



Plenary sitting

B9-0526/2021

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))

Pedro Marques, Maria Arena
on behalf of the S&D Group

B9-0526/2021

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

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on Tunisia,
 - having regard to the statement by the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (VP/HR) on behalf of the European Union of 27 July 2021 and his statements to the press in Tunis on 10 September 2021,
 - having regard to the joint communication of 9 February 2021 by the Commission and the VP/HR entitled ‘Renewed Partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood – a new Agenda for the Mediterranean’ (JOIN(2021)0002) and the joint staff working document annexed thereto entitled ‘Renewed Partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood – Economic and Investment Plan for the Southern Neighbours’ (SWD/2021/0023),
 - having regard to the EU-Tunisia Association Agreement of 1995,
 - having regard to the Constitution of Tunisia of 2014,
 - having regard to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966, to which Tunisia is a party,
 - having regard to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), ratified by Tunisia in 1985,
 - having regard to Rule 132(2) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas Tunisia’s revolution of December 2010 put an end to the autocratic rule of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and initiated a new era of multi-party politics in the country;
- B. whereas on 25 July 2021 President Kais Saied dismissed Prime Minister Hichem Mechichi, suspended parliament for an initial period of 30 days, and also stripped parliamentarians of immunity; whereas the President justified this move by invoking Article 80 of the Tunisian Constitution, which provides him with the power to enact extraordinary measures to face an ‘imminent crisis’ in the country; whereas Article 80 of the Constitution provides for parliament to operate in permanent session alongside the President in emergency situations;
- C. whereas the governments of UAE, Saudi Arabia and Egypt immediately praised and lent rhetorical support to President Saied’s initiative;
- D. whereas President Saied’s decision comes in the context of a severe economic and health crisis with the world’s second highest rate of COVID-19 deaths; whereas internal political divisions have blocked the Tunisian institutional system for years, preventing

the country from implementing the reforms provided for in the 2014 Constitution, in particular the establishment of a constitutional court, as well as economic reforms;

- E. whereas on 22 September 2021 President Saied adopted exceptional measures allowing himself to replace government and parliament by ruling by decree for an indefinite period, therefore subordinating the validity of the 2014 Constitution to his own ruling;
 - F. whereas on 29 September 2021 President Saied appointed Najla Bouden Romdhane as Tunisia's first woman Prime Minister with a view to establishing a new government; whereas President Saied declared that the new government would be accountable to him during the emergency period, rather than to the Prime Minister, thus reducing Prime Minister Bouden's powers compared to those of her predecessor; whereas Prime Minister Bouden declared that the new government's main priority would be balancing public finances and proceeding with the economic reforms needed by Tunisia, as well as fighting corruption in the country; whereas on 11 October 2021 a new government of 24 ministers and a secretary of state, including 10 women, took up office;
 - G. whereas the lifting of parliamentary immunity has led to the execution of previous judgements on corruption and fraud on several members of parliament; whereas some of them have been informally blocked from travelling and others have been placed under house arrest; whereas Yassine Ayari, an outspoken parliamentarian and whistleblower who exposed several corruption cases in Tunisia, has been held since 28 July 2021 in the Mornaguia prison to serve a two-month sentence pronounced by a military court in 2018 for his Facebook posts criticising the army;
 - H. whereas on 26 July 2021, Tunisian police closed the offices of Al Jazeera in Tunis without providing any explanation; whereas on 6 October 2021 Tunisian security forces seized the broadcasting equipment used by Zitouna TV, a television station close to the Ennahda party, after the Independent High Authority for Audiovisual Communication (HAICA) declared that the channel had been operating illegally; whereas on 3 October 2021, Tunisian authorities arrested Amer Ayad, a Zitouna TV presenter, on charges of plotting against the security of the state; whereas the Zitouna TV network started operating in 2012, after the fall of President Ben Ali;
 - I. whereas, on 10 September 2021, the Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT) presented its roadmap for the establishment of a national consultative committee in order to ensure a legal framework for inclusive social and political reforms in the country, in particular the reform of the political system and the electoral law, as well as the amendment of the Constitution;
 - J. whereas since 1995 Tunisia has been a close partner for the EU, cooperating in the framework of the European Neighbourhood policy; whereas since 2011 the EU has provided over EUR 2 billion in grants and EUR 800 million in macro-financial assistance to support Tunisia's declared commitment to embrace transition towards democracy; whereas in May 2021 an instalment of EUR 600 million was made available under the Macro-Financial Assistance programme for Tunisia with the specific objective of mitigating the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic in the country;
1. Is deeply concerned about the concentration of legislative, executive and judicial

powers in the hands of one person, Kais Saied; notes that such a level of centralisation of power goes against democratic principles;

2. Expresses its sympathy and support for the people of Tunisia at this difficult moment for the country's young democracy, and reiterates Tunisians' legitimate right to a democratic path and to socioeconomic prosperity;
3. Expresses its concern at the President's unilateral decision to re-write the Constitution on terms which will provide him with almost unlimited power, including the power to issue 'legislative texts' by decree without interference and to declare them above any oversight or judicial review, as well as to dismiss state officials and replace them with allies;
4. Expresses its concern about the deterioration of an already critical socioeconomic situation, which can be only be exacerbated by the current political crisis, which in turn could lead to international isolation for Tunisia's economy and damage to its image abroad as a democratic model for the region;
5. Reaffirms its core belief that democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights are fundamental for achieving sustainable and truly inclusive economic growth and prosperity in Tunisia, as well as freedom of expression, the rights to protest, travel, to a fair trial, and for civilians not to be tried in military tribunals;
6. Welcomes the UGTT's recommendations in this regard; is convinced that any adjustments to the political system and constitutional framework have to be carried out through an inclusive dialogue involving trade unions and civil society organisations; calls on Tunisia to establish a constitutional court with the objective of avoiding misinterpretations and misuse of its Constitution by any relevant actor;
7. Is concerned about the recent wave of arrests targeting political figures, as well as by the closure of broadcasting corporations participating in the democratic life of Tunisia; calls on the Tunisian authorities to guarantee the full respect of fundamental rights and freedoms in the country, in particular the freedom of expression and information;
8. Considers the respect of rule of law and the independence of the judiciary system priorities and prerequisites for democracy; calls for the restoration of an independent judiciary, which should lead to the reform of the military courts in Tunisia to avoid military trials of civilians;
9. Is concerned about the interference of third country actors undermining Tunisian democracy and consolidating their grip on the region; calls in this regard on the EU institutions and the Member States to encourage the restoration of representative democracy mechanisms in Tunisia based on elections, as they are the cornerstone of economic and financial cooperation with the country;
10. Recalls that Tunisia has a privileged relationship with the EU, since the country is its main trading partner in the region and the EU has been investing in Tunisia's democratic transition for a decade since the revolution; believes that the EU should continue supporting Tunisia in its efforts to overcome the current economic and pandemic crisis, while in parallel Tunisia should urgently restore the role of its

democratic institutions;

11. Points out that Tunisia urgently needs a stable government legitimised by democratic accountability in order to reinitiate talks with the International Monetary Fund over the disbursement of a much needed loan for relaunching the economy of the country;
12. Calls on the EU to continue programmes that support Tunisian citizens, and to step up assistance where necessary in the light of the current crisis, including with healthcare support through the COVAX system to help the country to manage the severe impact of the COVID-19 pandemic;
13. Calls on the VP/HR and the Member States to closely follow the situation in Tunisia, and calls on the VP/HR to report back to Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Subcommittee on Human Rights on a regular basis in order to ensure proper parliamentary dialogue on this important and worrying situation;
14. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the Commission, the Parliaments of the Member States, the Parliament and the Government of Tunisia.