Report on the FEMM Committee delegation visit to Tunis, Tunisia, 29-31 October 2012

COMPOSITION
Mikael Gustafsson, Chair (GUE/NGL)
Mariya Gabriel (EPP)
Silvia Costa (S&D)
Nicole Kiil-Nielsen (Greens/ALE)

Members were accompanied by Jutta Schulze-Hollmén and Armelle Douaud from the committee secretariat and Valborg Linden Jonsten, advisor to the S&D Group.

PURPOSE
The purpose of the delegation was to learn more about the situation of women's rights in Tunisia after the Arab Spring at a time when the country was still negotiating its new constitution. Indeed Tunisia has been known for decades as the most advanced country in Arab world as far as women rights are concerned. After the revolution though more conservative voices were heard and challenged this acquis, including in the main party of the majority (Ennahda). Women's organisations therefore fear that the relative good protection of women's rights might no longer be the footprint of Tunisia if this is not clearly guaranteed in the next constitution.

MEETINGS
(See full programme in enclosed Annex I)
29 October 2012

1. Briefing with the EU Delegation

The FEMM delegation was briefed by Mr Patrick Berckmans, Head of Cooperation on EU action in Tunisia. The three axes of cooperation with Tunisia (economic and trade cooperation, education and energy and natural resources) were reoriented after the change of regime to grant more support to civil society and good governance. The Delegation is also working specifically on gender equality. To mention but two examples: advocacy on women's participation to the elections (together with UN Women) and violence against women, especially in the countryside.

2. Roundtable on "The universality of human rights and the primacy of international conventions to guarantee gender equality"

Members participated to a roundtable organised by ATFD and European Feminist Initiative (EFI) to discuss on the primacy of international conventions over the constitution which was much discussed in Tunisia. Indeed the National Constituent Assembly (NCA) was discussing at that time on the Preamble and the general principles of the future constitution. Disposition stating that international conventions cannot overrule the constitution, concern that this may affect primarily the CEDAW. Concerns about the preservation of the acquis (Personal Status).
For a long time in Tunisia the authorities played "women's rights" against "human rights".
Most civil society organisations active in women's rights and gender equality were present and could exchange together with Members.
Absence of a women caucus in the NCA which would help building a women's consensus on this issue: women are actually divided along political lines.

30 October 2012

3. Meeting with Members of the National Constituent Assembly

The meeting was organised with the purpose to exchange views about the role of women in politics and take stock of the progress in the drafting of the Constitution.

- Meherzia Labidi Maïza ( Ennahda), 1st VP
- Samira Merai-Friaa ( VP in charge of legislation, relations with the government and Presidency, Parti Républicain, Chair FEMM Committee of the PA-UfM)
- Maya Jribi ( Parti Républicain, Secretary General)
- Salma Baccar ( Pôle démocratique moderniste)
- Lobna Jribi ( Ettakatol)
- Fatouma Attia ( Ennahda)
- Samia Abbou ( Congrès pour la République)
Pour Maya Jribi:


4. Meeting with ENDA

Enda Inter-Arabe is a non-profit NGO operating for 20 years in Tunisia and providing microfinance. Members met Essma Ben Hamida, Executive Director, Michael Cracknell, Secretary General, and some clients who explained their activities and how Enda is operating. 70% of the currently 210,000 active clients are women, for a credit line from 200 to 5000 Tunisian dinars (EUR 100 to 2500). Enda is not only providing financing but also advice on negotiations, accounting, how to draw business plans, etc. Women then become entrepreneurs and are empowered: they then can play an increased role in the family and the community. Women explained how the development of their activity helped them to support the whole family and to give a better education to their children.

5. Meeting with ATFD

Longstanding organisation, most important in women's rights. Try to influence changes in society. Patriarchal society despite very advanced legislation.

Very active in fighting violence against women which is still a taboo in Tunisian society, no public structures.

6. Meeting with Women and leadership

New organisation to empower women in business but risk of backlash pushed the organisation to enter the fight for women's rights. Social networking by salafists in poor areas, social support.

7. Meeting with UGTT

Longstanding civil society organisation, active role of women but absent at higher level, especially in the central board. Very active during the revolution.

31 October 2012

8. Meeting with the World Bank

Gender equality not as a goal but as a means, mainstreamed in all WB actions and programmes. Work in convincing authorities about gender mainstreaming.

9. Meeting with UN Women
Very favourable situation of women was used as propaganda for the regime. Now women's rights are endangered. CEDAW and reservations.
31 October 2012

Delegation to Tunisia, 29-31 October 2012

Final programme

Monday, 29 October - Tunis

15.30 - 16.30 Briefing with Mr Patrick Berckmans, Head of Cooperation at the Delegation of the European Union to Tunisia
Address: European Union Delegation

17.00 - 19.30 Building a Common Agenda for Equality between Women and Men through Istanbul Process
Roundtable with State actors, politicians and civil society to discuss the implementation of the principles of universality of women’s rights as human right and equality between and men in the transitional processes as enshrined in the international and regional women's rights mechanisms. Project supported by the EU.
Address: Hôtel Majestic Tunis

Tuesday, 30 October - Tunis

9.00 - 11.30 Meeting with representatives of the Assemblée nationale constituante
- Meherzia Labidi Maïza (Ennahda), 1st VP
- Samira Merai-Friaa (VP in charge of legislation, relations with the government and Presidency, Parti Républicain, Chair FEMM Committee of the PA-UfM)
- Maya Jribi (Parti Républicain, Secretary General)
- Salma Baccar (Pôle démocratique moderniste)
- Lobna Jribi (Ettakatol)
- Fatouma Attia (Ennahda)
- Samia Abbou (Congrès pour la République)
Address: Assemblée Nationale Constituante
12.00 - 13.30 Meeting with ENDA (micro-finance organisation)
   ➢ Essma Ben Hamida, director of ENDA
   ➢ Clients from ENDA
   Address: ENDA Inter-Arabe

14.30 - 16.00 Meeting with the Tunisian Association of Women Democrats
   ➢ Ahlem Belhaj (Association tunisienne des femmes démocrates - ATFD)
   Address: Hôtel Novotel

17.00 - 19.30 Meeting with representatives of trade union departments and NGOs working on women empowerment
   ➢ Sana Ghenima, from Women and leadership (NGO) and member from the board of the Confédération des Entreprises Citoyennes de Tunisie (CONECT)
   ➢ Emna Aouadi, from UGTT (Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail)
   Address: Hôtel Novotel

Wednesday, 31 October - Tunis

8.30 - 9.30 Meeting with the World Bank
   ➢ Heba Elgazzar, Senior Economist, Human Development Department
   ➢ Laurent Gonnet, Senior Financial Sector Specialist
   Address: World Bank office

10.00 - 11.30 Meeting with UN Women
   ➢ Héla Skhiri, Programme Officer
   Address: UN Women office

***

End of the programme