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## Tunisia's Rocky Road to Stability: Security Sector Reform, (De-) Radicalization and Socio-Economic Development - Policy Briefs from the Region and Europe

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# DGAP REPORT

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Edited Volume

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## **Tunisia's Rocky Road to Stability**

Security Sector Reform, (De-)  
Radicalization and Socio-Economic  
Development – Policy Briefs from the  
Region and Europe

Edited by Dina Fakoussa and Laura Lale Kabis-Kechrid

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The following papers were written by participants of the workshop “Promotion of Think Tank Work on Security Sector Reform and Socio-Economic Challenges in Tunisia,” organized by the German Council on Foreign Relations’ Middle East and North Africa Program in the summer and fall of 2017 in cooperation with the Tunisian think tank Jousour and the Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung für die Freiheit in Tunis. The workshop is part of the program’s project on the promotion of think tank work in the Middle East and North Africa, which aims to strengthen the scientific and technical capacities of civil society actors in the region and the EU who are engaged in research and policy analysis and advice. It is realized with the support of the German Federal Foreign Office, the Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations (ifa e.V.) and the Robert Bosch Stiftung.

The content of the papers does not reflect the opinion of the DGAP. Responsibility for the information and views expressed herein lies entirely with the authors. The editorial closing date was September 17, 2017.

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Edited by Dina Fakoussa and Laura Lale Kabis-Kechrid

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## INTRODUCTION

Laura Lale Kabis-Kechrid

Despite the progress Tunisia has made in the past years, the country continues to be plagued by the persistence of grave socio-economic disparities – a key driver of the popular upheavals in 2011. Among other factors, corruption and the high frequency of changes in government have significantly hampered the Tunisian government's ability to address these issues and implement effective socio-economic and political reforms. As a result, dissatisfaction with the political process has been growing, particularly among youth. This has provided a fertile ground for radicalization. Radical groups have been gaining a stronger foothold among politically and socio-economically marginalized groups in Tunisia. The assassination of political figures Chokri Belaid and Mohamed Brahmi in 2013, several deadly terrorist attacks, as well as the high number of Tunisian foreign fighters who have traveled to Syria, Libya, and Iraq, have shaken the country in its core.

To tackle the problem of radicalization and to regain public trust in the democratic process in Tunisia, a holistic approach is needed that includes the reform of the security sector, a stronger focus on preventive and deradicalization measures, improving employment opportunities for young Tunisians, and greater political participation. To ensure the stability of the country and the success of its democratic transition process, continued international support, especially from the EU and its member states, is crucial.

This edited volume brings together papers written by the participants in the workshop series "Promotion of Think Tank Work on Security Sector Reform and Socio-Economic Challenges in Tunisia", held in Berlin in August and in Tunis in October 2017. The workshops were conducted as part of DGAP's project on strengthening think tanks and similar institutions in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and Europe. The authors analyze key issues impacting the political, social, and economic development of Tunisia, including the reform of administrative structures and the security sector, drivers of radicalization, and persisting socio-economic issues, especially in Tunisia's historically marginalized regions. The volume offers recommendations for the Tunisian government as well as for the EU and its member states, who are key partners in supporting the country's reform process.

Among the recommendations are the following: to safeguard the success of Tunisia's decentralization process, which is fundamental for the sustainability of the country's democratic transition, legislative reform must be driven by a coherent vision underpinning the restructuring of the state. In addition, the Tunisian government should implement participatory mechanisms to communicate the need for progressive decentralization.

In order to ensure that the Tunisian state can adequately respond to the security challenges it is facing, while also ensuring that old structures of the security apparatus do not operate counter to the country's democratization efforts, Tunisia needs a transformation of its security culture. To this end, the Tunisian government should provide an institutional framework that facilitates the integration of security forces' demands and a national security debate within a democratic setting. In the interest of ensuring the sustainability of the country's security sector reform efforts, the EU should create a framework that can bring together all European security cooperation initiatives with Tunisia, thus avoiding issues caused by bilateral, non-aligned activities. Moreover, the Tunisian government should revise the legal and structural framework of its anti-cybercrime efforts to overcome the current problem of fragmentation. The development of alternative funding models could also help the government become more self-reliant and gradually decrease the share of funding by international donors. In addition to reforming its security sector, an adjustment of current deradicalization and prevention approaches is advocated for. This includes close cooperation with civil society organizations in the state's effort to counter extremist narratives and the strengthening of the Alternative Narrative Platform (ANP) through the establishment of strategic units that would support the ANP's ability to function as a self-sufficient unit. Moreover, more attention should be paid to the role social and family ties can play in preventing and countering extremism.

With regard to the country's socio-economic challenges, which frequently also constitute a driver of radicalization, the authors focus on two key aspects: first, to improve the employability of young Tunisians, the Tunisian government should make sure that it adopts a student-centered approach that focuses on quality learning adapted to labor market needs when devising its reform plan for higher education. Second, as precarious socio-economic conditions have driven an increasing number of women to engage in informal cross-border trading, and in the

absence of sustainable government solutions to their marginalization, Tunisian policymakers should devise strategies for alternative sources of income for these women, activate free trade zones, and place female traders at the heart of the government's war against corruption.

## The Contributions in Short

### Chapter I: Administrative Structures and Security Sector Reform

*"Tunisia's Security Sector Since 2011 – Promoting International Cooperation"*: Onur Kara assesses various factors that have impeded efforts by the Tunisian state to reform its security sector in the aftermath of the ousting of former President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, and urges the Tunisian government to create an environment that allows for a national security debate within a democratic setting and gives members of the security services the opportunity to express their demands. In addition, the EU should ensure the sustainability of Tunisia's reform program by streamlining European security cooperation efforts.

*"Cybercrime in Tunisia – Tackling Legal, Structural, and Financial Challenges"*: Alexandra Laban argues that the current structure in place to tackle cyber insecurities in Tunisia impedes the government's ability to adequately respond to the sharp increase of cybercrime in the country. Therefore, policymakers should revise the legal, structural, and financial parameters underpinning the Tunisian cyber-framework to improve cyber security.

*"Reconfiguring Territorial State Administration and Decentralization in Tunisia – The 'Obvious' Need for a Political Vision"*: Meriem Guetat critically assesses Tunisia's ongoing decentralization process. She underlines the need for a coherent vision, reflected in clear legislative provisions, and the use of participatory mechanisms that would allow the state to communicate the need for progressive decentralization.

### Chapter II: (De-)Radicalization

*"Civil Society and Government Partnership in Preventing Violent Extremism in Tunisia"*: Sadem Jebali analyses the Tunisian government's strategy to counter the narratives of extremist groups by taking a close look at the government's flagship initiative – the Alternative Narrative Platform (ANP). He

advocates for an improved partnership framework between the government and civil society organizations and the establishment of strategic units that would improve the effectivity and self-sufficiency of the ANP.

*"Deradicalization and the Prevention of Radicalization of Tunisian Youth through Peer Pressure, Family, and Tribal Bonds"*: Samah Krichah draws attention to the importance of social ties in preventing radicalization as well as in deradicalization and reintegration efforts. Arguing that current strategies by the Tunisian government do not sufficiently take the role of such ties into account, she advocates for a revision of current approaches and a greater involvement of family and peer networks in deradicalization and reintegration programs.

*"Ennahda and Hizb ut-Tahrir – Cooperative Rivals or Brothers-in-Arms?"*: Inna Rudolf discusses the effect the positioning of the Ennahda party as "the champion of the post-revolutionary Islamist project" and "Muslim democrats" has had on the party and critically analyses its ambivalent relationship with the Tunisian branch of the international pan-Islamist Hizb ut-Tahrir party.

### Chapter III: Socio-Economic Challenges

*"Tunisian Female Cross-Border Traders in Algeria – On Gender Transgression and Socio-Economic Marginalization"*: Houda Mzioudet draws attention to the growing feminization of informal trade between Tunisia and Algeria. In light of women's precarious socio-economic situation and vulnerability to exploitation, she urges Tunisian policymakers to provide better support for female cross-border traders by drawing up strategies for alternative sources of income, activating free trade zones, and improving their safety and security at border crossings.

*"A Student-Centered Approach to Higher Education Reform in Tunisia"*: Molka Abassi argues that the government's recently approved reform plan for higher education focuses too much on governance, fiduciary, and administrative changes, instead of adapting a student-centered approach, which she deems necessary to improve graduate employability. She presents a broad range of recommendations that would allow the government to achieve quick gains in the areas of research and development and innovation, curriculum and pedagogy, and campus life and student experience.



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# **Chapter I: Administrative Structures and Security Sector Reform**

## TUNISIA'S SECURITY SECTOR SINCE 2011 – PROMOTING INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Onur Kara

*The need to reform Tunisia's security sector has been apparent since the immediate aftermath of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's departure in January 2011. The political transition that followed witnessed several proposals for Security Sector Reform (SSR), and a sizeable literature on the subject has emerged. Nevertheless, reform efforts have been impeded by enduring political polarization, resistance from within the security bureaucracy, and the emergence of a security agenda dominated by counter-terrorism. Striking a balance between democracy and security in Tunisia requires a transformation of its security culture, which will play out chiefly at the domestic level. To this end, the Tunisian government should provide an environment for its security services to voice their demands, and the international community should ensure that Tunisia's reform program remains sustainable over the long-term.*

As the Arab Uprisings unfolded, political actors in the Arab world found themselves engaging with security forces that were designed to protect the ruling regimes in power rather than public security as defined in liberal democracies. The earlier logic of security had revolved around two objectives: protecting the regime against its own population, and protecting the incumbent from intra-regime struggles.<sup>1</sup> Within this context, the collapse of a ruling regime meant that transitional governments had to work with large yet inefficient security sectors. Tunisia's transition, with security agencies being an indispensable part of Ben Ali's regime, was no exception. While information regarding authoritarian security sectors is notoriously difficult to gather, recent research has established that such regimes utilized various incentives to co-opt large segments of the population, in addition to repression.<sup>2</sup> As well as housing a large, centralized security bureaucracy, Ben Ali's regime also made use of local social relations to penetrate society further.<sup>3</sup>

The democratic agenda which accompanied the Arab Uprisings advocated a different framework for thinking about security. In democracies, security services are no longer committed to preserving a specific party or ruler – they abide by the rule of law and operate within a much more restrictive environment.<sup>4</sup> Reforming regime security-led practices within a democratic framework, however, is challenging. Persistent security threats make it very difficult to reconcile democratic values with security requirements, often eroding the former. Recent reports by humanitarian organizations have been increasingly critical of the Tunisian security forces, citing rights violations under the state of emergency rule in place since November 2015.<sup>5</sup> Allegations include torture as well as the excessive use of force and arbitrary arrests, which in turn points to the risk of returning to authoritarian security practices.

### The Internal Dimension of Security after 2011

The strength and structure of the Tunisian bureaucracy in general also reflects the country's formative experiences. In terms of institutional development and effectiveness, Tunisia is one of the stronger states in the Southern Mediterranean: security provision is handled by statutory powers, and the country does not accommodate the militias that have become widespread in the Middle East. Furthermore, Tunisia does not have the same degree of ethnic and religious cleavages as its eastern Arab neighbors. These factors have contributed to the relatively low levels of armed violence in Tunisia, even after the influx of militants and weapons from the Libyan conflict.<sup>6</sup>

The institutional strength inherited from the previous regime has both positive and negative effects on SSR. Firstly, the absence of competing irregular armed actors means that SSR in Tunisia can function with well-defined and established actors, and a comprehensive Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration Program may not be necessary. Nevertheless, the presence of strong institutions with an authoritarian heritage can also create a substantial capacity and will to resist, or even manipulate efforts to reform them. The polarized political climate in Tunisia creates risks for foreign donors, as they may

1 Milan W. Svobik, *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule* (Cambridge, 2012).

2 Probably the best example is Joseph Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath Party: Inside an Authoritarian Regime* (Cambridge, 2012).

3 Beatrice Hibou, *A Force of Obedience: The Political Economy of Repression in Tunisia* (London, 2011).

4 Joseph L. Derdzinski, *Internal Security Services in Liberalizing States* (Farnham, 2009).

5 Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2017: Tunisia*. <<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2017/country-chapters/tunisia>> (accessed October 21, 2017).

6 Moncef Kartas, "On the Edge? Trafficking and Insecurity at the Tunisian-Libyan Border," Working Paper 17, Small Arms Survey (December 2013) <<http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/F-Working-papers/SAS-WP17-Tunisia-On-the-Edge.pdf>> (accessed October 21, 2017).

become entangled in Tunisian domestic politics, as in the case of US military aid to Egypt.

It is crucial to recognize that Tunisia's security sector is exceptional amongst its peers in terms of its structure. Unlike Egypt, the often-cited example, the regular army does not dominate the country's security sector. The Tunisian armed forces were kept at the margins of political life under Bourguiba and Ben Ali's leadership, and were designed to be defensive forces smaller than the Algerian and Libyan armies. The army remains relatively small today, consisting of approximately 27,000 personnel, including conscripts. The country possesses a small navy and air force, although both have seen augmentation during recent years. Instead, it was the internal security apparatus, organized around the Ministry of Interior (MoI), which remained politically central. The MoI has been at the very center of the call for a SSR program in Tunisia, and control of this ministry has become one of the sensitive topics of the transition period. The National Guard, which takes the lead in defending domestic stability, numbers around 12,000 personnel and operates under the MoI.

## Tunisia's security sector is exceptional in the region in terms of structure

Designing a reform package for the MoI, however, has proven difficult. One example is the attempt to dissolve the Tunisian "political police," which illustrates the problematic situation in which Tunisian decision-makers find themselves. The institutionalization of coercive agencies under authoritarian regimes is often incomplete and obscure, and agencies may have overlapping jurisdictions which prevent them from forming a unified bloc. Mohammad Ghannouchi's government felt public pressure to disband the political police in 2011. However, no "political police" unit existed in the country. The government, therefore, abolished the Direction Générale de

Sécurité du Territoire (DGST), a specialist unit within the MoI that was responsible for overall intelligence coordination as well as monitoring political figures.<sup>7</sup> While it is true that the DGST's dissolution sent a strong signal, dismantling an important part of Ben Ali's security apparatus, it also caused a substantial loss of security provision. When political violence ensued a year later, many DGST officials were reinstated.

While MoI reform is crucial for prospects of democracy in Tunisia, it should be noted that the balance between the army and security forces within the security sector remains far from stable. The army's relative marginalization from politics was primarily a result of coup-proofing practices under Bourguiba and Ben Ali, which stemmed from deep distrust. Tunisia traditionally allocates a smaller fraction of its budget to defense when compared to its neighbors. More importantly, previous regime practices meant that soldiers had little input in policymaking, even when security policy was concerned.<sup>8</sup> This situation changed after 2011, when the army asserted itself as a key player in Tunisian domestic politics. In addition to a fast-expanding military budget, a number of military figures sought civilian positions, including seven military officers who were appointed as governors.<sup>9</sup>

The threat of terrorism has also disrupted the internal balance of the security sector. The army became increasingly involved in counter-insurgency operations in the Chaambi Mountains in late 2012, which soon became a politicized issue when General Rachid Ammar was forced to retire.<sup>10</sup> The Tunisian government also boosted the defense budget as a response to recent challenges, and started procuring equipment. In the last couple of years, Tunisia has purchased helicopters from the US and armored vehicles from Turkey, both of which were intended for counter-terrorism operations.

The imbalance between different factions within the security sector is problematic since it also exacerbates the polarization of civilian politics. For instance, when the Tunisian parliament passed a law granting suffrage to army regulars, it reinforced the Islamist-Secularist divide in Tunisian politics, as the Ennahda party tends not to support military suf-

7 Jean-Pierre Sereni, "Après Ben Ali, quelle police en Tunisie?" *Le Monde diplomatique*, April 1, 2011.

8 Jonathan N. C. Hill, *Democratization in the Maghreb* (Edinburgh, 2016).

9 Sharan Grewal, "A Quiet Revolution: The Tunisian Army After Ben Ali," *Regional Insight*, Carnegie Middle East Center, February 24, 2016 <<http://carnegie-mec.org/2016/02/24/quiet-revolution-tunisian-military-after-ben-ali/iucy>> (accessed October 21, 2017).

10 *Ibid.*

frage, while senior figures from the secularist Nidaa Tounes party voted in favor. In addition, the emergence of several anti-reform police unions in Tunisia has put further pressure on the government. Polarization is very risky under these circumstances, as Tunisia is a case where formerly banned parties have now become major political actors, especially when Islamist politics are concerned. The politicization of security legislation can thus engender further distrust in civil-military relations, preventing an effective response to security challenges.

Most of these cleavages also existed under the previous regime. However, the chief aim of the Tunisian presidency was to maintain inter-agency tensions rather than to solve them, keeping Carthage as the final arbitrator. Strong, personalized rule over the security sector no longer exists, and seems to have been replaced by party politics. High-level policy-making regarding security affairs is fragmented and politicized, as both the president's and the prime minister's offices now have defense staff, and multiple centers of power are competing for influence over defense and security policies. In response, Tunisia's National Security Council, which remained largely dormant since 1991, was re-activated, but it is yet to have the capacity to act as a fully functional coordinating agency.<sup>11</sup> The current deadlock over security policy stems from the fact that although a democratic constitution has been passed, the balance of power between the presidency, the cabinet, and the assembly remains undetermined in Tunisia.

### **The External Dimension: Dependence on Security Cooperation**

Although Tunisian policymakers were worried about the regional ambitions of Muammar Qaddafi's Libya in the past, Tunisia has stayed out of military confrontations for most of its history. However, the country struggled to maintain its security after 2011, as transnational threats emanating from an unstable region blurred the line between domestic, regional, and international security.

Internal and external dimensions of security are closely interlinked in the case of the Tunisian security sector. On the one hand, Tunisia's domestic experience inspired others, influencing contentious

politics throughout the Middle East. On the other hand, Tunisian politics is much less isolated than before: the Libyan conflict remains a major concern for both the army and the security forces, causing the combined defense and security spending in Tunisia to almost double since 2011.<sup>12</sup> The high number of Tunisians who travelled to fight in Syria and Iraq presents another challenge. Within this context, security challenges cannot be adequately addressed via unilateral policies.

## *Strong, personalized rule over the security sector is replaced by party politics*

By relying on a security sector which favored the MoI, Bourguiba and Ben Ali effectively relied on diplomacy and alliances to protect Tunisia against external threats. Successive Tunisian governments after 2011 also recognized the importance of international cooperation. Although it is difficult to establish cooperation with Libya, Tunisia could foster coordination with the Algerian government to combat insurgents operating near the Tunisian-Algerian border. The US and UK have provided technical assistance to both the armed forces and the National Guard, and NATO has established an intelligence "fusion center" in cooperation with the local authorities.

As a result, Tunisia's security sector now hosts a series of assistance programs rather than a single, centralized one. In addition to the challenges posed by liaising with multiple partners, this situation also creates dependence on foreign funds, creating financial risks to SSR. For example, when the US State Department's draft budget for the 2018 fiscal year envisaged an almost seventy percent cut in aid programs to Tunisia, it threatened the sustainability of defense cooperation between the two countries. The situation was resolved after substantial debate

<sup>11</sup> International Crisis Group, "Jihadist Violence in Tunisia: The Urgent Need for a National Strategy," Middle East & North Africa Briefing No. 50, June 22, 2016 <<https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/tunisia/jihadist-violence-tunisia-urgent-need-national-strategy>> (accessed October 21, 2017).

<sup>12</sup> The World Bank, "Impact of the Libya Crisis on the Tunisian Economy," Report No. ACS16340, February 2017 <<http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/517981490766125612/p df/ACS16340-WP-P158090-PUBLIC-Impact-of-Libya-Crisis-on-the-Tunisian-Economy-Long-Version.pdf>> (accessed October 21, 2017).

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within the US legislature, and the intervention of Prime Minister Youssef Chahed.<sup>13</sup>

### Recommendations

- *The Tunisian government should provide the institutional framework to integrate the security forces' demands within a democratic setting*

Signs of change in Tunisia's security culture are already visible: civil society is active in the field of SSR, and retired officers now publish their opinions in the media. The government should capitalize on this environment of relative freedom and create alternative bodies that are detached from the polarization between political parties, or between the presidency and the government. This will allow a national security debate to emerge within a democratic setting, and put pressure on anti-reform forces within the bureaucracy.

- *The international community should ensure the sustainability of security reform in Tunisia*

Recent debates over US aid to Tunisia have shown that the stability of security cooperation is at stake. Since the Maghreb region lacks an effective regional mechanism to regulate security affairs, extra-regional partnerships will remain crucial for maintaining stability in Tunisia for the foreseeable future. In particular, the EU maintains a presence in Tunisia through its member states and supranational institutions, and also enjoys long-standing economic and political links, providing access to Tunisian policymakers. The EU should utilize its institutions and provide a framework within which all European security cooperation with Tunisia can be organized, relieving Tunisia from problems generated by bilateral, non-synchronized SSR efforts.

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<sup>13</sup> The proposed cuts would have reduced the aid budget to Tunisia from \$165.4 million in 2017 to \$54.5 million in 2018. See Byrant Harris, "House Rejects Trump's Middle East Aid Cuts," Al-Monitor, July 12, 2017. <<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/07/congress-override-trump-middle-east-aid-cuts.html>> (accessed October 21, 2017).

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## CYBERCRIME IN TUNISIA – TACKLING LEGAL, STRUCTURAL, AND FINANCIAL CHALLENGES

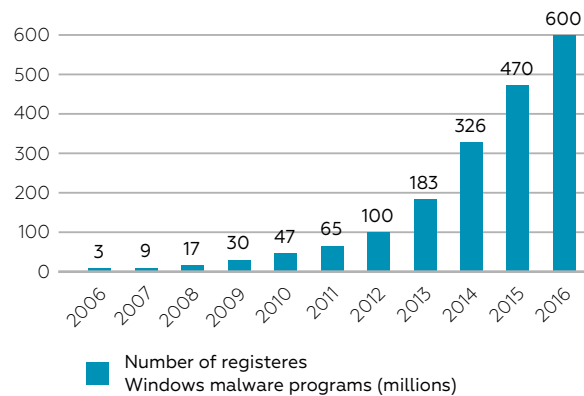
Alexandra M. Y. Laban

The migration of crime to cyberspace has become an increasingly important policy challenge for Tunisia. National authorities need to adapt their regulations and organizational structures to face new threats that arise from the prevalence of internet in daily life. The sharp rise of cybercrime in Tunisia has rendered national law enforcement efforts obsolete in responding adequately to this unprecedented transnational challenge. Tunisia's fight against cybercrime is a crucial item on the country's current security sector reform agenda and it is being hindered by existing legal, structural, and financial challenges. Tunisian policymakers should strengthen the Tunisian cyber-framework to ensure a more secure cyberspace. This should include a coordinated initiative to collect relevant data, the revision of the legal and structural framework to overcome the current problem of fragmentation and move towards highly developed and coordinated organizational structures, awareness campaigns, and the development of alternative funding models, which can gradually replace international donors.

Cyberspace has become a "criminal tool of unprecedented complexity and potential."<sup>14</sup> The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimates that almost 70 percent of all crimes will soon involve cyberspace to some extent.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, cybercrime costs the global economy up to \$445 billion annually, according to a report published by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) and McAfee in 2014.<sup>16</sup> As of 2015, malicious programs alone constituted the most significant threat to private users, businesses, and administrations, as shown in Figure 1.<sup>17</sup> The exponential rise in the number of malwares exemplifies the magnitude of a global phe-

nomenon and the rising threat of cybercrime for governments.

**Figure 1: Known malicious programs**



Source: German Federal Office of Information Security, The State of IT Security in Germany 2016, 11/2016.

Criminal abuse of information technology and its necessary legal and governance responses have been discussed ever since the creation of cyberspace. Over the course of fifty years, cybercrime has remained challenging for two main reasons: constant technical developments and the rapidly evolving techniques for committing offenses. Although fighting cybercrime might not seem a top priority for Tunisia, it is, in fact, a crucial dimension of the Security Sector Reform (SSR) currently underway in the country.

Tunisia ranks 65th out of 217 countries in internet users, reaching 5,355,000 internet users in 2014 and an internet penetration rate of 48.5 percent.<sup>18</sup> With a growing number of citizens online, cybercrime has gained momentum. Specific cyber-attacks are prevalent in Tunisia. In fact, the country is among the top ten African countries for cyber incidents (32,187),<sup>19</sup> ranking second for spam and malware,<sup>20</sup> and third for

14 Susan W. Brenner, *Cybercrime and the Law: Challenges, Issues, and Outcomes* (Lebanon, NH, 2012), p. 139.

15 Cho Seo-Young, "A Crime 2.0 – Cybercrime, e-Talent, and Institutions," Macie Paper Series No. 2016 /4, Marburg Centre for Institutional Economics <[https://www.uni-marburg.de/fb02/makro/forschung/magkspapers/paper\\_2016/08-2016\\_cho.pdf](https://www.uni-marburg.de/fb02/makro/forschung/magkspapers/paper_2016/08-2016_cho.pdf)> (accessed October 21, 2017).

16 Daniel Dobrygowski, "Why Should We Care About Cyber Resilience? Because \$445 Billion is at Stake," World Economic Forum, September 8, 2016 <<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/09/why-should-we-care-about-cyber-resilience-because-445-billion-is-at-stake/>> (accessed October 21, 2017).

17 German Federal Office for Information Security, "The State of IT Security in Germany 2016," November 2016 <<https://www.bsi.bund.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/EN/BSI/Publications/Securitysituation/IT-Security-Situation-in-Germany-2016.pdf?blob=publicationFile&v=3>> (accessed October 21, 2017).

18 Tunisia, CIA World Factbook <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ts.html>> (accessed October 21, 2017).

19 Symantec, "Cyber Crime & Cyber Security Trends in Africa," November 2016 <[https://www.thehaguesecuritydelta.com/media/com\\_hsd/report/135/document/Cyber-security-trends-report-Africa-en.pdf](https://www.thehaguesecuritydelta.com/media/com_hsd/report/135/document/Cyber-security-trends-report-Africa-en.pdf)> (accessed June 13, 2017).

20 Malware is malicious software that attackers use to steal confidential information, destroy data, disrupt computer operations, or gain access to the compromised system's network. Types of malware include viruses, worms, Trojans, and ransomware, and they spread through a variety of tools such as email, drive-by downloads, and infected files. They can also exploit existing vulnerabilities to infect systems.

bots.<sup>21</sup> The most common cybercrimes in Tunisia are Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks,<sup>22</sup> software piracy, cyberlaundering, and cyber terrorism.<sup>23</sup>

### National Policy Issues Arising from Cybercrime

#### Lack of Appropriate Data

It is worth noting that in its statistical criminal overview in Tunisia for 2014 and 2015, the Ministry of Interior (MoI) does not classify cybercrime as a crime. Cybercrime is a critical field that requires accurate information to attract the scrutiny and attention of Tunisian society. Lack of public information and knowledge about cybercrime only contributes to its relative neglect in media coverage of SSR. Moreover, the absence of data to assess the extent of cybercrime creates a blind spot, which in turn renders policymakers powerless in accurately evaluating the threat at hand.

#### Legal Shortcomings

According to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) Tunisia Cyberwellness profile (2014), several legal measures regulate cybercrime in Tunisia. National legislation addressing cybercrime was introduced into the Tunisian Penal Law (Article 199bis and 199ter) as early as August 2, 1999, and it focused mainly on intrusion into IT systems. On August 9, 2000, Tunisia enacted a law regulating electronic commerce and electronic exchanges. In 2004, Law No. 2004-5 and its three related decrees recognized the need to further regulate cybercrime. In April 2017, a joint commission of representatives from the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and the Ministry of Communication Technologies and Digital Economy (MoCT) met to draft a law on cybercrime. The first draft of a proposed cybercrime bill was leaked to the public on July 23, 2014. Two of its provisions alarmed civil society organizations, namely: surveillance and data gathering in ongoing criminal investigations, and monitoring of any online threat that could possibly jeopardize national security.

Cyberspace brings to light the challenge of protecting digital rights: access, freedom of connection, freedom of expression, equality, freedom of information, privacy, and data protection. Concerns over how to strike a balance between safeguarding privacy and personal data, and ensuring national security have been raised in debates over the new cybercrime bill. The loose definition of privacy protection in the cybercrime bill could open the door to power abuses on the part of policymakers in the name of greater security. This issue has attracted the attention of the general public, and seems to have slowed the authorities' efforts to update the country's criminal legislation.

The central challenge for the Tunisian legal system is to reform its Criminal Code. The gap between knowledge of new IT security breaches and necessary criminal law adjustments functions as an additional impediment to Tunisian legislators. The latter problem remains all the more relevant as the speed of network innovation accelerates. Tunisia's ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on Cybercrime, known as the Budapest Convention, conveys this challenge.

The Budapest Convention is currently the only legally binding instrument that provides a framework for international cooperation in the fight against cybercrime, and has served as a benchmark for setting international standards in this field.<sup>24</sup> Given the transnational nature of cybercrime, harmonization of national laws with international standards is vital in the fight against cybercrime. On September 23, 2015, Tunisia submitted its application to join the Budapest Convention. The pending ratification of the Budapest Convention, due to delays in updating national cybercrime legislation, has impeded Tunisia's adherence to international legal best practices.

#### Organizational Deficiencies in Addressing Cybercrime

Cybercrime is a multi-dimensional threat, which mobilizes a vast number of stakeholders to account for the many communication, security, legal, and

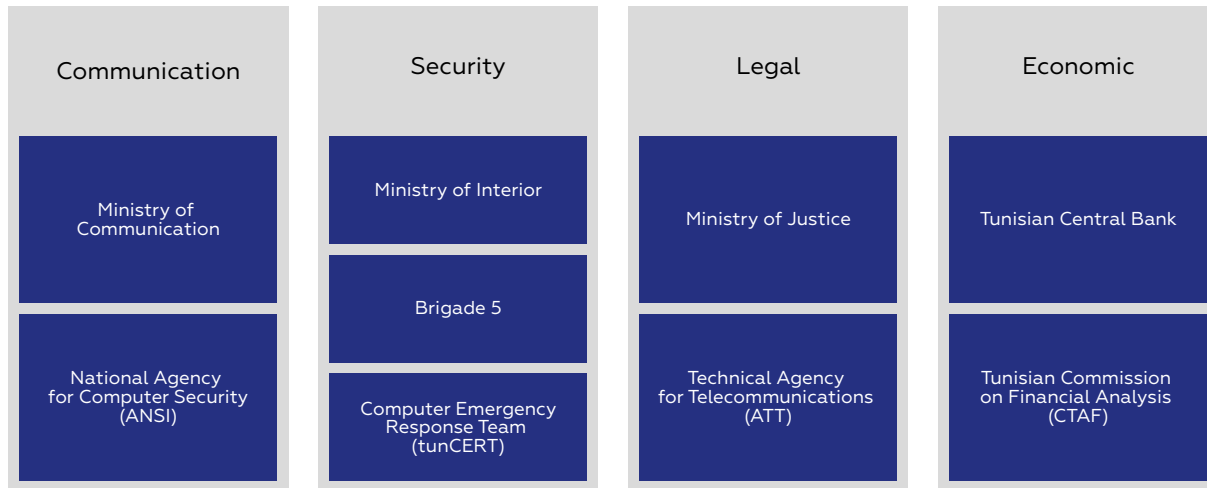
21 When used for malicious purposes, bots are programs that are covertly installed on a user's machine to allow an attacker to remotely control the targeted system through a communication channel, such as internet relay chat (IRC), peer-to-peer (P2P), or HTTP (hypertext transfer protocol). These channels allow the remote attacker to control a large number of compromised computers over a single, reliable channel in a botnet, which can then be used to launch coordinated attacks.

22 Denial-of-service attacks are characterized by an explicit attempt to prevent users of a service from using that service. In a distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attack, the incoming traffic flooding the targeted website originates from many different sources.

23 Ahmed Ben Ayed, "Nature of Cyber Crimes and Legislation in the Republic of Tunisia," *International Journal of Advanced Research in Computer Engineering & Technology* 6 (March 2017), pp. 241–44.

24 Patryk Pawlak, "A Wild Wild Web? Laws, Norms, Crime and Politics in Cyberspace," *EU Institute for Security Studies*, July 2017 <<https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/wild-wild-web-law-norms-crime-and-politics-cyberspace>> (accessed September 30, 2017).

**Figure 2: Tunisian stakeholders involved in anti-cybercrime efforts**



economic challenges that arise. Tunisia was a pioneer in Africa for building technical infrastructures to address cyber insecurity. Several governmental bodies and agencies coexist in the anti-cybercrime effort. Figure 2 categorizes the various Tunisian institutions and bodies involved in the fight against cybercrime.

As far as national security is concerned, the MoI is responsible for internal affairs such as cybercrime, and has newly recruited “Brigade 5,” which comprises thirty computer security engineers.<sup>25</sup> In addition, a Tunisian Computer Emergency Response Team (tunCERT) was created in 2004 to provide proactive and reactive IT services, including information dissemination, tool development, network monitoring, auditing, penetration testing, and regulation development. Initially, tunCERT was under the jurisdiction of another body: the National Agency for Computer Security (ANSI). Since 2004, ANSI has been the recognized body implementing a national cybersecurity strategy, policy, and roadmap in Tunisia. It falls under the supervision of the MoCT, and is therefore not responsible for national security prerogatives. Its core missions are awareness-raising and technological monitoring.

Regarding judicial investigations into cybercrime, the Technical Agency for Telecommunication (ATT), cre-

ated in 2013, is placed under the responsibility of the MoJ, and performs legal interceptions of suspicious online communication. Furthermore, ATT provides technical support in judicial investigations regarding the information systems of crimes.<sup>26</sup>

This divide in responsibilities between the MoCT, MoJ and MoI is contradictory, as cybercrime mostly remains a security issue. The fragmentation due to the high number of stakeholders in charge of complex investigations leads to structural confusion through overlapping responsibilities and unclear competencies, as a wide range of expertise is required, from legal to technical aspects. As a result, the current Tunisian cyber-framework’s excessive need for coordination hampers the ability of policymakers to efficiently address the threat and meet the needs of their citizens.

**Current Unsustainability of Financing the Fight against Cybercrime**

Updating the cyber-framework comes at a high cost for Tunisia, especially in terms of analyzing what is already in place and which international best practices can be brought forward. International cooperation instruments, such as that proposed by the EU, may represent a short-term strategy to fund the first steps in necessary anti-cybercrime reform. Support-

25 Chawki Gaddas, “Nécessité d’établir un cadre juridique en matière de cyber-sécurité en Tunisie,” Tekiano, June 3, 2017 <<http://www.tekiano.com/2017/04/27/chawki-gaddas-necessite-detablir-un-cadre-juridique-en-matiere-de-cyber-securite-en-tunisie/>> (accessed October 21, 2017).  
 26 Wafa Dahmani, “Breaking the National Cyber Security Dilemma in Tunisia,” iGmena, June 15, 2017 <<https://www.igmena.org/Breaking-the-National-Cyber-Security-dilemma-in-Tunisia>> (accessed October 21, 2017).



ing SSR has increasingly become an area of engagement for the EU to contribute to conflict prevention and peace-building. Ensuring effective SSR in neighboring countries is critical to the long-term success of EU efforts to promote peace. One promising area for EU cooperation is to assist willing partner countries in implementing adequate anti-cybercrime reforms to reap the benefits of harmonized governance frameworks. The pillar of cybercrime diplomacy is that: “If all countries adopt adequate, consistent cybercrime laws, transnational cybercrime will become easier to investigate.”<sup>27</sup> In this context, the EU is committed to supporting Tunisia in reforming its existing security apparatus. For this purpose, the EU Commission Directorate General for Neighborhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR) is funding a multi-million-Euro program in 2017 to support SSR in Tunisia, with a component on cybercrime and money laundering. This cooperation program is set to start in September 2017 within the Tunisian MoI.

## Heavy reliance on international funding is not a sustainable option

International funding, however, is not a sustainable option in the medium- to long-term for national policymakers. In fact, heavy reliance on external donors will not help Tunisia become self-sufficient and continue its efforts after foreign donors have shifted their priorities.

### Recommendations

*- Improve data collection as a stepping stone in weighing the extent of cybercrime*

The lack of accessible data should be addressed to inform policymakers and the public on the magnitude of the issue and to determine threat levels. Academics and politicians can use crime statistics as a basis for discussion and starting points for the decision-making process. Thus, the MoI should coordinate

a data collection initiative to include cybercrime in its crime statistical overview, especially as a data-sharing platform already exists on the ministry’s website. Publicizing the gathered information is vital to spark interest and build trust in the national cyber-infrastructures.

Furthermore, access to accurate information on the magnitude of cybercrime would enable Tunisian law-enforcers to improve their anti-cybercrime strategy, deter potential attacks, and enact effective legislation. Proposed activities include expert review of key documentation, and cybercrime statistical data collection and sharing. By doing so, the Tunisian authorities will demonstrate the need for action and build momentum.

*- Revise the legal and structural cyber-framework*

The rule of law (that is, a robust legal and organizational framework) holds the most potential in the fight against cybercrime. The current cybercrime governance framework in Tunisia requires a comprehensive assessment, which should result in a publicly-accessible action document co-published by various high-level stakeholders (the MoI, MoJ, and MoCT, among others), providing the way forward to improving maturity. This action document should map the necessary steps to identify the main gaps in the required cyber capabilities, assess risk in the current threat landscape, formulate recommendations on national priorities, and establish a roadmap to reach the desired cyber-resilience capacities.

In addition, instead of creating a separate cybercrime code, cybercrime provisions should be included in the current Tunisian Criminal Code to simplify access to the law. To avoid drafting cybercrime legislation unconnectedly, which may result in significant duplication and wasted resources, legislators should monitor international standards and ensure the international harmonization of Tunisian criminal legal provisions.<sup>28</sup> Last but not least, Tunisian criminal law can significantly benefit from the experience and training of other countries in order to modernize the country’s judiciary. Tunisian policymakers need to review and update the current regulatory cyber-framework to guarantee the digital rights of Tunisian citizens while providing a secure and up-to-

27 Brenner, *Cybercrime and the Law* (see note 14), p. 139.

28 M. Gerccke, “Understanding Cybercrime: A Guide for Developing Countries,” *Cybercrime Legislation Resources*, International Telecommunication Union, March 2011 <[https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/3b71/8675198cf15c3167be8fbd20ed227f78817.pdf?\\_ga=2.223590939.1675568018.1503152434-1853178410.1502047837](https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/3b71/8675198cf15c3167be8fbd20ed227f78817.pdf?_ga=2.223590939.1675568018.1503152434-1853178410.1502047837)> (accessed August 20, 2017).

date internet, proactively equipped to face its security dilemmas.

Rethinking the current fragmentation of the Tunisian cyber framework to focus on efficiency and alignment, to foster coordination, ensure accountability, and ultimately, increase organizational impact should be a priority for national policymakers. Fighting cybercrime entails highly developed and coordinated organizational structures and must balance centralizing and devolving key responsibilities among the various stakeholders.

*-Foster inclusive participation and awareness of civil society*

Educating internet users reduces the number of potential targets. One essential requirement of an effective training and information strategy is open communication and the inclusive participation of civil society. ANSI, which is the agency responsible for raising awareness about cybercrime in Tunisia, should widen its scope of action to encompass public campaigns, lessons in schools, libraries, IT centers, and universities, and public-private partnerships (PPPs) to engage Tunisian civil society.

*-Gradually replace international donors through alternative financing*

Tunisian policymakers, especially governmental bodies, must think strategically about resource management in reforming the cyber-framework. At a mature stage, an “Alternative Funding Model” or PPP arrangement could gradually replace international donors to ensure that the Tunisian authorities maintain their anti-cybercrime efforts. Thus, Tunisian companies will be relevant stakeholders in assisting their government in their relevant fields of expertise regarding cybercrime.

In parallel with governance efforts, Tunisian energy providers, water suppliers, transport companies, and other critical infrastructure providers must build solid expert networks to deliver secure and robust e-services as the enabling backbones of their businesses. Tunisian policymakers should commit to developing shared responsibilities through partnerships that seek to engage businesses especially in areas of critical infrastructure provision, and

to deliver a unified approach to cyber resilience in Tunisia. At the heart of this approach is the building of trust between government and private organizations.<sup>29</sup>

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29 David M. Cook, “Mitigating Cyber-Threats through Public-Private Partnerships: Low Cost Governance with High-impact Returns,” School of Computer and Security Science, Edith Cowan University, 2010 <[https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/a68f/55796f5a7186dc652805fd763a\\_b99bbf916c.pdf?\\_ga=2.260790667.723561613.1504092745-1853178410.1502047837](https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/a68f/55796f5a7186dc652805fd763a_b99bbf916c.pdf?_ga=2.260790667.723561613.1504092745-1853178410.1502047837)> (accessed August 20, 2017).

## RECONFIGURING TERRITORIAL STATE ADMINISTRATION AND DECENTRALIZATION IN TUNISIA – THE “OBVIOUS” NEED FOR A POLITICAL VISION

Meriem Guetat

*The 2014 Tunisian Constitution established a new mode of local governance based on the principle of decentralization. This was intended as a response to the deficiencies, including regional inequalities, of the previous system based on the 1959 Constitution. A reconfigured territorial administration could thus provide an opportunity to establish new political narratives based on identification with a new proximity to state institutions and invigorate political life. But for such an opportunity to become concrete, policymakers must provide a coherent vision underpinning the restructuring of the state and translate it into legislative provisions. Furthermore, beyond the legal ratification of decentralization, the state should communicate openly on the need for progressive decentralization by implementing participatory mechanisms.*

The Tunisian Constitution of 2014 dedicated an entire chapter to specifying a new organization of local powers based on decentralization.<sup>30</sup> The chapter addressed one of the most substantial problems that led to the 2010–2011 uprisings, namely the authoritarian mode of local administration and deepening regional economic disparities. Articles 131 to 142 of the new Constitution established principles such as free administration, participatory democracy, and subsidiarity.<sup>31</sup> This new conceptualization of the role of local authorities marks a huge leap forward from the problems created by the 1959 Constitution and, if well implemented, indicates positive change.

As local authorities are now expected to provide local services, trigger regional and national economic growth, and even respond to security issues, it seems that implementing the new principles of the 2014 Constitution is a matter of urgency. Yet the creation of concrete new legislative initiatives has been slow. While this new code is under discussion by the Parliamentary Committee on Administration

Organization and Armed Forces Affairs, it appears that the reconfiguration of relationships between the center and the regions determines not only the fate of the Tunisian transition, but more importantly, the reconstruction of a national identity that stems from a process of confidence-building and identification with state institutions.<sup>32</sup>

### The Tunisian Territorial Administration Model before 2011

The 1959 Tunisian Constitution dedicated only one article to local authorities. Article 71 stated that “municipal councils, regional councils, and structures to which the law confers the statute of local authorities conduct their local affairs with respect to the conditions provided by the law.”<sup>33</sup> This allowed legislative powers broad prerogatives to define how territorial administration functioned according to a political vision based on full territorial control. In effect, a combination of the rules laid down in the Organic Law No. 75–33 of May 14, 1975 on communes, and the Organic Law No. 89–11 of February 4, 1989 on regional councils, defined the specific system of Tunisian territorial administration and, at the same time, the social and political relationships between the center and “interior regions.” In other words, the state administration configuration was shaped around strict control of local collectivities and subsequently their affiliated citizens. But this effort to impose the center’s political hegemony over Tunisian territory has resulted in a political identification with the interior as a “spatial imaginary,”<sup>34</sup> which is described through the deeply distorting vocabulary of marginalization, disdain, and injustice.

Tunisian territorial administration was set up according to two logics that should have normally overlapped. First, the deconcentrated central state was devised around 24 governorates. Second, on the local level decentralization was based on the model of regional councils and communes. Practically, the deconcentration approach dominated in the service of the centralized state as regional councils and communes had very few prerogatives and no margin for decision-making. This was due to an *a priori* control system in which the governor, nominated by

30 Chapter VII of the Tunisian Constitution of January 26, 2014.

31 See Salwa Hamrouni and Salsabil Klibi, “Les défis juridiques et politiques à la mise en œuvre de la décentralisation,” Occasional Paper Series 17, Forum of Federations (2016), pp. 10–12.

32 See Youssef Cherif, “Tunisia’s Postcolonial Identity Crisis: A Key to Understanding the Lure of Extremism,” DGAPkompakt 23, German Council on Foreign Relations (2016) <<https://dgap.org/en/article/getFullPDF/28906>> (accessed August 6, 2017).

33 Author’s translation, Article 71, Tunisian Constitution of June 1, 1959.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 178.

the state, and the Ministry of Interior had extensive supervisory powers.<sup>35</sup>

Thus, the model stemming from the 1959 Constitution established an administratively deconcentrated state ruling over a geographically decentralized territory. This configuration led to structural problems that blocked reform of the overburdened, anachronistic Tunisian administration. It also created a sense of mistrust and lack of confidence in state institutions, resulting in a tendency on the part of citizens to find solutions outside legal circuits perceived as slow, corrupt, and authoritarian. Ironically, but understandably, this culminated in the fortification of parallel economy circuits, causing more corruption and the incapacity of both the decentralized institutions and central state representatives to deal with social, political, and economic challenges.

### Functioning of the System after 2011

This institutional architecture explicitly demonstrated its limits during the transitional period, as the special delegations created after the dissolution of regional councils fell short of performing their assigned duties under the new conditions created by the revolutionary context. Consequently, different post-transition governments have had to face intense regional crises to which they could only offer artificial solutions. Realistically, when dealing with regional issues, the centralized state's intervention cannot be considered as a substitution for local authorities but rather as a supplement. In concrete terms, the latter should be able to address problems in their immediate environment without having to fully rely on the center's guidance.

The last crisis at El Kamour in the governorate of Tataouine, where unemployed youth blocked the roads leading to oil wells to claim their region's share in the oil produced on its land, has shown not only the very negative outcomes of the current configuration, but also the state's incapacity to deal with them politically.<sup>36</sup> Thus, there is an obvious need to take steps towards the effective establishment of a stable and sustainable model of territorial administration, and to translate this into legislative measures.

### The Draft Code on Local Authorities: The Lack of Vision Underpinning State Restructuring

To create a valid alternative to the ineffective model of Tunisian territorial administration, it is important to grasp the principles included in Chapter VII of the 2014 Constitution, including free administration, representativeness, and participatory democracy. Political discussions about decentralization, and more specifically the draft code on local authorities, show there is a trend towards dealing with the provisions of the chapter on local authorities as mere deliverables.<sup>37</sup> This attitude could lead to the adoption of a draft code on local authorities that represents nothing more than a collection of idealistic and theoretical decentralization principles which cannot realistically be implemented by the Tunisian state in the light of its current challenges. This would not only be counterproductive but also represent a loss of the outstanding opportunity offered by the context of general political transition.

*There is a trend towards dealing with the chapter on local authorities as mere deliverables*

For example, the draft code is expected to implement a clear division of prerogatives not only between the centralized state and new local authorities, but also between the latter in the application of the Constitution. In fact, Article 134 provides that local authorities have their own distinct attributes besides shared and transferred attributes from central powers, and which obey the principle of subsidiarity. Close reading of Articles 12–23 of the current version of the draft code indicates that the division of prerogatives being implemented is highly vague and abstract. Although the current draft respects the provisions of the Constitution, it remains cautious about detail. This may be the result of the lack of a holistic vision

35 See Sami Yassine Turki and Eric Verdeil, "Tunisie: La constitution (du printemps) ouvre le débat sur la décentralisation," in *Local Governments and Public Goods: Assessing Decentralization in the Arab World*, eds. Mona Harb and Sami Atallah (Beirut, 2015), pp. 14–24.

36 Carlotta Gall, "Young and Unemployed, Tunisians Agitate for a 'Second Revolution,'" *New York Times*, May 27, 2017.

37 See "Riadh Mouakher : Ce n'est pas la fin du monde si le code des collectivités locales n'est pas adopté à temps," *Business News*, August 22, 2017 <<http://www.businessnews.com.tn/Riadh-Mouakher--Ce-n%E2%80%99est-pas-la-fin-du-monde-si-le-code-des-collectivit%C3%A9s-locales-n%E2%80%99est-pas-adopt%C3%A9-%C3%A0-temps-!534,74338,3>> (accessed December 18, 2017).

to set out the future structure of local powers and their prerogatives or, worse, a will to neutralize such a new configuration. In fact, the structure of the text opens the door to contradictory measures that will only hinder its legitimacy. As the draft code on local authorities does not allocate a chapter to deconcentration, future initiatives may be used to neutralize decentralization efforts.

## The absence of a structured vision on responsibilities leads to a waste of resources

Clearly, the absence of a structured vision clarifying roles and responsibilities will cause unnecessary expenditures and waste human resources and expertise. Furthermore, without a clear and well-defined division that demonstrates the state's willingness to actively undertake change, the draft code will not receive popular support. As well as the loss of human and financial resources that such measures would generate, it would also represent a missed opportunity to build confidence in state reform initiatives by delivering a token of trust to citizens who might then stop believing that the state takes with one hand what it gives with the other.

Another symptom of the lack of vision behind the draft code lies in its vague introduction of the principle of progressive implementation. While the preamble to the draft code states that the radical scope of change introduced by decentralization requires progressive implementation, nothing is consecrated in the code itself or in the declared state policies. Comparative experiences show the importance of laying down the key steps of decentralization and territory evolution beforehand. For example, the French experience presents the case of a continuing decentralization process whose general aspects are structured around acts or significant periods.<sup>38</sup>

By completely omitting a timeline of application suitable to each mechanism and type of collectivity, the state will be exposed to new types of social and economic claims to which it cannot realistically respond due to financial and material constraints. In order to be effective, the decentralization process must transfer major prerogatives to collectivities which, in reality, are neither prepared financially nor trained to endorse their new roles. If newly elected institutions fail to substitute former organizations due to their incapacity to perform their duties, the risks of social fragmentation and political delegitimization will be further exacerbated.

### Recommendations

- Take decentralization seriously

Decentralization cannot be dealt with as if it was a deliverable to be checked off. Decision-makers need to understand that the creation of a truly representative base lies at the decentralized level. Taking into consideration their current difficulties in dealing with social unrest, the creation of a peaceful social environment by ensuring a democratic political presence is something politicians cannot ignore.

- Clearly formulate legal provisions which are derived from a well-structured political vision

The division of prerogatives should follow an effective distributive regime that explicitly establishes a general rule of competence in favor of communes to guarantee efficient local services, and protect them from interference from the state and other collectivities.<sup>39</sup> This division should also clarify the exclusive domains of intervention granted to local authorities. Furthermore, blocks of competence should be explicitly determined in areas concerning the shared and transferred prerogatives of local authorities to avoid conflicts of competence and the excessive use of litigation.

- Rethink the new architecture of territorial administration to answer social, economic, and political problems

This rethinking must result from a comprehensive and holistic understanding of current capacities and citizens' demands. A tailor-made process should

<sup>38</sup> See Law 56-619 of June 23, 1956 ("Loi Defferre") and Law 2004-809 of August 12, 2004 on local freedoms and responsibilities ("Loi Raffarin").

<sup>39</sup> Cyprien Avenel, "Enjeux et impact de la réforme territoriale sur la mise en œuvre des politiques sociales locales," Working Paper, Conseil national des politiques de lutte contre la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale (CNLE), 2015, p. 4 <[http://www.cnle.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/NOTRe\\_polsoc\\_loc\\_Avenel\\_170915-docx.pdf](http://www.cnle.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/NOTRe_polsoc_loc_Avenel_170915-docx.pdf)> (accessed August 6, 2017).

be initiated to address the specific problems of Tunisian collectivities by interacting with those primarily concerned, the citizens, instead of blindly and unilaterally applying theoretical principles of decentralization or comparative experiences without measuring their success. Rather than creating new hotbeds of political and social unrest by enacting ineffective laws, a participatory process of decentralization will help the state better communicate on the current challenges and engage citizens in a new dynamic that would strengthen decentralization and establish the basis for a bottom-top political configuration. Since 2011, Tunisia has held multiple national consultations on ways to develop several sectors. A similar initiative would be an important first step preparing the ground for participatory democracy mechanisms at the regional level, on condition that it produces concrete results with real added value.

*- Ensure a progressive and strategic implementation of decentralization mechanisms*

Decision-makers will have to think seriously about pressing issues and consider a roadmap for reform, while taking into consideration the state's financial, human, and material means. Such an operative method would provide the process with much-needed credibility and legitimacy. Moreover, strategic thinking on a progressive implementation timeline would provide an occasion to reflect upon key issues, such as local authorities' capacity constraints—mainly due to regional disparities— and concrete equalization measures.

The current combination of persisting social pressure and an inability to conceptualize immediate solutions could finally be addressed by a mid- to long-term strategy that incorporates concrete elements such as training civil servants and local representatives, and financial means. Beyond concretizing a much-needed transparent state communication, this would also allow the state to own the decentralization process and channel its impact for the creation of political alternatives to extinguish the history of regional and interior conflict between the center and “anti-state” narrative.<sup>40</sup> Combined with holding long-awaited municipal elections to offer the possibility of establishing legitimate and representative channels of communication, the initiation of a progressive and cooperative process of decentralization would not only help to reshape the image of the state, but would also benefit all parties by giving rise

to a trained and experienced political elite from the regions. If established, the open negotiation of powers and prerogatives during the long, complex, and progressive process of decentralization could also achieve regional political equality and representation as well as economic and social balance.

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40 David Featherstone, Anthony Ince, Danny Mackinnon, Kendra Strauss, and Andrew Cumbers, “Progressive Localism and the Construction of Political Alternatives,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 37 (April 2012), p. 177.

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# Chapter II: (De-) Radicalization

## CIVIL SOCIETY AND GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIP IN PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN TUNISIA

Sadem Jebali

*The Tunisian Government is undertaking efforts to counter the propaganda of extremist organizations through different activities, including the Alternative Narrative Platform (ANP). In order to increase its effectiveness, such a counter-narrative should be developed in partnership with civil society organizations, not only through social activities in areas where young people face a high risk of radicalization, but also through a focus on grassroots communication. In order to ensure that the ANP can function as a self-sufficient entity that can develop appropriate messaging hand in hand with civil society organizations, several steps should be taken. First, a political buy-in should be secured to include other governmental actors in the process, without encroaching on the turf of ANP staff. Second, a research and monitoring cell should be created within the platform. Third, a PR and communication cell should be created to start engaging with a wider audience of media actors. Fourth, a donors and civil society organizations coordination unit should be established, possibly in cooperation with some of the existing partners. Fifth, a local business development unit should be set up to leverage funding from Tunisian corporate actors for the different campaigns. Finally, the creation of these cells can be made at almost no cost, if dispatched throughout the ANP's different international NGO partners under ANP leadership.*

The immediate driver of instability in the Middle East and North Africa is the lack of trust between citizens and the state. This distrust has developed due to longstanding failed education systems, high youth unemployment rates, and poor and corrupt governance and security regimes that take a draconian approach to national security and ignore human security issues. State engagement – particularly in areas susceptible to violent extremism – is therefore perceived as hostile and unhelpful. This distrust provides fertile soil for narratives which argue that violence in the form of popular revolt, conflict, or violent extremism, is the only route to change.<sup>1</sup>

The impacts of globalization (particularly in excluded areas), a command and control approach to the economy with the accompanying government corruption and over-regulation, and an education system that fails to equip young people with the necessary skills or resilience to manage these pressures, have combined to create the perfect storm.

Tunisia is one of the countries most affected in the region by the jihadi threat from within the country as well as from Libya.<sup>2</sup> Following the attack by the radical Islamist group Ansar al-Chariaa on US government facilities in Benghazi in 2012, and the group's classification as a terrorist organization in 2013, Ansar al-Chariaa shifted its strategy from *daoua* (proselytizing) to jihad against the state. The assassination of two political leaders in 2013, and the attacks on the Bardo Museum in Tunis and in the coastal resort of Sousse in 2015 represented an escalation by Islamic State-affiliated groups, such as the Oqba Ibn Nafaa Brigade.

Faced with such escalation, two national strategies were drafted between 2014 and 2016, the key elements of which can be summarized as follows:

- prevention through working on the push-and-pull factors of youth radicalization, with a particular focus on counter-narrative efforts;
- protection and reduction of citizens' vulnerability through a coherent plan based on integrated communication mechanisms;
- pursuit and tracking of the terrorist groups' resources; and
- response and crisis management through mechanisms and legislation adequate to enhance the efficiency of the intervention.

By the end of 2016, the national strategy was publicly announced, and a decree was adopted by parliament for the creation of a counter-narrative platform,<sup>3</sup> as the government has become more aware of the importance of strategic communication as a tool to counter violent extremism. A shift in the mindset of high security officials has also taken place, follow-

1 Michelle Dunne, "Is Unemployment to Blame for Radicalization?" Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (op-ed), May 22, 2015 <<http://carnegieendowment.org/2015/05/22/is-unemployment-to-blame-for-radicalization-pub-60179>> (accessed October 21, 2017).

2 The Soufan Group, Foreign Fighters: An Updated Assessment of the Flow of Foreign Fighters into Syria and Iraq, December 2015 <[http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/TSG\\_ForeignFightersUpdate\\_FINAL3.pdf](http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/TSG_ForeignFightersUpdate_FINAL3.pdf)> (accessed October 21, 2017).

3 "Exclusif – Kamel Akrouf révèle la Stratégie nationale de lutte contre l'extrémisme et le terrorisme en Tunisie," December 11, 2016 <<http://www.leaders.com.tn/article/21179-tout-sur-la-strategie-nationale-de-lutte-contre-l-extremisme-et-le-terrorisme>> (accessed October 21, 2017).



ing the realization that collaboration is essential to develop communication campaigns that no longer focus on the government, but rather on the citizens.

### The Launch of the Alternative Narrative Platform

Identified as a key threat to national security by the Government of Tunisia (GoT) in its draft national counter-terrorism strategy, online extremist messaging and recruitment is also at the core of the GoT's latest flagship initiative: the launch of the Alternative Narrative Platform (ANP) which has received support from the British government through the British Embassy, the British Council, and the Research Information and Communications Unit. Led by the former Minister for Human Rights and Relations with Constitutional Bodies and Civil Society, Kamel Jendoubi, and his successor Mehdi Ben Gharbia, the ANP has resulted in the creation of a government body responsible for coordinating the design, production, and dissemination of an alternative narrative targeted at segments of the population that are vulnerable to violent extremist messaging, especially youth.

## The government lacks skills and a vision for a counter messaging unit

While the GoT's interest for building strong mechanisms of counter messaging is still high, the concretization is still far away from being reached due to the lack of skills and strategic vision for such a unit. Moreover, feedback collected during conversations with the stakeholders involved in the set-up of the ANP clearly underline the fact that there is a need for a continuous collaboration with other international actors working on the follow-up of jihadi messaging.

### Current Short-Comings

Initiatives such as Ala Khatek Tounsi were launched during Ramadan in 2016, marking the first governmental strategic communication output, and were followed by other initiatives, such as Houmet Al Ayla, which targeted returnees. The various campaigns have conveyed a completely independent message,

seeking to create an alternative narrative that appeals to a wider group of Tunisians through a focus on the positive attributes of young Tunisian resilience.

Mediated by international donors, civil society organizations (CSOs) endorsed the campaigns and took part in the offline activities of the Ala Khatek Tounsi campaign, especially in radicalization hotspots such as Douar Hicher and Kabaria. Based on an assessment of the actual capacities and the overall activities developed by the platform, specific challenges were identified and can be clustered within two main groups: organizational and resources challenges. These include:

- the absence of donor coordination and a management mechanism;
- the absence of a strategy for cooperation with CSOs;
- administrative tensions between representatives of the various ministries at the counter-narrative commission;
- limited human resources (the platform employs six permanent public servants in addition to the director);
- limited expertise and skills within the platforms which recruit from among ministries;
- limited financial capacities and budgets due to the platform's affiliation to the Ministry of Human Rights, which has the lowest ministerial budget;
- dependence on the UK as the major donor and actor; and
- the absence of direct communication channels between civil society actors and private sector communications agencies.

### Recommendations

The GoT and relevant stakeholders should adopt an action plan containing several implementation steps to address the current short-comings (defined chronologically):

- Assess leverage

At this stage, the most important step is to secure the approval and readiness of the leading actor(s)

who will be proposing and endorsing the policy from within. The most suitable actors will be the deputy prime minister and the director of the platform. Finding the right narrative for both will be crucial for policy implementation success. The support of an organization – whether the British Council or the DGAP – to co-opt the policy brief will also be crucial, in terms of renown and institutional backup.

*- Define the CSO-government partnership framework*

To tackle the issues analyzed above, the ANP will need to undertake a strategic planning exercise with several civil society actors as potential partners for the platform. A structured partnership will be crucial in defining roles and responsibilities, especially in the light of the lack of trust between members of the commission and wider CSOs.

*- Establish strategic units in order to ensure that the ANP can function as a self-sufficient entity that can develop appropriate messaging hand in hand with CSOs*

Four different cells should be established to increase the effectiveness of the ANP, namely a research and strategic monitoring cell, a public relations and communication cell, a donors and CSO coordination cell, and a local business development cell.

The research and strategic monitoring cell would provide information and guidance for all communication campaigns, and play a backstopping role in the dissemination of information and knowledge. Its activities could also include connecting with national researchers and organizing regular, thematic in-house sessions. CSOs should play a major role in this cell through the development of action research and providing platforms with access to vulnerable youth in radicalization hotspots.

The public relations and communication cell would take the lead on account management and collaboration with media partners, communications agencies, and production agencies. It would identify prospective new partners and organize press conferences around campaign launches. Civil society should be at the forefront of this work, while the government's role would be to support NGO partners gain access to national public media.

The donors and CSO coordination cell would serve to identify potential donors for the platform's activi-

ties, and define a selection process for partner NGOs to implement activities on behalf of the platform via international funding. Cyclical consultation with all commission members and bi-annual evaluation systems should be in place to assess the NGOs' implementation progress. The evaluation commission would have several independent members to manage any potential tensions that might rise between the governmental commission and civil society actors.

The local business development cell should explore possible ways to diversify the funding structure, and to introduce private sector contributions to campaign development through co-opting mechanisms and commercial actions.

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## DERADICALIZATION AND THE PREVENTION OF RADICALIZATION OF TUNISIAN YOUTH THROUGH PEER PRESSURE, FAMILY, AND TRIBAL BONDS

Samah Krichah

*Since 2012, Tunisia has seen an unprecedented rise in the number of radicalized young people. Over the last few years, the country witnessed several deadly terrorist attacks. The jihadi organization Oqba Ibn Nafaa Brigade is affiliated to Al Qaida and has used Jebel Chaambi, a mountain peak in western-central Tunisia, as a rear base to conduct guerilla warfare operations in the region. However, over the last few years, jihadists have also targeted popular tourist spots such as Sousse and the Bardo Museum in Tunis. These attacks have killed many tourists, cut visitors numbers to the country, and left Tunisia's reputation as a prominent holiday destination in tatters. Mobilizing social ties could contribute to countering jihadi radicalization in Tunisia. This should include raising awareness and engaging families in the development of a strategic plan to prevent violent extremism, trust-building measures between families and security forces to enhance information sharing and the engagement of families and peers in deradicalization and reintegration processes of former extremists.*

Tunisia's deradicalization and anti-terrorist strategies are designed around a security-based approach or focus on socio-economic factors. The new national anti-terrorism strategy, centered around the newly created Centre National du Renseignement – whose mission is to elaborate punctual and periodic analysis, assess dangers and threats, make strategic choices in terms of intelligence, and elaborate the national intelligence plan – has recently been implemented, and it will be some time before the success of the new approach can be assessed.

The roots of violent extremism in Tunisia and North Africa are diverse. However, as mentioned in the report “Engaging Families to Counter Violent

Extremism in North Africa: Opportunities and Challenges,”<sup>4</sup> peer pressure and family, tribal, and social bonds can help explain why many young people join radical organizations.<sup>5</sup> While this set of pull factors has been extensively examined in Libya, Iraq, Mali, and other countries, it has been critically overlooked in studies on jihadi radicalization and terrorism in Tunisia.

### Kinship

Shortly after its establishment, the French protectorate sought to settle the nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes of the south and reach out to the settled tribes in the rest of the country to establish grass-roots-level control.<sup>6</sup> At the start of independence, President Bourguiba described Tunisia as a homogenous country, where 98 percent of the population were Arab Sunni Muslims, and where there were no significant regional differences in culture, ways of life, or worldviews.<sup>7</sup> This vision of a homogenous and unified Tunisia remained the dominant narrative under Ben Ali's rule. Following Bourguiba, Ben Ali promoted the concept of the “hegemony of the state” over differences in culture, social dynamics and contexts in an attempt to control the power of social ties. After the revolution, Tunisia witnessed several incidents, including sporadic tribal clashes in the Gasfa region over positions in the local phosphate company.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, tensions occurred between tribes over the issue of arable land in the Douz region. As a result, several members of the fighting tribes were wounded or killed.

As stated in an International Alert report highlighting the importance of tribal bonds in sustaining cross-border trade and humanitarian aid with Libya after 2011, kinship is key to preserving social peace in many regions in Tunisia.<sup>9</sup> Tribal ties act as an informal social safety net in marginalized regions where the state has failed to address the grievances of the local population.

4 Yassine Souidi, Julia Ebner and Saeida Rouass, “Engaging Families to Counter Violent Extremism in North Africa: Opportunities and Challenges,” Quilliam Foundation E-publications, 2016.

5 Ibid.

6 Olfa Lamoum, “Marginalisation, Insecurity, and Uncertainty on the Tunisian-Libyan Border: Ben Guerdane and Dhehiba From the Perspective of Their Inhabitants,” International Alert, December 2016 <[http://www.international-alert.org/sites/default/files/TunisiaLibya\\_MarginalisationInsecurityUncertaintyBorder\\_EN\\_2016.pdf](http://www.international-alert.org/sites/default/files/TunisiaLibya_MarginalisationInsecurityUncertaintyBorder_EN_2016.pdf)> (accessed October 21, 2017).

7 Rikke Hostrup Haugbølle, “Together for Tunisia: Tribal Structures and Social and Political Mobilization,” Middle East Institute, October 19, 2016 <<http://www.mei.edu/content/map/together-tunisia-tribal-structures-and-social-and-political-mobilization>> (accessed October 21, 2017).

8 Rida Kefi, “Assiste-t-on à la résurgence du clanisme et du tribalisme en Tunisie,” Kapitalis, April 26, 2011 <<http://www.kapitalis.com/politique/3678-assiste-t-on-a-la-resurgence-du-clanisme-et-du-tribalisme-en-tunisie.html>> (accessed October 21, 2017).

9 Lamoum, “Marginalisation, Insecurity, and Uncertainty on the Tunisian-Libyan Border” (see note 6).

## Peer Pressure

Examining rap songs by singers from popular neighborhoods in major urban centers, one of the most recurrent topics – alongside hatred of the state and security services – is the territorial inscription of identity carried by peer groups composed of friends from the same district or neighborhood. For instance, the rapper A.L.A from Zahrouni, a popular neighborhood of western Tunis, repeats in his song “Identity”: “Where I come from, my *Touma* [neighborhood] is my safe home.”<sup>10</sup> Like kinship, friends and neighbors represent a trusted support system for young people and constitute a source of information, material support, and a group with which to identify. Along similar lines, Emino, a Tunisian rapper who joined the so-called Islamic State (IS), was considered a role model by many of his peers in popular neighborhoods, whether for his music or his commitment to Jihadism. IS used popular figures such as Emino to attract young people in Tunisia and the Greater Maghreb region. Peer groups also represent a refuge and a support system for young people facing problems and tension within their families. Thus, many young Tunisians who joined IS confessed their intention to engage in jihad to their friends and/or loved ones. In a study carried out by the Tunisian Center for Research and Studies on Terrorism, many young people imprisoned on terrorist charges admitted they were regularly in touch with peers, especially on social media.<sup>11</sup>

## Blind spots of Tunisia’s Counter-Terrorism Strategy

In 2016, the Tunisian government enacted its national counter-terrorism strategy. To this day, no official documentation has been published. Few attention has been paid to how jihadist groups have used local networks, kinship, and peers, or how these ties could help prevent and counter radicalization. Rather, the government has focused on building counter-narratives, enacting new security measures, and fighting corruption related to terrorism. However, as McCauley and Moskalenko have demonstrated, twelve pathways to radicalization may be identified, which operate at three different levels: individual,

group, and the mass public. Jihadi groups use many channels to recruit young people. The authors argue that young people usually join radical groups through “personal connections.” In other words, young people tend to radicalize through “a network of friends, lovers, and family.”<sup>12</sup> Along those lines, a study conducted by the Tunisian Center for Research and Studies on Terrorism demonstrated how personal connections matter in the radicalization process. Analyzing a sample of more than 1,000 convicts held on terrorism charges, the study concluded that the influence of relatives and friends was the second most-cited reason why young people decided to join radical groups.

## Personal ties play a key role in the recruitment and post-recruitment processes

These case studies highlight the importance of peer pressure and family networks in spreading ideas, enhancing identification processes, and strengthening the sense of belonging to a community which, in turn, are also some of the most powerful recruitment tools. This confirms Marc Sageman’s “bunch of guys” theory, which states that group pressure “crushes doubts and prevents people from turning away,” and that this pressure was and still is powerful in turning young Muslims into jihadists.<sup>13</sup> According to Joel Busher,<sup>14</sup> personal ties play a key role in the recruitment and post-recruitment processes. In terms of the former, personal networks facilitate adherence to radical ideologies through several mechanisms. Personal connections serve as information channels and facilitate the first contact with radical groups. The recruiters’ mission is eased by the fact that they already know their potential recruits. The initial fear of joining a radical group is alleviated if recruits feel that their close environment will support their decision. In terms of the latter process of post-recruit-

10 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T7yuNO8f5Qc>> (accessed October 25, 2017).

11 Kamilia Ben Ayed, Mouldi Guissoumi, Riadh Ben Hamida, Imen Kochbati, Mariem Ozaza, Ahmed Mchaouech, Souheil Mdimegh, Najet Yaakoubi, Imen Ozaza, Heythem Zeibi, Ridha Raddaoui, Ameni Mekki, Raoudha Aouni, and Hatem Achech, *Le Terrorisme en Tunisie à travers les dossiers judiciaires*, Tunisian Center for Research and Studies on Terrorism, Tunisian Forum of Social and Economic Rights, 2016.

12 Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, “Mechanisms of Political Radicalization: Pathways toward Terrorism,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 20 (July 2008), pp. 415–33.

13 Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century* (Philadelphia, 2008).

14 Joel Busher, *The Making of Anti-Muslim Protest: Grassroots Activism in the English Defence League* (London, 2015).

ment, social networks facilitate tactical learning and shape the conceptions of legitimate actions.

collapse as groups are consumed by bitter squabbles and infighting.<sup>16</sup>

**Social and Tribal Ties Could Prevent Radicalization**

**Recommendations**

Presumably, the mechanism also works in reverse: positive peer pressure could prevent young people from adopting radical ideas and thus joining violent extremist groups. In Tunisia, the areas of Tozeur and Siliana can serve as interesting case studies. Indeed, although isolated and religiously conservative, these two governorates are among the least affected by violent extremism. Tozeur and Siliana are characterized by the prevalence of strong tribal ties which can work as a social safety network to counter radicalization. Similarly, the inhabitants of Ben Guerdane, a tribal community, stood by and even protected the security forces during the terrorist attack of March 2016. Even though the informal nature of personal ties makes it difficult to establish a clear link between personal connections and radicalization, it can be maintained that personal ties play a significant role when it comes to individuals' decisions to embrace radical ideologies.

Taking into account the aforementioned elements, the government and civil society should acquire a better understanding of the immediate environment in which vulnerable youth, ex-extremists, and returnees evolve, and consider it an opportunity for prevention and deradicalization. This implies working together with their environment by recruiting sociologists, anthropologists, and psychologists. Trained social scientists are better suited to study social environments. Alongside social training to tackle the issue, friends and family should be convinced to support the process, and an iterative approach should be adopted, where mistakes and successes are taken into consideration to optimize the results. Thus the outcomes may be more sustainable and effective in the long term.

*- Strengthen family networks and parent-child relationships*

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## Positive peer pressure could prevent radicalization

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A positive relationship between parents and children is key in developing non-violent behaviors. The family support system prevents youth from looking for support beyond the family-based network. Mothers can be prevention actors. They are usually the best-placed persons within the family to identify changes in behavior, vulnerabilities to violent extremism, or other harming behaviors. They can provide efficient counter-narratives to jihadist ideology, humanizing the impact of terrorism on the individual, the family, and the community.

*- Foster a positive relationship between elder male figures and young teenagers and men*

In that vein, and on the issue of radicalism in Indonesia, Susan Sim and Noor Huda Ismail have analyzed how individuals convicted on terrorism charges found that by returning to the same connections in prison, they eventually repeated the trajectory that originally brought them into extremist violence.<sup>15</sup> They were pulled back in by one of four drivers: friendship, discipleship, group pressure, or economic pressure. Loyalty to friends and the group may perhaps be the single most important factor in predicting recidivism. Personal ties also contribute to the process of deradicalization or disengagement. Those same personal ties that characterize and hold radical political groups together can also precipitate their

In a patriarchal society like Tunisia, fostering a positive relationship between elder male figures and young teenagers and men can help spread cultural values opposed to the use of violence and compete with the image of distorted masculinity diffused by extremist recruiters within young audiences.

15 Noor Huda Ismail and Susan Sim, "Predicting Terrorist Recidivism in Indonesia's Prisons," The Brookings Institution (op-ed), January 28, 2016 <<https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/predicting-terrorist-recidivism-in-indonesias-prisons/>> (accessed October 21, 2017).

16 Busher, The Making of Anti-Muslim Protest (see note 13).

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*- Raise awareness and engage families in the development of a strategic plan to prevent violent extremism*

Awareness-raising can be led through different channels. First, youth-led media programs targeting youth and tackling their problems, or educational programs training families to deal with changes in behavior, or how to integrate can be very effective. The media can also be used to broadcast the testimonies of reluctant or disengaged extremists to a large audience. Second, religious courses and counseling tailored to deal with the existential questions troubling young people nowadays in a non-rigid way can be of great impact. Indeed, the Tunisian Ministry of Religious Affairs has empowered young religious counselors to reach out to young people. However, this initiative lacked both financial and logistical means. These activities would pave the way for more positive and non-violent prevention counter-narratives within families and the surroundings of at-risk persons.

*- Create trust between family members and the security forces to enhance cooperation and engage families in the deradicalization and reintegration processes of former extremists*

This can only be done when all family members, including women and children, are actively and equally engaged in the social and public life of the community. On the one hand, families are a key factor in the reintegration of former violent extremists. For instance, deradicalization programs in Saudi Arabia have capitalized on the role of commitment to the family, or the desire to start a family, as a pull factor to encourage former violent extremists to renounce violence.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, constant emotional and financial support from family members, and assurances that one of their members will not be rejected (disengaged jihadi), can compete with the sense of belonging that violent extremist groups offer to their adherents.

*- Engage peers in the creation of a new friendly environment for at-risk youth and former extremists*

Peers as friends, colleagues, or trained young people can be a watchdog for changes in behavior and report to family members or specialists. Many civil society experiences can serve as examples, including peer education about taboo subjects such as

addiction and sexually transmitted diseases. This peer education could be carried out using creative and more youth-friendly means such as rap music, sport activities, and debates. In addition, old friends of extremists can act as a support system and provide guidance, reminding them of their old values, providing a spiritual and emotional home, and reintegrating them into daily life.

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17 Amanda K. Johnston, "Assessing the Effectiveness of Deradicalization Programs on Islamist Extremists," (Master's Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2009) <<http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a514433.pdf>> (accessed October 21, 2017).

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## ENNAHDA AND HIZB UT-TAHRIR – COOPERATIVE RIVALS OR BROTHERS-IN-ARMS?

Inna Rudolf

*Against the backdrop of rising violent religious extremism among Tunisia's most vulnerable youth, Ennahda's unique selling point as the champion of the post-revolutionary Islamist project appears seriously undermined. Playing the "Muslim democrats" card has affected the party's credibility among its more conservative grassroots who demand stronger commitment to the foundations of Islamic government. An important question is how the party's ambivalent relation with the elitist Hizb ut-Tahrir plays into the leadership's efforts to strike a healthy balance between moderation, pragmatism, and ideological integrity. What appears at first glance to be a contestation for the hearts of periphery might also be a fragile divide and rule the arrangement between two brothers – if not in arms – then at least in approaches towards a shared vision.*

With some 7,000 Tunisians having left Tunisia for the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the question remains how the country, with its secular predisposition, has become a jihadist breeding ground. Disbelief in the political process has provided a fertile ground for radical Islamist organizations to exploit millennials' loss of identity. Among disillusioned conservative grassroots activists in particular, the power maximizing behavior of Tunisia's moderate Islamist party Ennahda has created a momentum for political and ideological contestation.

Extremist non-state actors have not shied away from capitalizing on the economic and ideological vulnerability of the country's spatially, socially, and culturally marginalized. Their efforts to frame Ennahda as "salon Islamists" insufficiently committed to push for an ethical framework based on Sharia (Islamic law) have damaged the movement's trustworthiness as champion of the post-revolutionary Islamic project. By rejecting its affiliation to "political Islam" at its May 2016 party congress, Ennahda has also freed the stage for more radical non-state actors to claim an alleged moral high ground.

### The Evolution of Ennahda towards Party Politics

Questioning the legitimacy of the concept of nation-building and the imperative of top-down secularization, young laymen sheikhs around Rachid Ghannouchi initiated the Islamic review *al-Maarifa* (The Consciousness) in 1970.<sup>18</sup> Voicing commitment to the preservation of Islam which they framed as bottled-up in the light of leftist-dominated intellectual debates, Ghannouchi and his followers founded the clandestine organization *Jamaa al Islamiyya* (Islamic Group) in 1972, which appealed strongly to students from across Tunisia's marginalized hinterland. Encouraged by the engagement of Islamist activists, Jamaa members around Ghannouchi opted for consolidation and established the *Mouvement de la Tendence Islamique* (MTI) in 1981, from which the Ennahda party later evolved in 1989.<sup>19</sup>

In "Moderation through Exclusion? The Journey of the Tunisian Ennahda from Fundamentalist to Conservative Party," Cavatorta and Merone analyze the Islamist party's adaptation to mainstream democratic discourse through the prism of systemic repression and societal rejection. The authors emphasize that the experiences of imprisonment, exile and, last but not least, Tunisian society's opposition to the movement's initial fundamentalist vision of Islam have urged Ennahda to adopt a more progressive stance on religious reformism.<sup>20</sup>

Having evolved into the best-organized opposition movement, Ennahda succeeded in capitalizing on the collapse of Ben Ali's regime, obtaining 89 seats in the elections to the Constituent Assembly on October 23, 2011. The readiness to join forces with secular and leftist parties not only illustrated the movement's strategic pragmatism during times of high political volatility. Even after losing the 2014 parliamentary elections due to socio-economic grievances, a similar power-sharing pattern prevailed, resulting in the "bargained competition" and reconciliation between Ennahda and the old techno-bureaucratic elites represented by Nidaa Tounes.<sup>21</sup>

While Ennahda's leadership has been eager to give an impression of a consensus-oriented conservative democratic actor, radical ideologists within the party

18 Sherin Gharib and Cengiz Günay, "From Persecution to Government – Ennahda's Claim to Power," in *Transformation in Tunisia: The First Five Years*, ed. Wolfgang Mühlberger, European Institute of the Mediterranean, January 2017, pp. 77–106 <[http://www.euromesco.net/images/joint\\_policy\\_studies/euromesco%20joint%20policy%20study%205.pdf](http://www.euromesco.net/images/joint_policy_studies/euromesco%20joint%20policy%20study%205.pdf)> (accessed October 21, 2017).

19 Francesco Cavatorta and Fabio Merone, "Moderation through Exclusion? The Journey of the Tunisian Ennahda from Fundamentalist to Conservative Party," *Democratization* 20, no. 5 (2013), pp. 857–75.

20 Ibid., p. 871.

21 Amel Boubekeur, "Islamists, Secularists and Old Regime Elites in Tunisia: Bargained Competition," *Mediterranean Politics* 21, no. 1 (2016), pp. 107–27.

had voiced disapproval of the movement's willingness to compromise on the inclusion of Sharia into the constitution as the "source among sources."<sup>22</sup> Another source of internal contradictions was the movement's tainted relationship with the Salafist scene. Having acknowledged its failure to accommodate the polarized Salafist milieu as a complementary grassroots movement following the assault on the American Embassy in Tunis in September 2012, Ennahda experienced another turning point in its development. Under increasing pressure to forge an alliance with the country's Salafist spectrum, Ennahda chose to reiterate its commitment to the liberal democratic system by harshly condemning the attacks and banning Ansar al-Sharia, the group responsible.

In a revolutionary attempt to distance itself categorically from radical extremism, the movement officially renounced the label "Islamism" during its 10th party congress held in May 2016. In his statement to *Foreign Affairs*, Rachid Ghannouchi defended the decision by saying that "the state no longer imposes secularism through repression, so there is no longer a need for Ennahda or any other actor to defend or protect religion as a core part of its political activity."<sup>23</sup>

Conceived as an act of pragmatism, this decision soon earned the party criticism for allegedly abandoning its core perception of "Islam and politics as belonging to an organic sphere," as Larbi Sadiki commented to Al Jazeera shortly after the party congress.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, in "The Future of Political Salafism in Egypt and Tunisia," George Fahmi emphasizes that Ennahda's conciliatory gestures have undermined its credibility in the eyes of its former ultra-conservative supporters: "Some Salafist-Jihadist voices explicitly accused the Ennahda movement of being a US satellite, deviating from the path of the Islamic project, and attempting to please Western countries, even at the expense of Islam and its provisions."<sup>25</sup>

### Between Co-optation and Contestation: Ennahda's Relations with Hizb ut-Tahrir

The Tunisian branch of the international pan-Islamist Hizb ut-Tahrir party (The Liberation Party) was established in 1977 under the leadership of Shaykh 'Abd al-Qadim. In an uncompromising tract from March 8, 1985, the Tunisian arm called "on the sons of the grand Islamic umma to rise with [it] and to work to establish the Caliphate which the impious colonizers have suppressed and to re-establish Islam in the Islamic territories."<sup>26</sup> Even though the imperative of reviving Islamic values may at first glance echo the above-mentioned slogans of Ennahda and its ideological predecessors from the 1980s and 1990s, the explicit incitement to aspire to a Caliphate state certainly differs from the contemporary narrative by Ennahda representatives seeking international endorsement as Tunisia's "Muslim democrats." Nevertheless, Hizb ut-Tahrir members still refer off the record to Ennahda as "brothers in methods" (*ikhwān al-manahij*), even if officially they criticize Ennahda's path towards secularization.<sup>27</sup> The question remains what accounts for these ambivalent dynamics of loyalty and disavowal on behalf of Ennahda's puritan counterpart.

## Hizb ut-Tahrir call Ennahda off the record "brothers in methods"

Like Ennahda, Hizb ut-Tahrir activists were forced to operate clandestinely under the repressive measures adopted by Bourguiba and later Ben Ali. It was not until Ennahda had assumed leadership of the Troika government that Hizb ut-Tahrir was officially legalized in July 2012.<sup>28</sup> Although Hizb ut-Tahrir has deliberately distanced itself from Salafi currents, Ennahda's strategy towards the Liberation Party strongly resem-

22 Gharib and Günay, "From Persecution to Government" (see note 18), p. 91.

23 Rachid Ghannouchi, "From Political Islam to Muslim Democracy: The Ennahda Party and the Future of Tunisia," *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2016 <<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/tunisia/political-islam-muslim-democracy>> (accessed October 21, 2017).

24 Larbi Sadiki, "Why is Tunisia's Elite Ditching Political Islam?" Al Jazeera, May 24, 2016 <<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/05/tunisia-ennahda-ditching-political-islam-160524094550153.html>> (accessed October 21, 2017).

25 Georges Fahmi, "The Future of Political Salafism in Egypt and Tunisia," Carnegie Middle East Center, November 16, 2015 <<http://carnegie-mec.org/2015/11/16/future-of-political-salafism-in-egypt-and-tunisia-pub-61871>> (accessed October 21, 2017).

26 Anne Wolf, *Political Islam in Tunisia: The History of Ennahda* (London, 2017).

27 Author's interview with Hizb ut-Tahrir officials conducted in July in Tunis.

28 Wolf, *Political Islam in Tunisia* (see note 26), p. 146.



bles the attempted persuasion strategy vis-à-vis the Salafi movement to co-opt and eventually moderate preachers who had not yet engaged actively in armed activities.

## *As opposed to Ennahda, Hizb ut-Tahrir has remained a distinctly elitist organization*

This hope of reversing Islamist radicalism is clearly demonstrated in the statement of a Nahdawi official recorded during a Crisis Group interview in Tunis in September 2012: “We have encouraged them to request legalization. The simple fact that they request authorization from the prime minister implies that they see the law as a positive thing. They will eventually accept the rules of the game. Their radical projects will be thwarted. They put forward political programs that are contrary to the reality of Tunisians today. Political integration will dilute their radical discourse.”<sup>29</sup> What becomes apparent in this testimonial is Ennahda’s political gambit to tame hardliners by “letting off steam” and betting on the familiar “inclusion-moderation hypothesis.”

Acknowledging the problematic conceptualizations within the predominantly normative interpretation of the inclusion-moderation paradigm as raised by Kasper Ly Netterstrøm in his article on “The Islamists’ Compromise in Tunisia,”<sup>30</sup> Hizb ut-Tahrir’s perception of Ennahda’s own moderation course and its implications for the Liberation Party’s flexibility towards political activism should be emphasized. Author interviews with supporters and representatives of Hizb ut-Tahrir in Tunis only underline the party’s willingness to undertake tactical concessions in the face of political opportunities without necessarily relativizing the omnipresence of its ideological framework.

To comprehend the underlying dynamics, it is important to underline that while Ennahda is characterized by a broad and diverse support base and political mobilization capacity, Hizb ut-Tahrir has remained a distinctly elitist organization maintaining exclusive membership criteria such as the qualifying examination described by members. In this respect, the political ambitions of Hizb ut-Tahrir remain confined to raising awareness about their ideological vision and serving as a moral compass to ruling elites. To be able to pursue these normatively framed functions, Hizb ut-Tahrir have actively sought formal registration as a political party even though they reject a secular democratic system as a corrupt and unsustainable form of governance.

When asked to comment on Ennahda’s contemporary narrative and policy work, a representative of Hizb ut-Tahrir’s administrative commission reiterated that such compromising gestures apparently reveal Ennahda’s one true face of a secular movement, one that is no longer Islamist in any sense. The main criticism referred to the fact that Ennahda’s leadership – explicitly excluding the figures of Sadek Chourou and Habib Ellouze from this generalization, who are broadly regarded as representatives of the party’s hardliner wing – merely perceives of Islam as a moral reference, while Hizb ut-Tahrir understands Islam as the sole guiding principle meant to rule over the life of the individual. Phrased in that manner, one cannot help but acknowledge that this implied difference between Ennahda’s and Hizb ut-Tahrir’s stance on the issue of secularism and the place of religion in politics and society feeds excellently into Ennahda’s self-portrayal as “Muslim democrats.”<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, and in the light of the fact that other interviewed Hizb ut-Tahrir members do not shy away from highlighting Ennahda’s uncanny pragmatism, the question emerges whether the alleged clash of convictions is indeed a real clash at all. One should not exclude the scenario in which Ennahda consciously profits from allowing an ideological hardliner to defend politically inconvenient positions such as the institution of a Sharia law system. This would provide Ennahda with the opportunity to claim credit among its more conservative grassroots for granting Hizb ut-Tahrir a green light to operate officially under the legal umbrella of the constitution without necessarily incriminating itself for question-

29 International Crisis Group, “Tunisia: Violence and the Salafi Challenge,” Middle East/North Africa Report no. 137, 2017 <<https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/tunisia-violence-and-the-salafi-challenge.pdf>> (accessed October 21, 2017).

30 Kasper Ly Netterstrøm, “After the Arab Spring: The Islamists’ Compromise in Tunisia,” *Journal of Democracy* 26, no. 4 (October 2015), pp. 110–24.

31 Ghannouchi, “From Political Islam to Muslim Democracy” (see note 23).

ing the constitutional “freedom of conscience and belief” (*hurriet al-damir*).

### Ennahda’s Pragmatism: Gains and Losses

A carefully negotiated burden and risk-sharing agreement between what may seem at first glance to be non-competitors, such as Ennahda and Hizb ut-Tahrir, may prove beneficial by further untying Ennahda’s hands to construct its image as a party whose “values are already aligned with democratic values.”<sup>32</sup> Ennahda’s efforts on this path are exemplified by the party’s unconventional positions on the abolition of harsh sentences for the consumption of soft substances such as hashish,<sup>33</sup> the individual right not to fast during the holy month of Ramadan,<sup>34</sup> and, last but not least, Ali Layaaradh’s recent support for gender equality regarding Tunisia’s inheritance law.<sup>35</sup>

Nevertheless, this window of opportunity to play the liberal card while still scoring among the conservative base for projecting a benevolent stance vis-à-vis selected actors from within the Islamist wing does not come without a price. The efforts of radical and anti-system extremists to frame Ennahda as “salon Islamists” unable and insufficiently committed to push for the implementation of Sharia law as an ideal ethical framework continue to damage the movement’s trustworthiness as the champion of the post-revolutionary Islamic project. Furthermore, by publicly rejecting its affiliation to “political Islam” at its May 2016 party congress, Ennahda has also freed the stage for more radical and uncompromising actors to capitalize on the party’s moderation course claiming an alleged “moral high ground.”

In this context, both national and international stakeholders need to start questioning the presupposed benefits of a top-down imposed *laïcité* (secularity), and even encourage moderate Islamist parties to appeal more strongly to locally rooted belief systems and cultural understandings. Linking universal values such as tolerance, respect, and solidarity with the concept of “*la tunisianité*” largely associated with the bourgeoisie, can prove counter-productive among socially and culturally disenfranchised youth and can deepen and even trigger toxic social divisions.

According to this logic, the process of Ennahda’s stylization as a member of the elitist milieu might become a decisive factor in utterly alienating the young disenfranchised periphery from institutional politics or losing them to much more radical movements than the currently non-violent Hizb ut-Tahrir which, for now, still rejects the possibility of contesting Ennahda’s position by participating in parliamentary elections.

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32 Ibid.

33 Sarah Souli, “Will Tunisia Finally Amend Harsh Cannabis Law?” Al-Monitor, February 2017 <<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/ar/contents/articles/originals/2017/02/tunisia-arrests-cannabis-weed-marijuana-change-law.html>> (accessed October 21, 2017).

34 Hamadi Jebali, “The face of moderate Islamism in Tunisia,” National Post, October 2011 <<http://nationalpost.com/news/hamadi-jebali-the-face-of-moderate-islamism-in-tunisia>> (accessed October 21, 2017), and Lotfi Zitoun, “Le jeûne du Ramadan, entre religieux et politique,” Leaders, June 2017 <<http://www.leaders.com.tn/article/22576-lotfi-zitoun-le-jeune-du-ramadan-entre-religieux-et-politique>> (accessed October 21, 2017).

35 “Àpre débat autour de l’égalité dans l’héritage en Tunisie,” Telquel.ma, August 2017 <[http://telquel.ma/2017/08/18/apre-debat-autour-legalite-heritage-en-tunisie\\_1557957](http://telquel.ma/2017/08/18/apre-debat-autour-legalite-heritage-en-tunisie_1557957)> (accessed October 21, 2017).

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# **Chapter III: Socio- Economic Challenges in Tunisia**

## TUNISIAN FEMALE CROSS-BORDER TRADERS IN ALGERIA – ON GENDER TRANSGRESSION AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC MARGINALIZATION

Houda Mzioudet

*Tunisian female cross-border traders in Algeria negotiate their gendered role in a male-dominated economic sector as well as their social and economic marginalization as heads of their households and/or the sole breadwinners. They enter into direct competition with Tunisian men in a challenging economic sector: informal trade. Female cross-border traders in Tunisia come from socially and economically precarious backgrounds, and often have non-sustainable jobs, thus making them vulnerable to exploitation due to the dire economic situation in society at large. In the absence of sustainable government solutions to their marginalization, Tunisian policymakers and European stakeholders should provide more support for these women, devise strategies for alternative sources of income, activate free trade zones, and place female traders at the heart of the government's war against corruption.*

Over the past few years, many Tunisians started making occasional trips to Algeria as the new destination for cheap merchandise, to purchase goods to resell or for family use. The Tunisian Office for Tourism has reported that thousands of Tunisians traveled in early 2017 to Algeria for alleged tourism, mostly in Sétif, El Eulma, Jijel, Béjaïa, Tlemcen, and Oran. But it is rather “Shopping tourism” that is taking place and that is particularly popular in the cities that border Algeria and Tunisia.<sup>1</sup>

Many Tunisian women have been among this group and they entered Algeria to trade in the last few years. Most of these short trips pass through the four functional border crossings between Tunisia and Algeria.<sup>2</sup> These women are considered active participants in the economic activity of their households and neighborhoods, and are even trusted by their spouses when traveling alone.<sup>3</sup> Since the Tunisian revolution, the “feminization” of cross-border trade is proof of an

increasing gender transgression of traditional gender roles in the context of social and economic marginalization. Indeed, nowhere is feminization more visible in Tunisia's economic landscape than in the informal trade sector. The trend has started in the 1990s, mainly in Tunisian working-class areas, with Tunisian women traveling to countries such as Turkey and Morocco for trade. Like their middle- and upper-class female peers, these women feel empowered by braving the risks of traveling abroad alone. Their sense of empowerment, like that of women from more privileged backgrounds, stems from their economic independence, resisting patriarchy, and braving dangers. They are often overshadowed by their counterparts from more affluent backgrounds, and are rarely given credit due to their invisibility in the public sphere.

But this feminization of cross-border trade is symptomatic of an economic malaise in many precarious Tunisian households. The pauperization of the Tunisian working class and the shrinking of the middle class (from 80 percent before 2011 to 67 percent in 2015),<sup>4</sup> compounded by the economic crisis that mostly hit middle-class Tunisian households, have pushed many women from modest backgrounds to engage in what is generally perceived to be the riskier business venture of cross-border trade. Many women are struggling to make ends meet, either as housewives trying to help their spouses with household expenses, or as widows or divorcees, the sole breadwinners providing for their families. Some of these women cross the border to trade in Algeria against their will, usually out of economic necessity, and would happily exchange this job for something more economically sustainable. Increasing their hardship are tighter controls by authorities as a result of more smuggling activities.

### Female Cross-Border Traders between Smugglers and the Authorities

Fuel smuggling has become a challenge for Tunisian cross-border traders in the impoverished Tunisian towns of Le Kef and Kasserine. Regarded by Tunisian authorities as competition with domestic products, customs officials at the various border posts have

1 “Le Shopping des Tunisiens en Algérie”, L'Expression le Quotidien, April 2, 2017 <[http://www.lexpressiondz.com/autres/de\\_quoi\\_jme\\_mele/263742-le-shopping-des-tunisiens-en-algerie.html](http://www.lexpressiondz.com/autres/de_quoi_jme_mele/263742-le-shopping-des-tunisiens-en-algerie.html)> (accessed October 21, 2017).

2 The author's trip in May 2017 to Annaba (Algeria) with two female traders in a louage (shared rented vehicle) from downtown Tunis' main station. Annaba, Sétif and Oued Souf have replaced Tripoli and other Libyan border towns such as Zuwara, Zawiya, and Zolten as the new sites of cheap products subsidized by the Algerian state.

3 In Tunis' Bab Alioua bus station, a daily bus to Annaba leaves with many women on board traveling to Algeria for trade. Author's observation in May 2017.

4 “Economie: La classe moyenne tunisienne est passée de 80% à 67% en quelques années,” Webmanagercenter, December 24, 2015 <<http://www.webmanagercenter.com/2015/12/24/167652/economie-la-classe-moyenne-tunisienne-est-passee-de-80-a-67-en-quelques-annees/>> (accessed August 21, 2017).

been trying to impose restrictions and tighten control of imports from Algeria. Cross-border traders are caught in the vicious cycle of informal trade – which is tolerated by Tunisian authorities – and smuggling, which the authorities consider a threat to the Tunisian economy, as well as a conduit for mafia groups and terrorist activities.

Having to navigate between both legal and illegal economic activity in the eyes of the Tunisian authorities, they enter into confrontation with border officials to allow them to carry out their business without impediment. In some cases, officials take bribes for allowing cross-border traders to bring in more than the allowed amount into Tunisia. Some customs officials have even built a strong network with traders, allowing them to bring in large quantities of products in return for a share of the imported goods. By negotiating with the Tunisian border authorities – in particular over the amount of currency they can take out of Tunisia and the volume of products they purchase from Algeria – female traders have become experts in the art of dealing with a stringent border security system.

### Female Cross-Border Traders and the War on Corruption

The Tunisian government has been struggling between a desire to fight smuggling and to keep things under control through a policy of *laissez-faire* towards cross-border traders, while still trying to enforce transparency and accountability. Some have observed that the current war on corruption launched by Prime Minister Youssef Chahed testifies to the government's attempt to formally break with impunity in this sector.

However, in the absence of deep reforms, instances of corruption in informal trade (the frequent low-level bribing of customs officials) are making the prime minister's "clean hands operation" look increasingly problematic. The problem lies in the inability of successive post-Ben Ali governments to address the economic and social woes of Tunisian households, and to prevent what some Tunisian observers have described as the "democratization" of corruption. Indeed, many Tunisians agree that corruption under Ben Ali was bad, but post-revolution Tunisia has seen a rampant form of corruption practiced with total

impunity by almost every official in power to such an extent that corruption flourishes in a democratic environment, remaining unchallenged and even state-tolerated due to a lack of effective oversight in holding the culprits accountable.

The Tunisian authorities tend to buy peace of mind by turning a blind eye to low-level corruption at border crossings, regarding it as harmless. This can be dangerous when one considers the porous border with Algeria that can be used as transit passages for illicit activities including drugs and weapons. Female traders are vulnerable to illicit smuggling networks, and can be used as soft targets to bypass strict Tunisian security measures in the form of customs, national guards, border police, and the Tunisian army. The quasi-absence of trust between cross-border traders and border control officials has intensified with the rising confrontation between them. In particular, this affects both those from border areas with no other means of subsistence, as well as cross-border traders, including women who often complain about border control officials confiscating their products and asking them to pay bribes to get them across.

When the Tunisian prime minister declared war on corruption in May 2017, smuggling became the target of his large-scale operation.<sup>5</sup> A series of arrests of businessmen connected to smuggling signaled the beginning of a shakeup operation to clamp down on smuggling networks along the borders with Algeria and Libya. This war is likely to affect female cross-border traders as this sector will also come under heavy scrutiny. Female traders will feel increased surveillance from border officials of their commercial activities.

### Recommendations

*- Support female entrepreneurship as alternative sustainable sources of income*

Women should be provided with financial incentives to start their own businesses and adopt a more sustainable business model.<sup>6</sup> While this business venture may be an exception to the rule, it can serve as a starting point for the promotion of social business entrepreneurship aimed at marginalized areas in

5 Seif Soudani "Corruption. Vague d'arrestations: une guerre contre les «nouveaux riches»?" *Le courrier de l'Atlas*, May 25, 2017 <<http://www.lecourrierdelatlas.com/tunisie-corruption-vague-d-arrestations-une-guerre-contre-les-«-nouveaux-riches-»--8318>> (accessed August 6, 2017).

6 The Aatik project of autonomy for rural women in the northwestern Tunisian town of Aroussa (governorate of Siliana) was initiated by two young women from Germany and Canada, and funded by Canadian Embassy in Tunis. See also Christine Petré, "Tunisia: Bringing the Global Market to Rural Women Weavers", *World Bank Blogs*, April 3, 2016 <<http://blogs.worldbank.org/arabvoices/voices/tunisia-bringing-global-market-rural-women-weavers>> (accessed August 6, 2017).

Tunisia. For instance, Yunus Social Business Tunisia<sup>7</sup> assists with funding programs for social entrepreneurship projects in impoverished areas of the country. Women can also obtain financial support from EU-funded projects aimed at marginalized areas.<sup>8</sup>

- *Improve female traders' safety and security at border crossings*

Women should be empowered and encouraged to denounce corrupt practices by officials at border posts and, ideally, qualified female border crossing officers should be appointed from among local unemployed graduates, who can serve as a point of contact between locals and the authorities.

Tightening border control security at the border crossing with Algeria could be achieved by introducing a scanner system to speed up the control process, and preventing the entry of illicit products by using sniffer dogs. This can effectively deter smugglers from exploiting women's status as "harmless" when paying their way through security and customs.

- *Legally protect female traders from exploitation*

In late July 2017 Tunisian lawmakers unanimously voted in a law to criminalize gender-based violence. One of the measures of the new legislation is the criminalization of economic abuse and violence against women. It should be stipulated that all types of economic exploitation – including coercing female laborers and workers into harsh working conditions without social security coverage – should be criminalized.<sup>9</sup> This legal framework can serve as a stepping stone to regulate women's work in the informal trade sector, where women often do not own their own vehicles, and are therefore more prone to being coerced into dealing with male smugglers who own

vehicles, and charge prohibitive prices to carry merchandise across the border.<sup>10</sup>

- *Activate stalled free trade zone projects in border areas*

Since the revolution, local communities in border areas have been campaigning for the activation of stalled free trade zone projects, particularly in Le Kef and Tozeur. The creation of the National Agency of Land Border Crossings within the Ministry of Transport<sup>11</sup> to manage traffic in the border areas should further boost development of marginalized areas and ease the activation of free trade zone projects with Algeria, as promised by the Tunisian authorities.<sup>12</sup> These projects are still on hold, as the Tunisian authorities had to prioritize other projects along the border areas with Libya, particularly in Ben Guerane, whose long-awaited free trade zone project has recently been given the green light.<sup>13</sup>

The border areas in Kasserine, Ain Drahem-Tabarka, Kef, and Tozeur could become free trade zones, where the economies of these communities could thrive, making the temptation towards illicit activities such as smuggling less alluring to the most vulnerable citizens. The Tunisian authorities' establishment of a pilot model free trade zone project in the port city of Tabarka could boost the local economy by reducing unemployment and establishing businesses there.<sup>14</sup>

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7 Yunus Social Business Tunisia main homepage: <<http://www.ysbtunisia.com>> (accessed October 21, 2017).

8 The Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID) and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) devised partnership programs promoting Tunisian women in rural areas, their involvement in decision making, and female entrepreneurship. See "Profil Genre de la Tunisie 2014" <[https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/rapport\\_national\\_genre\\_tunisie\\_2014\\_version\\_courte\\_fr.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/rapport_national_genre_tunisie_2014_version_courte_fr.pdf)> (accessed October 21, 2017).

9 "In the Assembly of the Representatives of People, demands of the criminalization of all types of economic exploitation of women", Assabah, July 25, 2017 <<http://www.assabah.com.tn/article/139241/-/مجلس-الاعمال-يطلب-الاعمال-الغريبة-في-تونس>> (accessed September 3, 2017).

10 The author learnt during her trip to Algeria that female traders sometimes had to pay 500 Tunisian dinars (about 180 Euros) to male Tunisian smugglers, usually from border areas, to transport merchandise such as electronic equipment and household appliances through unofficial border routes that these experienced smugglers are familiar with.

11 Journal Officiel de la République Tunisienne, "Décret gouvernemental 2016-100 du 11 janvier 2016, portant création de l'Office National des Postes Frontaliers Terrestres," January 11, 2016 <<http://www.legislation.tn/sites/default/files/news/tf20161003.pdf>> (accessed October 21, 2017).

12 "Protesting Youth Again Close the Hezoua Border Crossing in Tozeur" [in Arabic], Babnet, May 2, 2017 <<https://www.babnet.net/cadredetail-142104.asp>> (accessed October 21, 2017).

13 Tunisia 2020 international conference, Tunis, November 29–30, 2016, "Free Trade and Logistics Zone in Ben Guerane" <<http://www.tunisia2020.com/en/projet/free-trade-and-logistics-zone-in-ben-guerane/>> (accessed September 3, 2017).

14 "Hamila Duty Free va réaliser une Zone de Repos et un Free Shop à Melloula (Tabarka)," Tustex, May 16, 2017 <<https://www.tustex.com/economie-actualites-des-societes/economie-hamila-duty-free-va-realiser-une-zone-de-repos-et-un-free-shop-a-melloula-tabarka>> (accessed October 21, 2017).

## A STUDENT-CENTERED APPROACH TO HIGHER EDUCATION REFORM IN TUNISIA

Molka Abassi

*The recently approved reform plan for Tunisian higher education fails to put the student at the center of the system. It lacks a student perspective and overemphasizes governance, fiduciary, and administrative changes at the expense of quality learning adapted to the job market. Only through a focus on students can higher education reform reach its key goal of graduate employability. To achieve quick gains, a range of steps should be taken, including: allowing undergraduate access to the university Research & Development apparatus to provide invaluable pre-job market research experience, permitting cross-registration at different universities to give students the flexibility they need for learning development, and easing administrative burdens through IT tools.*

Long considered a regional model in higher education, Tunisia has achieved impressive results with its aggressive investment in its university system, one of the highest rates in the region. Indeed, over the last twenty years, the country's share of public spending on higher education remained one of the largest state budgets. Paradoxically, despite such commitment, graduate unemployment remains strikingly high at 31 percent,<sup>15</sup> predominantly due to discrepancies between the university system and the labor market. Conscious of the urgent need for reform, the government prepared a series of measures to address the shortcomings of the university system.

However, the current plan's emphasis on governance, administrative, and fiduciary matters fails to push for the essential goal of higher education: quality learning adapted to the job market. By neglecting students and focusing on elements other than the final product the university system aims to create, the current reform plan merely addresses peripheral issues instead of tackling the structural problem: graduates' readiness to enter the labor market.

### The Tunisian University System

The formation of the Tunisian university system dates to 1960, when the University of Tunis was established

by combining existing institutes across the country. It was subsequently divided into three universities (Tunis, I, II, and III) in 1988. Today, it is overseen by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MESRS) and follows the Bologna process<sup>16</sup> License–Master–Doctorate (LMD) model. The university system has since developed significantly.

Tunisia currently boasts 13 public universities, 46 private universities, 6 teacher training institutes, and 24 applied technical institutes (ISETs), none of which are included in any international university rankings as they do not adhere to the standards and criteria set by QS World University Rankings and Shanghai Academic Ranking of World Universities. This expansion, together with a policy for baccalaureate laureates to automatically enter bachelor programs, has led to an expansion of higher education, reaching a student population of 500,000 in 2015. Indeed, once baccalaureate laureates have completed high school they are guaranteed enrollment at a university and assigned to a specific program based on their scores, prioritized preferences, and the number of places available on each course. Such expansion was not, however, accompanied by job creation, and has thus created a significant increase in graduate unemployment, and the need for urgent structural reforms.

### The Reform Plan

The proposed reform plan and its accompanying draft law were developed by the National Reform Commission using a participatory approach. Key stakeholders included ministry officials, university presidents, professors and students, and parliamentarians, as well as representatives of the private sector, civil society organizations (CSOs), and labor unions. Based on the diagnosis undertaken from 2012 to 2015, five major pillars were chosen as the primary axes in which specific technical and thematic sub-commissions will specialize, namely: the quality of university studies and employability; and innovation; governance and resource management; university mapping; and professorship and pedagogy.

The process culminated in the design of the “Strategic Plan for the Reform of Higher Education and Scientific Research” that will be presented to the public in December 2017 as part of the National Reform Conference sponsored by the prime minister.

<sup>15</sup> National Institute of Statistics website <<http://www.ins.tn/fr/publication/note-sur-lenqu%C3%AAt-nationale-de-l%E2%80%99emploi-t1-2016>> (accessed October 25, 2017).

<sup>16</sup> The European Higher Education Area and the Bologna Process <<http://www.eua.be/policy-representation/higher-education-policies/the-european-higher-education-area-and-the-bologna-process>> (accessed October 25, 2017).

While the plan proposes a series of measures aimed at transforming Tunisian higher education, it over-emphasizes governance-related measures and falls short of addressing the centrality of students' personal and professional growth.

### **Pillar I: Research and Development and Innovation**

With its 590 laboratories and research units, and 1,803 researchers per one million inhabitants in 2014, Tunisia ranks first in the Middle East and North Africa region in terms of research publications for the period 1996-2015. Established partnerships with European institutions – especially in the fields of food security, the environment, nanotechnology, and social sciences – exemplify this success. That said, the country has recently slipped in the Global Innovation Index, ranking 77th out of 128 in 2016. Indeed, the country suffers from a low rate of patent filing and deficiencies in terms of transforming Research and Development (R&D) into entrepreneurial and commercially viable projects. A United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) survey of 22 stakeholders involved in entrepreneurship promotion showed that innovation is a key weakness of the Tunisian higher education system, as university culture and teaching remains focused on theoretical training. The survey also demonstrated that the system excludes practical experience as well as connections with the country's start-up ecosystem.

To further improve R&D at the university level, the MESRS aims to create project management units at various universities to help them deal with international research programs. Additionally, it plans an overhaul of funding schemes to incorporate research tax-credits as part of Public-Private Partnerships to boost the involvement of private sector stakeholders in the research process. Moreover, to address poor performance in patent filing, universities will provide researchers with patent law courses and finance patent registration. Accordingly, the National Reform Commission believes that these measures, along with entrepreneurship modules, would lead to an improvement in the country's innovation apparatus and create an "entrepreneurial university," leading to the creation of new value-added enterprises and the expansion of already established enterprises.

The proposed reform plan does not, however, address the central role of undergraduate and postgraduate

students and, in its exclusive focus on researchers, fails to provide students with adequate and transferable research training. As such, in the absence of appropriate research education and practical expertise in R&D, graduates – from engineers to those seeking research positions – will be unable to join high-end industries such as the technology sector.

The case of the *École Supérieure Privée d'Ingénierie et de Technologie (ESPRIT)* can serve as a positive example that shows that innovative R&D initiatives and applied education are key to entrepreneurship, employability, and integration in the labor market. With a budget of 23.8 million Tunisian dinars,<sup>17</sup> significantly lower than the average public university's budget, ESPRIT has been able to punch way above its weight. Based on the *Conceive Design Implement Operate (CDIO)* approach, the university adapted its pedagogy to involve students in the research process and act as a pre-incubation program for future R&D-driven entrepreneurs. Indeed, this focus on applied research allowed for the commercialization of R&D outcomes. By giving them direct access to its research facilities, five start-ups have emerged out of ESPRIT's academic environment, two of which are pursuing their development in Silicon Valley.

This was made possible by boosting study abroad opportunities and partnerships with companies and universities such as Paris-Dauphine, Mines-Telecom, Ginette, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Such partnerships and international accreditations provided its graduates visibility and credibility abroad, thereby opening doors and internationalizing university life on campus. Additionally, ESPRIT's reputation boosted the enrollment of sub-Saharan students as its curriculum became widely known across Africa. The same can be said beyond the entrepreneurship realm, as the university's emphasis on a holistic rather than a theoretical curriculum has created classes of directly-operational engineers, 85 percent of whom find work after graduation, while the country's overall graduate employment rate remains as high as 26 percent.

### **Pillar II: Curriculum and Pedagogy**

Since 2006, the higher education system has followed the License-Master-Doctorate (LMD) model. Overall, curriculum development and content is characterized by standardization, and university curricula are reviewed and validated by sectorial minis-

<sup>17</sup> Benjamin Polle, "Tahar Ben Lakhdar: «Il est possible de mieux former les ingénieurs tunisiens, avec moins d'argent»,» *Jeune Afrique*, October 27, 2016 <<http://www.jeuneafrique.com/333377/economie/interview-tahar-ben-lakhdar/>> (accessed October 25, 2017).



terial commissions dominated by professors. Private sector representatives are involved in the process when it comes to applied degrees and courses. Yet despite the involvements of such stakeholders, pedagogical tools remain archaic, and the most basic services, such as electronic grading, remain unavailable. In terms of assessment, continuous evaluation is a fundamental principle of the system as students go through multiple examinations per semester. Such frequency has created a system in which students spend more time being assessed than they do learning. Beyond course content, the system suffers from a lack of transparency and accountability, as ineffective inspection mechanisms have led to a decline in teaching and administrative quality.

To address these shortcomings, the MESRS is working to restructure the LMD system to improve teaching quality by reducing the number and frequency of examinations, setting up a system of auto-evaluation for professors, and providing universities with Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) tools such as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) for use in teaching. Taking into consideration the results achieved since the creation of the Virtual University of Tunis in 2002, the government believes it can build on this experience to generalize its success. The MESRS also plans to create language centers to improve students' English as a second language, as part of an overarching soft skills approach.

While these measures would address some shortcomings of the Tunisian higher education system in terms of curriculum content and pedagogy, they are inadequate to deal with students' personal and professional growth. This neglect of student quality learning is at the heart of the discrepancy between the skills they acquire and job market needs. Additionally, focusing on the current Tunisian context and ignoring wider global trends that will impact future graduates – such as the fourth industrial revolution – leads to an overarching failure to strategize holistically, thereby widening the existing skills and job market gap.

### **Pillar III: Campus Life and Student Experience**

Despite its saliency for the overall university experience, and the well-being of students in particular, campus life is awarded very little importance in the Tunisian context. Almost no literature – either academic or non-academic – exists and no mention of

the matter is made in either the Strategic Plan or in public interviews conducted by senior ministry officials. The only noteworthy measure undertaken is a general increase in university infrastructure and the creation of new student resources, such as career centers and leadership centers.

Common shortcomings with regard to campus life in Tunisia include:<sup>18</sup>

- a lack of resources for disabled students and generally poor and old infrastructure, both those of the university premises as well as dorms, as well as a lack of interest in the green aspect of modern campuses;
- inadequate access to university and student information online, where websites are not updated and student portals lack the most basic features such as access to grades, course descriptions, professor contacts and bios. This has led to Kafkaesque situations in which students across the country spend hours on campus waiting for their grades to be posted on boards;
- little or no access to basic facilities and resources, even at developed universities with sound infrastructures, including computer labs with printers and other office supplies, libraries, and academic journals;
- insufficient administrative resources, both in terms of HR and financial resources, which is especially problematic in the light of the system's reliance on bureaucracy; and
- a lack of university resources devoted to student-run organizations, thereby hindering their sustainability.

The Institut des Hautes Études Commerciales de Carthage (IHEC Carthage) can serve as a positive example, which illustrates the importance and positive impact of creating a thriving campus life. Founded in 1942, IHEC Carthage is Tunisia's primary public school. Despite its historic role in the country, students do not cite its curriculum as the most important factor in its successful graduate employment rate and their general fulfillment on campus, but emphasize the role of community life.

<sup>18</sup> Given the scarcity of written information, research was directed towards field research and media analysis. Visits were conducted to universities in the country's capital, Tunis – where the bulk of Tunisian universities are based – and several podcasts on student life and campus environments were analyzed.

With around thirty student organizations<sup>19</sup> organizing more than 200 events a year, the school boasts one of the most active campus lives in the country. These organizations have proven to be a core factor behind students' success in terms of graduate employment and overall university experience. Beyond their participation in conferences and events where networking and capacity building are emphasized, their focus on student-led project management constitutes a primary source of practical knowledge. Indeed, students are pushed to find financing, elaborate programs, and dive into the country's business eco-system. Students thereby acquire the practical skills and contacts which improve their labor market suitability and allow them to fully enjoy their time on campus as proactive individuals. In a country where over seventy percent of universities have no active student organizations, IHEC Carthage represents a striking model to be followed and replicated.

### Recommendations

#### To address issues related to Pillar I – Research and Development and Innovation:

- Beyond boosting existing R&D structures, the reform plan should also prioritize improving students' research skills, allowing them to graduate as fully-operational researchers on the labor market.<sup>20</sup> R&D should be horizontal, rather than specific to PhDs and research institution staff. Undergraduate and graduate students should be encouraged, and sometimes even required, to take part in university research projects, both in elementary ways (working through manual processes) and advanced ones (data-mining, coding, translation, report write-ups, laboratory testing, etc.). For instance, students should be allowed to obtain university credits as part of their university research projects. This would also allow them to gain experience as research assistants, boosting their credibility as researchers on the labor market. Specific research project-management training spanning all phases, including the search for funding, would enhance the benefits they will provide companies and organizations after graduation.

- To fulfill the innovative goal of R&D, students could initiate projects for which they would receive supervised access to resources at research institutes. Beyond the obvious benefits in terms of academic publishing, such access would also be advantageous to potential entrepreneurs in allowing for the initiation of commercialized R&D outcomes. As entrepreneurship modules remain theoretical, the establishment of private co-working spaces, accelerators, and incubators would complement the entrepreneurship centers.

#### To address issues related to Pillar II – Curriculum and Pedagogy:

Based on international best practices and experiences to tackle both the rigidity of the learning process and the overall status-quo nature of the reform plan, structured flexibility should be the key philosophy of the learning experience. Accordingly, the focus should be on access to interdepartmental and cross-disciplinary resources for students to acquire holistic knowledge and advance beyond specialized technical skills that limit their employability.

- Students should be allowed to cross-register, taking classes in different subjects and at different departments despite majoring in one field of study. In addition, students should be allowed to choose specific elective classes within majors, in place of the established and standardized coursework accompanied by an obligation to fulfill requirements.

- Students should be required to fulfill holistic and multidisciplinary requirements, which should include the humanities, quantitative analysis, social sciences, and specific skills such as English as a second language.

- Beyond the introduction of new subjects and programs, such as machine learning and artificial intelligence, existing curricula should be revised and redeveloped based on emerging international trends, such as the Curriculum in Open-access

19 These organizations range from the university's "Radio Libertad," whose events have attracted nationwide coverage, to various entrepreneurship bodies – such as the Association Internationale des Etudiants en Sciences Economiques et Commerciales (AIESEC), ENACTUS (formally called Students in Free Enterprise (SIFE)), and Marketing Méditerranée Tunisie (MMT) – whose international networks and program depth allow students hands-on personal and professional development.

20 According to a 2014 study assessing the results of undergraduate research, student involvement in research greatly increased their intention to publish articles: Sharon A. Weiner and Charles Watkinson, "What do Students Learn from Participation in an Undergraduate Research Journal? Results of an Assessment," *Journal of Librarianship and Scholarly Communication* 2 (2014), p.eP1125. DOI: <<http://dx.doi.org/10.7710/2162-3309.1125>> (accessed October 25, 2017).

Resources in Economics (CORE), emphasizing real-world problems.

Additionally, pedagogy should also focus on quality learning. In this sense, the use of new pedagogical tools should be encouraged. Professors should also be accountable to students and take greater care of their academic needs.

- Professors, PhD students, and teaching assistants should provide students with office hours. Excellent undergraduate students can also gain experience by undertaking this task.
- Tutorial centers and sessions for introductory mandatory courses by subject area should be provided (such as accounting, calculus, language, and essay writing centers). In addition, online course-specific platforms should be elaborated, with features including course readings, syllabi, videos and podcasts, forums, and notification panels.
- Student evaluations of professors and course materials should be incorporated as part of the overall evaluation.
- New methods of course examinations and student evaluations should be incorporated, such as partial credit for essays as well as ICT-based quizzes.

**To address issues related to Pillar III – Campus Life and Student Experience:**

A shake-up of the existing approach should be undertaken to focus on student well-being, and provide the student population with the adequate resources for it to thrive. This is especially true as many such services are necessary and basic ones. They would constitute important, quick gains.

- Study abroad, exchange opportunities, and academic programs should be boosted to internationalize university life on campus. Existing partnerships and programs as well as scholarships and fellowships offered by a significant number of international institutions need to be better publicized.
- Centers dedicated for alumni relations, health and counseling services, as well as student housing and dining services should be created.

- First-year students should be prepared for university life by holding orientation weeks, during which students would receive extensive academic advice (including degree requirements and schedule planning), become acquainted with the academic curriculum and undergraduate research, explore ways to get involved in campus activities, meet faculty and staff, and learn about campus life and environment from current and former students.
- University communication strategies and plans need to be established to attract foreign students as part of exchange programs and boost the image of universities abroad, especially online, and to promote universities' credibility as well as that of students after graduation.
- Provide students with part-time employment opportunities at the university and through university-affiliated partners. Such affiliations require a negotiated flexibility of working hours, which allow for a work-life-study balance for students.
- Reinforce the post-revolution momentum of active student-run organizations by providing them with university resources as well as financial aid based on their impact.
- Boost intra-university and inter-university athletic and artistic activities to create an established extracurricular environment in which university branding leads to the creation of a distinctive university culture.
- For all IT and non-IT related matters, assign students specific online identities (such as emails and unique names) for communication purposes, the ability to log in to all available resources, and further to monitor student numbers for administrative purposes and tracking. All administrative tasks should be undertaken online. Given the experience and historic commitment in Tunisia of technology giants such as Microsoft and ICT for Education, these could be ideal partners for the e-admin transformation.
- Improve library facilities and allow students access to all available resources such as course textbooks (for those unable to purchase them), online academic journals, IT equipment (computers with appropriate software and applications including Stata, R, Bloomberg, and other pack-

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ages needed for practical learning, as well as multiple printers and scanners). Such improvements would also involve library services providing 24/7 opening hours during peak exam times, and dedicated and trained library staff.

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