

Tunisia one year after the revolution

Tunisia is facing several problems at different levels. The economy has been badly affected by the legacy of the previous regime, negative growth, very low currency reserves and increasing unemployment. The labour force is growing rapidly, increasing the number of unemployed people. In addition, the revolution's effect on production capacity, the lack of investor confidence and local insecurity have all contributed to reducing economic activity in the short term, especially in the manufacturing and tourism sectors, with a further loss of jobs.

The gap between supply and demand for qualified workers is resulting in a very high number of unemployed graduates, increasing the social malaise. The situation is made worse by the cautious attitude of the government, which is finding it difficult to find adequate solutions to urgent problems.

The tourism sector is still not in a position to meet the challenges it faces and agriculture is also having difficulties, with farmers affected by increased prices for all their costs of production. Finally, consumers are not spared either and are suffering badly because of the high cost of living.

Another feature of the current social situation is the unrest in disadvantaged regions, which are feeling even more marginalised, despite their vital role in triggering the revolutionary movement that overthrew the regime. Post-revolutionary Tunisia is also the scene of a rise in youth unemployment, with more than 800,000 unemployed young people, including a very high number of university graduates. These young people feel abandoned despite their vital role in bringing down the dictatorship.

Development aid seems to be a long time coming. Western countries are to some extent concerned about the current political context, the need to consolidate democracy and the signs of religious radicalisation that are beginning to appear:

(An increasing number of Salafist demonstrations, accompanied by attacks against democratic symbols. They sometimes focus on issues that are not really important but which distract the people's attention away from the

real problems that are going to decide the country's future, such as employment, the constitution, justice, economic revival and regional development).

The trade union movement is working for social peace and decent work for the country's citizens. It wants to see compliance with the law and is prepared to demonstrate against injustices. This often causes tension between the country's most representative trade union, the UGTT, and the government, which lacks experience. There has been an increase in the number of strikes and also of attacks on UGTT offices and trade unionists.

Relations between the government and the opposition are also marred by tension and an unwillingness to compromise. Opposition parties are increasingly critical of government inaction and the government's lack of cooperation with them. Meanwhile, the government blames conspiracies and insists on its electoral legitimacy as the majority political coalition.

Despite the present difficulties and the serious socioeconomic legacy left by the previous regime, Tunisia will overcome the obstacles in its path and ensure a happy future for its children. The 3,000 year history of our country has taught us that our people, well known for their peaceful nature, have never lacked the courage and determination to rise up against injustice whenever their dignity is threatened. The uprising that ended the dictatorship on 14 January 2011 was the most recent example of this. Can we imagine for one second that our people, so proud to have recovered their dignity, would accept living under the yoke of another dictatorship? Can we believe for one second that a minority of "extremist" cranks could impose a model of society different to the one to which the great majority of Tunisians aspire, that is, one that respects the Arab-Moslem identity of our country, while remaining open, tolerant, democratic and respectful of minorities? A modern Tunisia that all the reformers in our country at the end of the 19th century would have accepted.

My optimism is based on the arguments outlined above and strengthened by certain current developments:

One positive sign is the decision taken by the majority party Ennahdha, which has officially settled the question of Sharia law. The party says it is

content with the first article of the Constitution, namely: "Tunisia is a free, independent and sovereign country, with Islam as its religion, Arabic as its language and a republican system of government". The decision is very positive even though it goes against the wishes of a section of the party's radical supporters. It ensures a consensus with democratic forces and the great majority of Tunisians who want a secular and democratic state that respects their religious beliefs.

Another positive sign is the provisional government's decision to set a date for the next elections, which will now take place in June 2013 at the latest, and to confirm the creation of an independent electoral commission to organise them. These two decisions have reassured public opinion at the national and international levels.

Finally, there is a tendency for the political parties to regroup and form a coalition capable of offering an alternative. This augurs well for the consolidation of democracy. In addition, citizens are vigilantly monitoring proceedings in the Constituent Assembly to ensure respect for universal values, including democracy, liberty and the rights of men and women. The UGTT is similarly watchful with regard to guarantees for workers' rights and their freedom and dignity under the rule of law. A dynamic civil society, a vigilant opposition and women anxious not to see their rights threatened by a backward step are present everywhere to set the record straight.

Therefore, we say Optimism with Vigilance, Vigilance, Vigilance.

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