



Plenary sitting

B9-0523/2021

18.10.2021

MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

to wind up the debate on the statement by the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

pursuant to Rule 132(2) of the Rules of Procedure

on the situation in Tunisia
(2021/2903(RSP))

Emmanuel Maurel
on behalf of The Left Group

B9-0523/2021

**European Parliament resolution on the situation in Tunisia
(2021/2903(RSP))**

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Rule 132(2) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas Tunisia is one of the priority countries of the European Union’s European Neighbourhood Policy; whereas the EU and Tunisia have expressed their wish to enter into a new phase of bilateral relations based on common values and a mutual commitment to strengthening political, economic and cultural ties;
- B. whereas Tunisia continues to face extraordinary socio-economic pressures, in particular as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic; whereas Tunisia has experienced a sharp decline in economic growth, after having entered the current crisis with slow growth and rising levels of debt; whereas unemployment rose from 15% before the pandemic to 17.8% at the end of the first quarter of 2021; whereas unemployment continues to affect women (24.9%) and young people aged 15-24 (40.8%) in particular; whereas poverty and vulnerability have increased during the pandemic, and whereas the poverty reduction trend observed over recent years is now being reversed as a result;
- C. whereas the 10th anniversary of the Tunisian revolution was marked by numerous demonstrations throughout the country because for the Tunisian people the objectives and the promise of the 2011 revolution remain unfulfilled; whereas Tunisia’s system of parliamentary democracy, strongly supported by the European Parliament, is facing significant difficulties; whereas there has been no progress on the promised socio-economic reforms and the reform of the justice and security sector; whereas the institutions have failed to tackle corruption effectively;
- D. whereas after months of political tensions, deteriorating economic conditions, huge demonstrations and a sharp rise in COVID-19 infection rates and deaths, Tunisian President Kais Saied dismissed Prime Minister Hichem Mechichi and suspended the work of the Assembly of People’s Representatives by invoking the emergency powers under Article 80 of the Tunisian Constitution;
- E. whereas on 23 August, President Saied extended the suspension of Parliament, even though the Constitution stipulates that Parliament cannot be suspended for more than one month, which has given rise to serious concerns among civil society;
- F. whereas on 22 September, President Saied issued a decree conferring on himself full presidential powers; whereas, according to Presidential Decree No 117, the 2014 Constitution has been suspended, with the exception of the preamble and the first two chapters on general provisions and rights and freedoms; whereas the transitional provisions confer on the President of the Republic the sole prerogative to legislate in all areas, including the organisation of the justice system and the judiciary, the organisation of information and the press, the organisation of political parties, trade unions, associations, organisations and professional associations and their financing, the

organisation of internal security forces and customs, electoral law, freedoms and human rights, personal status, local powers and the organic law on the budget;

- G. whereas this decree overturns the universal rule of supremacy of the Constitution by placing presidential decree-laws above the Constitution; whereas no appeal will be possible against presidential decrees; whereas the Constitutional Court provided for by the 2014 Constitution, which would have assessed the legality of President Saied's invoking of Article 80 of the Tunisian Constitution, has still not been established;
- H. whereas national and international civil society organisations are warning against unilateral decisions by President Kais Saied, reaffirming their unwavering commitment to democratic principles and expressing their deep concern at the lack of safeguards;
- I. whereas on 29 September, President Saied appointed Najla Bouden Romdhane as Prime Minister; whereas Najla Bouden Romdhane is the first female Prime Minister both in Tunisia and in the wider Arab world;
- J. whereas the composition of the new government of Najla Bouden Romdhane was approved on 11 October;
- K. whereas President Saied has announced a roadmap towards establishing 'a genuine democratic regime in which sovereignty will, in effect, lie with the people', which will be drawn up under the responsibility of the President and with the support of a committee;
- L. whereas Kais Saied won the presidential election with more than 72% of the vote, according to the Electoral Commission, with 2.77 million Tunisians voting for him, a majority of whom were young people aged 18-25; whereas Kais Saied continues to score highly in the polls; whereas since his election victory, Tunisians have been waiting to see the changes promised in tackling corruption, eliminating nepotism and achieving justice and development for marginalised regions in the interior, whose population has been suffering from poverty and unemployment for many years; whereas, since Saied came to power, the situation has deteriorated, owing in particular to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has put the public health system under great strain and profoundly disrupted economic activity, adding to the rising unemployment and forcing down incomes in a country which is already in difficulty and whose economy is collapsing; whereas the political disputes in Parliament, manifestations of violence and violent altercations between political representatives have led Tunisians to turn their backs on their country's parliamentary politics and politicians;
- M. whereas same-sex sexual relations are criminalised in Tunisia and whereas, despite general legal protections in terms of dignity and the fight against discrimination and harassment, LGBTQI+ people in Tunisia face widespread violence, including death threats and rape; whereas LGBTQI+ people are also subjected to violence and degrading treatment at the hands of civil servants;
- N. whereas it is necessary to strengthen the existing partnerships and also to develop a genuine partnership through which the interests of the communities on both sides of the Mediterranean are taken into account; whereas that partnership must be designed in particular to tackle Tunisia's social and regional inequalities;

1. Expresses its concern at the serious challenge facing Tunisia's democratic transition; calls on the Tunisian President to restore the work of the Assembly of People's Representatives and to guarantee the rule of law;
2. While recognising the profound divide within the current political system, which has prevented a majority from being established, calls for any reform of this system to be carried out in full compliance with the constitutional order, in particular the separation of powers, and with fundamental freedoms and human rights fully guaranteed;
3. Stresses that the rights of LGBTQI+ people are human rights, and calls on the Tunisian Government to decriminalise same-sex sexual relations and to ensure that LGBTQI+ people are treated with dignity by civil servants;
4. Stresses the need for dialogue at national level – in particular a social dialogue which includes the participation of the social partners and other legitimate civil society organisations – in order to overcome the political and constitutional crisis; stresses, in this regard, the important and constructive role in this process of the Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT), and of the trade union movement as a whole; stresses the particular importance of involving young people and women in this dialogue;
5. Recalls the important role of the European Parliament's Democracy Support and Election Coordination Group (DEG) in building a dialogue between civil society and political leaders in the country;
6. Expresses its concerns about the current socio-economic and budgetary difficulties and the need for Tunisia to implement appropriate reforms to boost employment and develop social, sustainable and inclusive growth; regrets that the EU has not met the expectations raised when the privileged partnership with Tunisia was established;
7. Warns that, at this crucial moment for Tunisia, linking structural measures to macro-financial assistance is not the way to strengthen the country's path to democracy;
8. Is concerned about the impact on Tunisia's already fragile local economy of the current draft of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement negotiated between the EU and Tunisia; considers it to be archaic and out of step with the immediate emergencies, and notes that it is strongly opposed by Tunisian civil society;
9. Calls on the EU and its Member States to remain committed to working with the Tunisian people to promote democracy, sustainable economic development and social progress, including in the areas of trade, investment, tourism and culture; calls on the EU and its Member States to mobilise resources to meet the expectations of the Tunisian people, while stressing that any financial support for Tunisia must be accompanied by the restoration of the work of the Assembly of People's Representatives and respect for the rule of law and for civil and human rights; stresses that the basis for cooperation remains respect for democracy, the rule of law, democratic rights and human rights; reiterates its calls for the development of mechanisms to monitor respect for fundamental freedoms, gender equality and other human rights issues, with the full involvement of civil society;
10. Stresses the need to foster investment and development in all sectors of the country's

economy and society, in particular job creation and the maintenance of high-quality public services accessible to all;

11. Supports partnerships with EU Member States which promote decentralised approaches, cooperation projects carried out by Member State authorities which contribute to the development of regional and local governance in Tunisia, and partnerships and best-practice exchanges with EU cities and local communities; calls for increased EU support for civil society in the regions, building on existing successful initiatives;
12. Calls on the EU to help Tunisia obtain sufficient vaccines and medical equipment to overcome the country's long-term health crisis;
13. Reaffirms that freedom of the press and media, freedom of expression online (including for bloggers) and offline and freedom of assembly are vital elements and indispensable pillars of democracy and an open and pluralistic society; calls for standards of good practice to be applied in the media sector in order to truly reflect investigative and differentiated journalism; recognises the positive effects of uncensored access to the internet and digital and social media; welcomes Tunisia's dynamic and open online media landscape;
14. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the Government of the Republic of Tunisia and the President of the Assembly of People's Representatives of Tunisia.