of uprisings on 12 January, the day Ben Ali discharged the Minister of Interior and promised the release of protesters who had been arrested. However the number of deaths and injured continued to increase. On 13 January, Ben Ali showed himself for the third times since the protests had started and stated that he have withdrawn the order to shoot protesters, repealed the internet bans, and refused candidacy for president in the 2014 elections. Meanwhile, the number of deaths increased to 80. At the same time, the army was charged with securing the country, and a curfew was announced.

The Chief of Staff of the Tunisian Armed Forces, Rachid Ammar, affirmed that the army would not shoot unarmed protesters. At this point, the protests diverged to properties of rich Tunisians and the family members of Ben Ali. On 14 January, a state of emergency was declared, and Ben Ali decided to invoke an early election by cancelling the government. At the same time, the police forces were shooting protesters, which hardened the reaction of the public. Ben Ali ultimately fled to Saudi Arabia.

The end of Ben Ali's rule did not end the protest in Tunisia. After Ben Ali fled the country, Mebazaa, the spokesman of the parliamentary, was appointed as the interim president and Mohamed Ghannouchi, former prime minister, was appointed as prime minister and tasked with forming an interim government. On 18 January, the protests continued against the interim government, which included the former ministers of Ben Ali in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Interior Ministry, Defense Ministry, and Finance Ministry. The opposition parties were only in weak posts. This situation raised suspicions about Mebazaa and Ghannouchi, who had promised a national unity government. In addition, Ghannouchi told the exiled opposition leaders and members of en Nahda and the Republic Congress not to return to the country until the legal regulations regarding their conditions had been clarified. This call for opposition without identifying any specific date for legal regulations was perceived as political tactic. Ghannouchi announced that presidential and parliamentary elections would be held within six months and defended his new unity government and the ministers who served under the ousted president Ben Ali, defining them as "needed clean hands". His decision to

retrain these old names in the interim government angered many. On 23 January, Hannibal TV was closed down after broadcasting an interview with a Communist Party leader; the owner of the channel was arrested, suggesting that Ghannouchi and the interim government were no different than Ben Ali. All these reasons created a legitimacy crisis for the interim government and caused more protests. Attempts to solve this legitimacy crisis, such as mass resignations among the Constitutional Democratic Rally, did not work. Ghannouchi promised to cut all ties with former authorities could not allay the angry crowds in Tunisia. The process that started with the resignation of some ministers ended with the collapse of the government on 27 January. On the same day, Ghannouchi announced a new government that has no name from the Constitutional Democratic Rally, existing of 12 new independent ministers. However, protests targeted Ghannouchi and Mebazaa until their resignations.

The Factors Behind the Uprisings in Tunisia

The political experience since the beginning of Tunisia's independence is crucial for explaining recent developments. Tunisia has been governed almost exclusively by an authoritarian regime—one party, one leader—since its independence on 1956, although it experienced relative political freedom between 1987 and 1990. This later era became an important physiological determinant for the Tunisian political opposition movements. Yet these political opposition movements and parties have not actively participated in protests; thus, it can be assumed that the change after unrest would open the way to opposition parties in the future.

Ben Ali's rule ended with an adverse change in the balance of power based on his foreign policy, economic policies, and domestic policies. Since the beginning of the unrest, economic factors have been highlighted; however, using only these economic determinants—although important—would not be enough to explain the events. Bouazizi's death mobilized the masses. However, some important parameters were hidden behind this dramatic event. Ben Ali's foreign and economy policies did not significantly change until recently, and France's support of Ben Ali until the very end further proves this. General Rachid Ammar, chief of staff of the Tunisian army, played a significant role in recent events when he refused to order his troops to fire on protesters; with his decision, the *de facto* support of the army behind Ben Ali was removed (The Independent, 2011). The attitude of the Tunisian Army during the uprising and their disobedience to Ben Ali's orders invigorated Tunisians to continue their protests and make them feel the support of army with them. General Ammar's active and important role should not be underestimated in this context.

In addition to the changes in balance of domestic politics, WikiLeaks' release of diplomatic cables has to be considered. Cables published by WikiLeaks have revealed that the American ambassador in Tunis, in dispatches dated June 2008 and July 2009, wrote that "corruption is growing" in Tunisia and that the family of President Ben Ali, his wife and their families are "often defined [as] a quasi-mafia". The family's economic links, especially those of Ben Ali's wife, "causes the greatest anger" and "everyone knows that this is the problem" but cannot solve it. According to the cables dated 23 June 2008 and 17 July 2009, "France and Italy avoid putting pressure on the Tunis government" and greater commitment is needed "to persuade European partners to intensify their efforts to accelerate reforms from the Tunis government". Furthermore, "while some European countries (the United Kingdom and Germany) agree with USA, key countries such as France and Italy have avoided putting pressure on Tunis. These three countries should make efforts to ensure that they do so". These cables enraged the public. The US, Germany, and United Kingdom exerted political pressure on France and Italy regarding reforms in Tunisia. Such determinants helped successfully oust Ben Ali.

The main factor that sustained the continuity for Ben Ali's rule until 2011 was the domestic power balances which have not been seriously pose a threat to Ben Ali's power. The crucial institutions in the country continued to support Ben Ali during the ongoing protests, thereby suppressing the opposition. However, the recent protests have gained the support of both the public and the main state institutions.

The Impact of Political Islam

Another important point for Tunisia and the region is the rise of political Islam, which gained power in Tunisia and spread fear in the region. Some of the Arab media praised this option while others tried to reproduce the fear and suspicion of Political Islam by referring to Iran's Islamic Revolution. The main reason for this was the return of en Nahda to Tunisian political life under the leadership of Rachid Ghannouchi. When the activities of en Nahda were abolished in Tunisia, the leader of the movement lived in Great Britain for almost 20 years. The return of Ghannouchi on 30 January 2011 created a panic in some parts. Yet Ghannouchi's en Nahda paralleled the Justice and Development Party of Turkey, stating that the party has respected multi-vocality, democracy, and human rights. Many experts mention that en Nahda has stayed a conservative political line. In particular, Egyptian experts compare en Nahda's approaches with those of the Muslim Brotherhood in the context of politics and attributed positive values to en Nahda. It is important that en Nahda defined itself as a

conservative political movement in the Western style. On the other side it should be noted that the secular tendencies are quite strong in the country. In this respect the prediction that the parties would balance each other is not a fair option in the Tunisian case.

The arguments on political Islam present different tension for the region. In the Middle East, which transformed rapidly, the regional political actors reacted to any status quo possibilities. The recent situation in Iraq and Lebanon, uprisings in many regional countries, sharpening of security perceptions in the Gulf region, and Iran's regional goals have played important roles in this situation.

The Political Actors and Possibilities

The impact and role of the political parties have been seen as limited in the protests that emerged Buzid and spread nationwide. A new era began for the opposition with the abolishment of the former Constitutional Democratic Rally. Every political actor played a role parallel to their domain in the public in shaping the future of the country. Leading political actors like the Renaissance Party (*en Nahda*), The Congress for the Republic, Tunisian Workers' Communist Party, Green Party for Progress, Leftist Socialist Party, and the Tunisian Patriotic and Democratic Labour Party were involved in the political struggle during this transition process (BBC News, 2011).

The policies of the Renaissance Party (*en Nahda*) and Rachid Ghannouchi—the most arguable political actors in the post-Ben Ali period—will have serious impacts on the country and region. In 1970, *en Nahda* Movements was founded by Ghannouchi and 'Abd al-Fatah Mourou, who joined the government-sponsored Quranic Preservation Society (QPS), which aimed to rebuild the “Arab-Muslim character” of Tunisian society. In this way, Ghannouchi had the opportunity to call and spread his ideas, thereby starting his political life. In 1978, after the Tunisian army brutally suppressed opposition and the pressure on Islamists rose, the base and scope of the Islamist movement in Tunisia was expanded. The Quranic Preservation Society subsequently became influential by focusing on economic and political issues; in addition, the Islamic emphasis was able to build student unions as strong as leftist counters. Ghannouchi called upon workers, stating “It is not enough to pray five times a day and fast in order to be worthy of Islam... Islam is activism... it is on the side of the poor and the oppressed”. He moved to create a major force in the UGTT over the next five years (Jones, 1988: 21). Ghannouchi and friends' success stemmed from the suppression policies of the Destourien Socialist Party against labour unions and leftist opposition since 1956. These policies pushed some opposition to gather around the Quranic Preservation Society while

bringing forth the Quranic Preservation Society as an important political actor in Tunisia, where the other opposition movements were weakened. In April 1981, Bourguiba announced political liberalization to open up his one-party political system. In this respect, the Quranic Preservation Society headed by Ghannouchi requested a government license to set up a political party, the Islamic Tendency Movement (*Harikat al-Ittijah al-Islami*), but was not able to prevent its members and Ghannouchi from being arrested. The developments in 1981 marked the beginning of both a transition period within *en Nahda* and a coalition with some leftist groups. Non-Islamist organizations such as the Communist Party, the Socialist Democrats, the *Rassemblement Socialiste*, and the Tunisian League of Human Rights criticized the arrests and demanded the detainees be released. An alliance similar to that of the 1980s has been built in Tunisia today. The movement led by Ghannouchi was interpreted from a different perspective by the leftist and secular groups of that period primarily due to Ghannouchi's commitment to non-violence, advocacy of dialogue, and cooperation with other opposition parties as well as the relatively moderate orientation of the Islamic Tendency Movement. Cooperation among the leftist, secular, and Islamist opposition was deepened after the Islamic Tendency Movement's journals *Al-Ma'arifa* and *Al-Mujtamaa* were banned and non-Islamists groups opened their journals to voice Islamist views (Jones, 1988: 22). It is important to highlight the historical roots of such cooperation among Islamists and non-Islamist groups to argue the future of Tunisia.

The 1984 Bread Riots forced the government to moderate its policies. In this respect, many members of the Islamic Tendency Movement were released after the 1984 amnesty for political prisoners. On the other hand, the pressure of the state over the social life increased. These pressures strengthened the base of the Islamic Tendency Movement (Jones, 1988: 22). In 1986, Ghannouchi was banned from the mosques, prohibited from teaching, public speaking, and publishing his writings, and forbidden to travel abroad. Refusing to obey these bans, Ghannouchi continued lecturing and writing; he was arrested after a mosque sermon, which fired up the student riots in the country that were already tense because of economic stagnation and political suppression. This development raised the state suppression on Islamists. Ultimately, 3,000 Islamists were arrested in alleged links to Iran's Islamic Republic (Jones, 1988: 23). The pressure on political Islam and leftist movements under Bourguiba's rule strengthened the Islamists, but the Islamists have not been marginalized or resorted to violence. This is a critical point that separated *en Nahda* from other Islamic movements in the region.

A short liberal period took place in Tunisia when Ben Ali's rule started with a bloodless coup in 1987. Hereupon, the Islamic Tendency Movement deleted the word "Islamic" from his name and renamed Hizb al-Nahda the Renaissance Party. Nevertheless, the party could not get official approval, and the members of the party participated in the election with independent candidates. En Nahda became the largest opposition bloc in this election (Esposito and Piscatori, 1991: 131). In light of the limitations in electoral law, this success was significant. Not surprisingly, the success of en Nahda was recognized by the Constitutional Democratic Rally and Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, leading to suppression of the opposition once again. The journal of en Nahda Al-Faj was closed down, veil bans returned (Esposito and Piscatori, 1991: 432), many members of en Nahda were arrested, and Ghannouchi was exiled. Ghannouchi continued his political activities in London, returning to Tunisia on 30 January 2011.

Although the Nahda Party was founded in order to promote an Islamic lifestyle, due to the oppression it faced during the Bourguiba and Ben Ali periods, today it is regarded as a "Western-style conservative party". Rashid Gannouchi's remarks about the JDP and his alliance with leftist and secular groups strengthened this view. Looking at its history, the Nahda Party's non-violent methods should be considered in this respect.

Cumhuriyet Kongresi, which was founded in 2001 by Moncef Marzuki, an opposition leader in exile, is another prominent actor. Marzuki is a leading human rights activist in Tunisia who focused particularly on torture and human rights breaches in prisons; he was arrested many times on charges of working with illegal Islamist groups (Amnesty International, 2011). When the Cumhuriyet Kongresi was banned in 2002, Marzuki went into exile in France and carried on his political activities there. Marzuki returned to Tunisia in 21 January 2011 and became a candidate for presidency (Al Arabiya, 2011). Although Marzuki and Gannouchi represent different political factions, they stood together in the 18 October Movement. Moreover, Marzuki made positive remarks about the Nahda Party.

The Tunisian Communist Labour Party, which is a Marxist-Leninist Party, was founded in 1986. TKIP is led by Hama Hammami, who entered politics during the 1972 student movements. TKIP was banned in 1987, and Hammami and its members were arrested. Since then, TKIP members have been arrested numerous times, most recently on 12 January 2011. Hammami, Muhammed Mzem, and Amar Amroussia were detained, but released on 18 January 2011 (Al Jazeera, 2011). TKIP is one of the rare political parties that actively participated in the popular uprising. It abandoned its anti-Nahda rhetoric in the 1990s and

gained a moderate position. It joined the 18 October Movement founded in 2005, thereby becoming allied with Nahda (On Islam.Net, 2011).

TKIP's shift towards a moderate position in the 1990s caused a rift within the party. In 2006, after TKIP's alliance with Nahda, a clique led by Muhammed Kilani left TKIP and established the Leftist Socialist Party. It was banned during Ben Ali's rule. Tunisia's Democratic and Patriotic Labour Party, led by Abdurrezzak Hammami, applied for legal status on 29 April 2005; however, it was rejected. This is a Marxist party. Another political party that was banned is the Green Tunisia Party founded by Abdulkadir Zeytuni. It applied for legal status in April 2004; however, it was rejected as another environmentalist party already had a license. In addition, it is a member of the European Green Federation. The party stands for environmentalist policies, human rights and gender equality, social justice and democracy, anti-violence, and anti-discrimination policies (Epoch Times, 2011)

Legal parties currently exist in Tunisian politics that were active during Ben Ali's rule. The most prominent is the Socialist Democrats Movement (MDS). When Bourguiba introduced a liberal opening in 1981 and ended the single-party system, the MDS was founded and became the first opposition party in Tunisia to be acknowledged by the state. In fact, it separated from the neo-Destours. When Ben Ali noted discontent in the MDS, he arrested some of its leaders in order to weaken it. It won no seats in 1981 elections but won 13 seats in 1999.

The Popular Union Party was founded in 1981 and became legal in 1983. As a socialist party, the Popular Union Party won 7 seats in 1999, 11 seats in 2004, and 12 seats in 2009. Moreover, Muhammed Bushisha ran for presidency in 2009, but he ultimately forfeited and supported Ben Ali.

The Socialist Liberal Party was founded in 1988. Its leader is Monder Thabet. It won 9 seats in 2009. The Progressive Democrat Party was founded in 1988. The most prominent figure of the party is Ahmed Najib Shabbi. In the 2009 presidential elections, Ahmed Najib Shabbi became a candidate, but withdrew after he accused Ben Ali of "fake legitimacy". The Democratic Labour and Freedom Forum (FDLT) is another prominent party of Tunisia. Its leader, Mustafa Bin Cafer, is a well-known human rights activist who entered politics in 1978 with the MDS. In 1994, Bin Cafer left MDWS and established the FDLT, which became legal in 2002. During Bin Ali's rule, the Progressive Democratic Party and FDLT constituted the legal opposition.

The Movement Ettajdid, Movement for Renewal, was founded as an office of the France Communist Party in Tunisia in 1919. In 1963, many of its members were arrested. In

1993, it changed its name to The Movement Ettajdid. The Progressive Green Party was founded in 2005 and legalized in 2006. Its leader is Mongi Hamassi.

Conclusion

Despite these parties, many more have official approval or are waiting for approval. In light of the increased parties, Tunisia's elections were postponed from 24 July to 16 October. Considering that Tunisia will have its first free elections in history, the high number of parties is a direct result of the suppression of political life since 1956. On the other hand, it is not possible for all parties to gain seats in the parliamentary regardless of how the electoral law is regulated. In this respect, fragmentation of the parties would be an advantage for the biggest parties and groups. In addition, the Islamists and secularists could establish a coalition to secure their recent political gains and avoid ideological objections. This option can create a healthy political transition for the MENA region, where political discontent has been increasing. The elections and aftermath offer crucial importance as well as opportunity for both Tunisia and the region in terms of political transition.

END NOTES

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