

# **Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies (MEDAC)**

## **Civil Society and Democratisation in Societies in Transition**

**Monika Wohlfeld (editor)**



Malta, January 2014

**Med Agenda New Series — Special Issue**

MEDAC Publications in Mediterranean IR and Diplomacy

# Civil Society and Democratisation in Societies in Transition

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# Civil Society and Democratisation in Societies in Transition

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Ambassador Dr. Souad Gueblaoui is the Ambassador of Tunisia to Malta. After a doctoral degree in International Relations obtained in 1987, Mrs Souad Gueblaoui started in 1988 her diplomatic career at the Tunisian Ministry of Foreign Affairs as Secretary of Foreign Affairs at the Department of International Organizations.

She served subsequently as Chief of Division at the Direction of North America and Canada (1998-2001), as Deputy Director in charge of the cooperation with the South-East Asian Countries (2006-2008) and as Deputy Director in charge of the cooperation with the Euro-Mediterranean countries (2008-2009).

Overseas, she served as Vice Consul of Tunisia in Strasbourg (1991-1998), as Counselor at the Embassy of Tunisia in Ankara (2001-2006) and as Chargé d'Affaires of Tunisia in Seoul (2009-August 2011).

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Ambassador Dr. Heinrich Kreft is a career diplomat and currently Director for Public Diplomacy and Dialogue among Civilizations in the German Foreign Ministry. Prior to this assignment he served as Senior Foreign Policy Advisor in the German Bundestag. As diplomat he was stationed among others in Tokyo (1991-1994) and Washington D.C. (2001-2004); Foreign Policy Planning Staff (in charge of the Americas, Asia and Economic Issues 1996-2001); Visiting Fellow at The Henry L. Stimson Center (July-December 2001), at the Heritage Foundation (January – March 2002) and the Woodrow Wilson Center (April – June 2002) in Washington, D.C.; Senior Strategic Analyst and Deputy Head of the Policy Planning Staff of the German Foreign Ministry in Berlin (2004-2006); Lecturer on International Politics. He wrote numerous publications on major power political and economic relations, International Security, the Arab World, and European, American and Asian political and economic affairs. Most recent publications focus on the Arab Awakening and on the rise of China.



### Dr. Monika Wohlfeld

Dr. Wohlfeld is the holder of the German Chair in Peace and Conflict Prevention established in 2009 at MEDAC by the German Academic Exchange Service and the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Previously she was the Deputy Director of the Conflict Prevention Centre of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). She served as Head of External Co-operation of the OSCE and, prior to that, as Senior Diplomatic Adviser to the Secretary General. She has been a Senior Research Fellow at the Western European Union (now European Union) Institute for Security Studies in Paris, and Researcher at the War Studies Department at King's College London.



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Dr. Monika Wohlfeld's most recent publications include an edited volume on **Change and Opportunities in the Emerging Mediterranean** (2012, with Prof. Stephen Calleya), a special issue of the MedAgenda entitled **"Towards a New Southern Mediterranean Region?"** (2011, with Prof. Stephen Calleya), and an edited volume on **Human Rights and the Conflict Cycle** (2010, with Dr. Omar Grech).

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Dr. Regan founded the NGO 80:20 Educating and Acting for a Better World, based in Ireland. He is a graduate of University College Dublin with post-graduate qualifications from Simon Fraser University, Vancouver (MA) and McGill University Montreal (PhD) and has been directly involved in development and human rights education for over 35 years in Ireland, Northern Ireland, Zambia, Lebanon, Rwanda, Brazil and Australia.

For eight years, Colm was a member of the Executive Committee of the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network and Chairperson of its Human Rights Education Working Group. He has worked on a wide variety of agendas including peace and human rights in Northern Ireland; Palestinian Rights in Lebanon; Aboriginal rights in Australia and Women's Rights in Zambia.

Colm has published widely and is editor of the international development and human rights resource **80:20 Development in An Unequal World**, now published in its 6<sup>th</sup> edition (2012) in partnership with UNISA Press in South Africa.

Colm Regan is now living and working in Gozo, Malta – teaching and writing and developing a series of new projects.

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Ms. Natasha Shawarib is an accomplished Jordanian development professional with over 25 years working with both international and national development organizations, large and small NGOs, and the government of Jordan. She is a senior consultant, advisor in the fields of civil society, institutional capacity building, Human Rights, Women Rights, Youth and Women Participation and Elections. She is also a researcher in development policies with special focus on Health and Education.

Ms. Shawarib served as President of the Women Organization to Combat Illiteracy, Board Member of the Jordan Society for



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Her publications include **Jordan Report – Social Watch 2002 Report “The Poor and the Market”**; **‘Factors Affecting Women’s Success in Jordan’s 2007 Parliamentary and Municipal Elections: Study’**, 2009 (co-author); **Human Rights Education: A Background Paper**, Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network, 2003, (co-author); **Education Chapter, Jordan National Agenda 2005** (co-author); **‘Civil Society in the Euro-Med’**, EMS Network: Euro-Med Seminars Newsletter, Malta Autumn 2010.

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Among his publications are **Morocco in the world economy** as well as **Le partenariat euro-méditerranéen à l’heure de l’élargissement: perception du Sud**. His most recent publication is « **Le Futur du Dialogue Méditerranéen de l’OTAN : pour un Dialogue Méditerranéen** » “Plus”? NDC, Rome.

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Among his publications are: **“The Syrian Policy in the Middle East : 20 Years of the Assad Doctrine (1970-1990)”**; **“From Tribe to Nation in Black Africa”**; **“Islam and International Relations: Towards a Clash of Civilizations?”**; **“Bachar al Assad from Syria: End of Regime or New Start?”**; and **“The Arab Spring: Challenges and Perspectives for Switzerland”**.



## Preface and Acknowledgments

*Stephen Calleya*

Throughout history the Mediterranean has continuously been at the centre of international relations. The end of the Cold War led some pundits to believe that the Mediterranean would be marginalized in global relations. The enlargement of the European Union towards the east, the rise of China in Asia and the emergence of India and Brazil as leading economic developing countries further cemented this perception.

Yet the process of globalization has not shifted international attention away from the Mediterranean. Two decades since the end of the Cold War it is clear that the Mediterranean remains an essential strategic theatre of operation linking Europe, North Africa, the Balkans, the Middle East and the Black Sea together. The physical importance of the Mediterranean as a geo-strategic waterway remains a constant.

Since 2011 the Mediterranean has again been in the limelight as a result of the transformation taking place along the southern shore of this region. In the space of a few years there has been a complete shift in the geopolitics of the region. The sea-change taking place in the Mediterranean has called into question the extent to which the role of the state in the Maghreb and Mashreq needs to go through a fundamental re-think so that a system of governance that consists of an inclusive society emerges.

Four years since the revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya it is still too soon to be able to interpret whether these states will be dominated by a cooperative or conflict dominant pattern of domestic and foreign relations. What is certain is that the Arab Spring of 2011 has unleashed a period of upheaval that has further attracted international attention to the Mediterranean.

The turbulent forces at play in so many of these states dictates the necessity to dedicate all diplomatic resources available towards addressing and hopefully resolving regional conflicts in the Mediterranean and to

developing a security arrangement that would help to sustain an outlook of stability in the region. Failure to introduce such a process is certain to negatively influence Mediterranean states' chances to implement political and economic reform.

Like any unforeseen and dramatic shift, regional dynamics triggered by the Arab Spring are forcing the research and policy-making communities to rethink accepted wisdoms and established approaches. It is clear that we must think of the role of civil society in transition if we wish to see democratization take place. Indeed, one aspect of this forced re-thinking is new attention to the subject of, and challenges to our understanding of civil society and democratization in societies in transition, as the 'Arab Spring' events do not squarely fit into the academic understanding of the shape, role and impact of civil society that has been developed on the basis of democratization and transition processes in other regions.

**T**his collection of essays addresses the issue of the role of civil society and democratization in societies in transition, in the light of the 'Arab Spring', and contributes to the debate on this subject. The contributors to this publication are representatives from academia, policy-making, and civil society organizations in North Africa and Europe. The publication is edited by Dr. Monika Wohlfeld, the holder of the German Chair for Peace Studies and Conflict Prevention at the Mediterranean Academic of Diplomatic Studies.

This edited publication has emerged from a Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies postgraduate seminar on the same subject matter held on Friday 15<sup>th</sup> March, 2013. It is thus worth highlighting that the authors of the papers presented in this special volume of Med Agenda engaged during the seminar in March 2013 in a vivid and lively interaction with MEDAC students many of whom are young diplomats from countries of the Mediterranean and beyond.

The Seminar has been made possible by **the German Academic Exchange Service (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst – DAAD) in conjunction with support provided by the German Federal**

**Ministry for Foreign Affairs and by the Human Dimension Program of MEDAC. This publication has been financed by the German Academic Exchange Service/German Federal Ministry for Foreign Affairs.**

The Federal Republic of Germany has been a stakeholder in MEDAC since 2009. In recognition of the vital importance of a Mediterranean region with strong, co-operative Euro-Mediterranean relations, the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in cooperation with the German Academic Exchange Service, established a German Chair in Peace Studies and Conflict Prevention at the Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies (MEDAC). The German Chair has been able to enhance the research and publication dimension of the Academy, in addition to teaching and supervision dimension of her work.

**The stake-holders of the Academy, the Governments of Malta, Switzerland and Germany, must be thanked for their continuous support to MEDAC, including its research and publication endeavours.**

***Professor Dr. Stephen C. Calleya***

Director

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January 2014



**The Role of Tunisian Civil Society: Two Years after the Revolution**



*Souad Gueblaoui*

***Dictatorship and emergence of a Tunisian Civil Society***

Two years ago, Tunisia used to be regarded as a police state, with serious human rights problems, with no freedom of expression, no freedom of association, no civil society, in the sense that means a civil society which can “serve as effective checks on Government power and sources of independent influence on it”.

The few Civil Society organizations that did exist were tightly controlled by the Regime and couldn’t play their role.

The political unrest which began in December 2010 ultimately toppled the President Ben Ali and his Government on 14 January 2011. The People of Tunisia gained the fabulous liberty of expression, the freedom of opinion, which offered spontaneously a space for the emergence of an effective civil society.

I’ll focus on this short paper on the political civil society, namely on Human rights organizations and associations which have been muzzled during the two authoritarian regimes that have governed Tunisia since its independence in 1956.

***The Tunisian civil society actors***

First of all, let us determine who the actors of the Tunisian Civil Society are.

They are women and men, labor unions organizations, students, academics, artists, intellectuals, journalists, bloggers, they share diverse array of ideologies and beliefs: They are democrats, secularists, socialists, communists, some advocate for moderate Islam, others advocate for radical Islam.

It should be mentioned that despite the fact that many human rights defenders were political prisoners while others were forced to leave the country, Tunisian Civil Society remained very active and never stopped its fight against dictatorship, using media and international arena, especially European, to reveal the human rights violations in Tunisia, to report practices of torture, conditions of detainees, the lack of justice, the comedy of elections, the corrupt practices of the regime, and so on.

### ***Revolution and empowerment of the Tunisian civil society***

During the popular revolts started in December 2010 in the west and the south of Tunisia after the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi, the Civil Society organized itself. Many observers considered that Civil Society played an instrumental role in bringing down the dictatorship: in fact, *it succeeded to move the popular rebellion for better conditions of life into a Revolution calling for the fall of the regime*. By taking full advantage of social networks the popular rebellion spontaneously diverted: thousands of demonstrations gathered in front of the Ministry of Interior, which was perceived as the trademark of dictatorship, shouting with political demands against the regime as “Dégage”, “Game over” in front. Civil society succeeded and President Ben Ali fled the country on 14 January 2011, which was made the official date of the Tunisian revolution. A short time later, all the political prisoners have been liberated from jail and the Human Rights defenders who were exiled abroad went back to Tunisia and were given heroes’ especially by the young people.

Nine months after, on 23 October 2011, and for the first time since the independence of Tunisia, democratic elections took place and passed off peacefully. A Constituent Assembly has been elected in order to draw the new Constitution of the country and a new government has been settled on 22 December 2011. The Islamic party Ennahda won the election with 42% of the votes. This Party has been praised, especially by some international media for its moderate party program. M. Rached Ghannouchi, Leader of that Party, who was one the main figure of the Tunisian civil society and a staunch opponent of Presidents Bourguiba and Ben Ali since the 1980’s, came back from London where he had taken refuge. It is interesting to note that following the October 2011 elections many figures of the

civil Society came to power: The President of the Independent Board of Elections, the President of the Republic; the President of the Constituent Assembly, The Prime Minister as well as several members of the Tunisian Civil Society became Ministers, heads of Political Parties, organizations and associations.

Since the revolution, it is estimated that 2,000 civil society organizations and associations have been created, in order to meet people's aspirations towards democracy, freedom and social justice and development. So, during the first year of the Revolution the situation Tunisia was offering an optimistic image of a country moving forward on the way of democracy. The People were proud to have for the first time in their contemporary history democratic Government representing different political sensitivities and supposed to put the country on the rights path.

### ***What is the situation today?***

It seems that euphoria has given way to political and social tension in Tunisia. The civil society which was united against a common enemy - the dictatorship - is today divided and victim of the clash of ideologies. Today in Tunisia, you can find so different definitions of democracy, different definitions of women and men rights, different definitions of the notion of Culture and Identity, even different definitions of Islam. To put the whole story in a nutshell, we can say that the Tunisian Civil Society is currently split into two divergent groups: *Islamists versus seculars*.

Before going further, I would like to highlight the difference between the Islamic movements and the Islamist movements:

1. The Islamic movement, mainly represented by the Ennahdha Party, Party of the Majority at the Constitutional Assembly and by civil society organizations and associations, is considered as a moderate movement.
2. The Islamist movement is represented by at least three political parties and by many civil society organizations (nobody knows exactly their number), influenced by hardliner movements like Muslim Brotherhood, salafists, wahabists and so on... Some of them are just conservatives

and not violent (as, for example, the Mormons in the United States) but others are radicals and consider that Tunisia is a Muslim country and must be governed in conformity with the principles of Islam, being under the illusion that ruling Tunisia is a divine right and that it is a duty for them to Islamize Tunisia. Some analysts note that Ennahdha Party is also divided between those who are true believers of democracy and those who are radicals, which makes things more complex!

3. On the other hand, we have the seculars who consider that Tunisia should be governed in conformity with the universal principles of democracy and human rights, recorded in the United Nations Conventions that Tunisia has signed and introduced in its national judicial instruments.

### ***Fields of confrontation between the representatives of Tunisian Civil Society***

- Islamic associations are very active: their members collect and distribute water and food and basic needs to poor families in the poorest urban and rural areas, providing free medical services, opening religious schools... Their educational and humanitarian actions are systematically filmed and videos showing the population's support those associations are broadcasted on the web. Some political analysts are convinced that those religious movements are not only building up a network of sympathizers and future voters for their party, but they are also trying to prove that they have the capacity to replace the state in its functions should the Republic fall and be replaced by an Islamic State (caliphate).

On the other side, the secularist civil society is also very active especially in trying to fight against extremism – it is struggling for:

- ***The adoption of Republican Constitution that guarantees civil liberties:***
  - Last year, the Ennahdha Party tried to integrate the *Sharia* as source of law into the new Constitution of Tunisia. In reaction, the civil society joined their efforts to block this initiative: they mobilized people to go out into street, called for national and international media to denounce this initiative, organizing several meetings and after an arm-wrestling of several weeks, this project has been abandoned.
  - The Ennahdha Party attempted also to introduce in the Constitution

the notion of complementarity between men and women, rather than the concept of equality between men and women. The civil society did not allow this constitutional “*innovation*” to be adopted and finally obtained that the Code of the personal status (adopted in 1957 and carries the main part of the guaranteed progressive rights for the Tunisian woman) cannot be modified by an ordinary law, but by a law requiring a qualified majority of two thirds at the Constituent Assembly.

– *Defending freedom of expression:*

The secularists brought up the contradiction between freedom of belief and the criminalization of attacks on the “*Sacred*”. They defend freedom of artists who are challenging every day the Islamists in producing their works. The wave of attacks by radical Islamists during the last two years and the failure of the Government to face them led to more violence targeting artists, intellectuals and political activists. The public opinion was shocked by the attack against the private TV channel NESMA, after the broadcasting of the movie *PERSEPOLIS* which denounces the misdeeds of the Islamist ideology. Violence culminated on the attack of the American Embassy on September 14, 2012, when four people were killed and 39 were injured in a protest against a film mocking Islam. These are some examples to show you how deep the scission inside Tunisian civil society is.

**Widening gap between civil society and escalation of violence in the country**

The Islamic and Islamist movements accuse the democrats and secularists parties and associations of trying to eliminate them from the political scene as did the former regimes before. The secularists are accusing the radical Islamist of trying to impose through violence, an Islamist agenda on the Tunisian population who is almost Muslim. They also emphasize that for centuries moderate Muslims, Jews and Christians integrated in Tunisia which has always been tolerant and opened to other cultures.

The divergence reached also the Constituent Assembly and rose among the elected deputies representing their political parties. Today, the new Constitution of Tunisia, supposed to be written in one year is still under discussion, the economic and social indicators of the country are negative

and tourists and foreign investors are waiting for the improvement of the security conditions to come to Tunisia.

The people of Tunisia who made the revolution for employment, justice, development and democracy don't understand why their life conditions are today worse than before; they are frustrated and terrified. The increase of conflicts of opinion and interests led to more and more violence inside the country and the murder last month of the leader of opposition party, Chokri Belaid, has been *the straw that broke the camel's back*.

Subsequently, the transitional Government went through the most serious political crises since the revolution. To reassure the People who lost its composure, a cabinet reshuffle took place recently in order to apply a social and economic program to save Tunisia from this dangerous situation and to respond to the objectives of the Revolution.

### **Raising of the awareness of the Civil Society's role in building democracy and development**

The new Prime Minister called the civil society as well as all the political parties to participate to the government actions to find solutions to main problems of Tunisia, such as unemployment, industrial and agricultural strategy, good governance, water and energy supply, reform of education, social justice and raising economy competitiveness.

### **Challenges ahead facing civil society**

At present Tunisian civil society is nascent and transitional with low capacities and limited resources (except the Islamic organizations). There also appears to be low capacity to create effective and policy-relevant networks. There is also a coordination challenge, as large numbers of new donors and INGOs arrive in Tunisia to support local civil society.

- To fully comply with its role, Tunisian civil society needs to be rebuilt because if the emergence of a multitude of associations might be seen as a healthy symptom of a modern society which has long suffered from suffocation. Those associations have to organize themselves to be considered as an effective group of pressure in the country. (For the moment they don't know each other and nobody really knows them).

- They have also to avoid the risk of confusion between their role and action and those relevant the political parties;

### **Role of Tunisian Civil Society today**

- First of all, **completion between extremists and secular civil society have to stop** in order to save the country from violence that could conduct it to a civil war (the example of what happened in Algeria in the 80's is still alive). **The Tunisian Civil Society should find and provide to the country an alternative ideology, not in conflict with Islamic values, but consistent with Tunisia's liberal and tolerant cultural heritage.** It becomes necessary for the security of our country, that the Tunisian Civil Society should include men and women from all walks of life, from all regions of the country and all generations, especially the youth.
- Islamic, Islamists and Secular CS have today a unique opportunity **to develop a new type of democracy adapted to the characteristics of Tunisia** and its history as an Arab, African and Mediterranean country.

### **Conclusion**

Should we remain optimistic about the positive development of Tunisia's civil society?

I can say yes because the consciousness has risen among the Tunisian civil society as well as among political parties and the current transitional Government that they are making history. Transition to a true democratic culture is going to take time, but they have to accept to working together in order to start the realization of the objectives of the Revolution which are democracy, freedom, equality and social justice values and principles of the Revolution. The People are waiting and have no more patience.

In conclusion I would like to underline this thought from Alexis de Tocqueville who said:

*"There is no country in which associations are needed more to prevent the despotism of parties or the arbitrary power of a Prince, than those in which the social order is democratic, adding that in countries where such associations do not exist, there will be no protection against any kind of tyranny".*

