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### Radicalism versus women's rights: Opportunities for women's political and civil representation in Tunisia

Louise Matsson  
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This memo was written by Louise Matsson, during her internship at the Swedish Defence Research Agency. Louise served in the African Security Studies team between 15 February and 4 July 2011 and the Memo served as her final report.

Justin MacDermott

Team Leader  
Studies in African Security

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## 1. Introduction

Since the fall of Tunisia's and Egypt's presidents Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and Hosni Mubarak in the spring of 2011, journalists worldwide have been writing encouraging articles about the Arab spring.<sup>1</sup> However, experts tend to be more reluctant on positive predictions; the fall of authoritarian regimes will perhaps not automatically imply democracy, stability and equal rights for all citizens. Nevertheless, the young Arab population has through repeated uprisings shown that the social contracts from governments to the people have yet to meet their wishes regarding jobs, wealth and a decent living.

It is argued that one of the reasons why the governments of authoritarian states such as Egypt and Tunisia have been accepted by the global collective is due to western countries' fear of Islamist alternatives to authoritarian rule, especially when considering the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region with its religious context.<sup>2</sup> It is therefore not surprising that different parts of the security policy research field mean that the recent 'openings' in the Middle East and North Africa are creating a void for radical, extremist and fundamentalist movements to increase their power. As examples, there have been insinuations that the Libyan rebels might have connections to Al-Qaeda and it has been argued that the power vacuum in Egypt might increase the likelihood of opportunistic moves by radical organizations. This could result in further destabilization of the region, posing threats of radicalization in neighboring countries as well.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, other fundamentalist movements could see opportunities for a development towards further Islamizing of states in general. Implicitly, there also exists an anxiety about how democracy per se could develop in countries that are so closely relating politics with religion - in that sense, authoritarian regimes, in favor of capitalism, could be said to create less of a security threat to the west.<sup>4</sup>

Even if the Sub Sahara African 'wind of change' has headed towards North Africa, manifested through in the Arab Spring, there are yet substantial changes to come. The uprisings have not settled; in Tunisia there are still infringements on freedom of expression and reports of police violence have occurred. In Egypt, people are still struggling against the military regime that took power after the fall of Mubarak.<sup>5</sup> The events that have taken place are already changing the picture of existing western security policy and development agendas within North Africa, thus making it of great interest to study.

Most observers argue that the protests seen in the Middle East and North Africa have neither been anti-west nor built upon ideology, but rather upon nationality and a wish for a new political order. The uprisings are not based on religious beliefs per se but rather on socioeconomic and political needs. The protesters showed an unforeseen capacity to unite; as they were fighting for a common goal, the possibility of cooperating across borders occurred. In both Tunisia and Egypt protesters stood side by side; young and old, Muslim and Christian, liberals and conservatives, men and women. In this sense, the revolutions have not only launched a breeze of democratization, but they have also created a window of opportunity to have a more holistic approach to society.

<sup>1</sup> Foremost with focus on revolutions that has taken place in Tunisia and Egypt, as well as ongoing movements in Bahrain, Yemen, Algeria, Morocco and last but not least, Libya.

<sup>2</sup> Goldstone, J. A:2011:14

<sup>3</sup> Benotman, Brandon:2011; Africa Confidential

<sup>4</sup> Lesser, I:2011; National Times 2011-03-24

<sup>5</sup> Ben Mhenni, L., Abbas, W: 2011

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*Women* were part of the revolution; they claimed their social and political rights. The unity amongst the population towards democracy could perhaps also create a liberalization of the view on women and women's rights in Muslim societies. This is particularly the case given that the power structures of the Arab world are changing; women are playing a larger role in society and in the creation of democracy, notwithstanding the patriarchal structures in society.<sup>6</sup> The US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton promoted the empowerment of Arab women at the 'Women of the World Summit' in March 2011, mentioning how women's empowerment could serve as a fundamental condition for the new democratic Arab world.<sup>7</sup> Likewise, the Arab Human Development Report stated that the deficit of women's rights is affecting both growth and advancement negatively. In the Washington Post, women's rights are in fact argued to be the litmus test of the Arab revolutions,<sup>8</sup> as when increasing women's rights, an increase in wealth will be nearby. A similar observation is made in World Politics Review, noting that "the better off women are, the more secure the nation-state is, whether on the level of health, wealth, corruption, conflict, or social welfare."<sup>9</sup>

In that sense, the status of women could be said to be both an issue for security and an issue for general development in a post-revolution setting.<sup>10</sup> This leads to the aim of this paper.

### 1.1. *Aim and method of the study,*

This paper will explore *to which extent women in civil society could, as an alternative political force, contribute and be part of the democratic process in revolutionist Tunisia?*

This guiding question will help to respond the queries below. If the worry is that radical Islam will fill the void left by the fall of the authoritarian regimes in Tunisia and Egypt, then a need is to map if and to which extent there exists an alternative force. One possible alternative to radicalization could be women and their involvement in civil society and politics. This memo will be based on the assumption that the greater part of women-based civil society groupings would not promote radical forms of Islam, which is associated with extreme forms of gender inequality and infringement of women's rights, as well as limitations on public and, in particular, political participation. Therefore radical forms of Islam would rather imply a direct contradiction to women's organizations agenda in public civil society.<sup>11</sup> Examples of this could be seen in other countries with Muslim forms of government such as Iran and Afghanistan, where women's rights are curtailed and women are oppressed by law and social order.

Hence, this memo explores the validity of this assumption, and women's role before, during and after (i.e. immediately post-fall of the Tunisian President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali – henceforth Ben Ali) mobilizing for protests within civil society as well as in politics. The possibility to engage them to be this alternative force to radicalization when building a democratic society is also studied. The memo concludes with recommendations on how to best support women's empowerment, and indirectly, lessen the probability of radicalism.

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<sup>6</sup> ISS:2011

<sup>7</sup> Clinton:2011

<sup>8</sup> The Washington Post:2011-02-20

<sup>9</sup> World Politics Review [2]

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> There are cases of women struggling to foremost achieve equal rights and not gender equality per se, as well as some women struggling against any change at all. These are however not in a majority, thus not making them a case to study; Grami, A:2008: 359

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### 1.1.1. Outline of the memo

Primarily, this study begins with a brief theoretical background regarding democratization, civil society in authoritarian states and radicalization. Thereafter a description of women's situation in pre-revolution Tunisia until the Jasmine revolution follows along with a brief overview of the limited threat posed by radicalism. In addition, their role in politics and civil society is explored. The next chapter covers the North African uprisings in general and the Jasmine Revolution in particular. Following this is a chapter on the situation regarding women's rights in Tunisia after the fall of Ben Ali. Radicalism, politics and civil society movements are explored. Subsequently, a concluding chapter comes where this memo ends with a brief discussion, lastly posing coming challenges in these questions with a perspective focusing on the MENA region.

## 1.2. *Theoretical background and assumptions*

What happens to women after a liberation struggle or a revolution? This is an important question for this study, foremost because women's participation might balance radical development, but also as there is a need to pin down how this window of opportunity could be seized. This is an area of study that could be developed further, and this section will theoretically deal with how democratization, radicalization and civil society could affect women's role in society.

### 1.2.1. Democratization

Women's access to power might not be readily available in a post-authoritarian state. Where women have mobilized against autocratic rule the experience from European and South American countries shows that, moving from autocracy to democracy, democratization rather lowers than increases women's representation in politics.<sup>12</sup> Studies in this field find that already existing informal networks are maintained by weak institutions in transitional democracies and semi-democratic states, and these networks will most likely be male dominated,<sup>13</sup> making it difficult for women to become involved in power at higher political levels.<sup>14</sup> Women need to participate in elected institutions where their concerns could be put on the agenda from the beginning, rather than being prioritized after other political reforms and lost on the way.<sup>15</sup>

### 1.2.2. Radicalization

The development of women's role in society might be at risk if more conservative alternatives gain power; the Talibans in Afghanistan and the Iranian regime are two illustrating examples of how a backlash on women's rights could occur if radicalization would flourish freely. In Afghanistan, the Talibans limited girls' rights to education to a minimum, and the regime in Iran gradually lessened women's rights and practically made women second class citizens after the revolution in 1969.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Razavi, S: 2000:vii ; Bjarnegård, E., Melander, E: 2011

<sup>13</sup> Bjarnegård, E., Melander, E: 2011

<sup>14</sup> "They changed the head, but not the regime": The first interim Prime Minister Mohammed Ghannouchi had a close relation to Ben Ali. Ghannouchi's successor Baja Cade El Sibs is also connected to the former regime, as he served as minister of foreign affairs under the president before Ben Ali, Habit Bourguiba; Al Jazeera [1]

<sup>15</sup> Dalmaso, E, Cavatorta, F : 2010:227

<sup>16</sup> NYT

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### 1.2.3. Civil Society

Dictatorship and oppression certainly forms the context of civic engagement and thus also affects a possible democratization. Thus, in order to promote civil society to build democracy, one need is to examine the impact of authoritarian states' hegemonic influence in society.<sup>17</sup> It has been shown that activists move back and forth between civil society and political (party) activities in authoritarian Arab regimes in order to increase their political effect.<sup>18</sup> This is an example of how 'activists' adjust their actions through different governmental and nongovernmental channels, in order to reach as much influence and gain as much power as possible.<sup>19</sup> Regarding women, experiences from other authoritarian countries tell us that women's rights activists seldom work in blocs to promote their rights.<sup>20</sup> In addition, it is argued that NGO's in authoritarian states generally are ill-equipped to lead a democratization movement, primarily because of their single issue focus which eventuates in limited support, and their dependence on both foreign financial support and governmental funding.<sup>21</sup>

## 2. PRE revolution: Until December 2010

### 2.1. *Women in Tunisia before the Jasmine revolution*

Tunisian women have one of the most developed positions in the whole MENA region<sup>22</sup> and the most secular identity as well. The pro-equality Code of Personal Status (CPS) was adopted by the government shortly after independence in 1956 and it is one of the main reasons for the development of Tunisia's gender equality agenda. The CPS had as objective to increase the equality between women and men and lead to women's emancipation and liberation. By the CPS, women have the right to vote, stand for office, the right to education and social protection, as well as the opportunity to work, et cetera. Tunisian women are legally entitled to education on the same terms as male citizens<sup>23</sup>, and women's advanced education combined with CPS's other rights have led to a high number of female representatives in national and local politics, as well as their participation in academia and at high-status-jobs. Consequently, Tunisian women have reached somewhat of a model status for other countries in the MENA region to aspire towards.

The governmental acknowledgement of women's rights was further advanced by economic development and urbanization. Such factors created opportunities for women to step away from their position at home where their occupation mostly concerned domestic production only.<sup>24</sup>

On the down-side, and in spite of the factors mentioned above, women are still expected to obey her husbands,<sup>25</sup> and men have shown resistance to the gender roles promoted by the government<sup>26</sup>. Men's traditional role as breadwinners, providers and heads of the household is seen upon as 'lost', and fundamentalist movements have underpinned these thoughts. This has

<sup>17</sup> Jamal, A. A: 2007: 138

<sup>18</sup> Langohr, V: 2004: 200

<sup>19</sup> Ibid p. 181-182

<sup>20</sup> Razavi, S: 2000:5

<sup>21</sup> Langohr, V. 2004

<sup>22</sup> With a few precautions; as the gender equality agenda was used by the regime to gain international recognition; Golding: [2] 2010: 6

<sup>23</sup> Freedom House

<sup>24</sup> Grami, A: 2008

<sup>25</sup> Ibid

<sup>26</sup> Freedom House; Grami, A: 2008

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contributed to the fact that there still exists a gap between the legal framework and the reality of women's private lives- foremost concerning the implication of family laws, through the opposition it has met by patriarchal beliefs. Violence against women and domestic oppression are still occurring problems in Tunisian family life. These acts are partly explained by men's lack of education, a high rate of unemployment in combination with other factors that make men feel vulnerable in society.<sup>27</sup> In addition to this, there still exists a stigma around questions of domestic violence, making it a neglected question on the women's rights agenda<sup>28</sup>. Hence, women are still not living on equal terms with men and they still face discrimination.

## 2.2. Tunisian women's situation in statistics prior to the revolution

Women in Tunisia have had the highest rate of female representatives in parliament in the whole MENA region.

Statistics on women's participation in society (until 2010)	
Women in parliament <sup>29</sup>	22,8%
Female ministers/Secretaries of state <sup>30</sup>	5
Women's Formal Labour Participation <sup>31</sup>	22,3%
Literacy rate, females <sup>32</sup>	69,6%

Figure 1. Statistics on Tunisian Women

However, Tunisia's lowest scoring category in Freedom House's women's rights country rating is in the factor *Political rights and Civic voice* with 2.8 on a scale of 1-5, which Freedom House suggests is a rather poor access to political power for women.<sup>33</sup> Around 50% of the university students are female, as are 66 % of the lawyers and judges<sup>34</sup>, but even if women are entitled to the same education as men, statistical surveys still show that men acquire a higher rate of literacy.<sup>35</sup>

## 2.3. Radicalization

To help understand the potential threat of radicalization on women's rights in Tunisia, the existence of radical tendencies is described below. As it happens, not much of extremism had space to evolve in Tunisia up until the Jasmine Revolution. Starting in the 1950's with the politics of President Habib Bourgiba, and continuing with anti-religious structures of President Ben Ali, the religious influence in public life was limited. As a result of legislation against Islamism, Tunisian radicals got lifelong sentences, were forced to exile or had to reform away from conservatism. It was rather secular intellectuals, trade unionists and lawyers who posed the largest threat on the regime of Ben Ali.<sup>36</sup> The oppression is the main explanation why Islamist

<sup>27</sup> Freedom House. For further information about masculinities, see Connell, R.W and Messerschmidt J.W: 2005.

<sup>28</sup> Goulding, K: [2] 2010:16

<sup>29</sup> Landguiden, *Tunisien – Sociala Förhållanden*

<sup>30</sup> In the government until the Jasmine revolution, out of 21 in total; Worldwide Guide to Women in Leadership, *Tunisia Ministers*

<sup>31</sup> Spierings, N., Smits, J: 2007

<sup>32</sup> Compared to the literacy rate for men: 86,4%; UI, *Tunisien, Utbildning*

<sup>33</sup> Where 1 is the lowest and 5 is the highest level of freedom to exercise their rights; Freedom House

<sup>34</sup> US Government

<sup>35</sup> UI *Tunisien – Utbildning*; Freedom House

<sup>36</sup> Foreign Policy

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groupings as such were not taking part in the revolution, even if they are now appearing to be candidates in the political agenda.<sup>37</sup>

It has been argued that the West's involvement has helped shaping the position of Islamism in the region. Inherently contradictory to democratic values, Western countries have supported North African and Arab dictatorships. In a sense, they have thus been part of pushing radicalism beyond control. Indeed, some observers note that the West's 'confederation' with the North African dictators has rather strengthened than eliminated Islamist threats.<sup>38</sup>

In sum, radicalization until the revolution was vague and successfully held at bay, thus not creating much of a threat towards women's engagement in Tunisian society.

## 2.4. Tunisian politics

It is noteworthy that not too much of political alternatives or opposition to the ruling party *Constitutional Democratic Rally* (RCD) existed before the Arab Spring.<sup>39</sup> Carnegie Endowment writes about the insignificance of the Tunisian political opposition, describing it as the weakest opposition in the whole region.<sup>40</sup> No real political opposition to the regime was allowed, and the existing oppositional parties<sup>41</sup> were not well-known to the public; commonly they were all grouped into 'the opposition', not giving recognition to any party differences.<sup>42</sup>

The oppositional parties that were legal under Ben Ali were few. The *Democratic Progressive Party* (PDP) and the *Liberal Social Democratic Party* (PSDL) were legalized but without parliamentary representation. The parties represented in parliament beside Ben Ali's RDC, until the revolution, were *Movement of Socialist Democrats* (MSD), *Popular Unity Party* (PUP), *Social Liberal Party* (PSL) and the newest oppositional party: *Green Part for Progress* (PVP). Certainly, the political opposition had ties to the regime, and more independent political alternatives did not gain any political power (i.e. they had poor results in elections).

### 2.4.1. Women in Tunisian politics

Women's representation in politics up until the revolution could also be questioned, as not many women were in actual decision making positions. It is being argued that women's rights were used as democratic facades and political commodities, not creating gender equality beyond the actual legal documents.<sup>43</sup> One observer notes that until the revolution, women's participation in politics was built upon top down functioning 'state feminism' where women supported a masculine state agenda.<sup>44</sup>

Women's part of political life before the revolution thus mainly appeared in political positions controlled by the regime, such as in parliament and in government. Five women out of around 20 held posts as ministers in the government up until the revolution, and 22.8 % of the members

<sup>37</sup> Ibid

<sup>38</sup> Taleb, N.N., Blyth, M: 2011:39

<sup>39</sup> RDC ruled from 1956-2011

<sup>40</sup> Carnegie

<sup>41</sup> Including the Democratic Progressive Party, Renewal Movement, and the Democratic Forum for Labor and Liberties; Carnegie

<sup>42</sup> Golding, K: [2] 2010:26

<sup>43</sup> Freedom House, *Country Rating Tunisia 2011*; Grami, A: 2008; NPR

<sup>44</sup> Goulding, K.: [2] 2010:8; Goulding, K: [1] 2009:126

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of parliament were female.<sup>45</sup> Towards the end of 2009, Ben Ali wanted to integrate more women into politics, and thus adopted a 30 % quota of candidates in regional and national elections. However, this quota was not realized before the revolution, but one could believe that the debates concerning this quota created a basis for the decision that was taken on gender parity in May 2011.<sup>46</sup>

In sum, women were substantially and formally represented in politics, but because of the authoritarian rule and the masculine state agenda, their actual power in politics could be questioned.

## 2.5. *Civil society*

### 2.5.1. Organized women and a vibrant civil society?

The lack of oppositional parties in Tunisia was combined with a weak civil society. The Tunisian government used Islamization as a reason to suppress political alternatives and civil society organizations focusing on anything other than women's rights.<sup>47</sup> The government threatened that Islamists would abolish the CPS if they came to power, as a way to mobilize Tunisian women's organizations to be part of the government's structures.<sup>48</sup> Thus, the only civil society groups that were permitted before the revolution were state sanctioned women's groups. Such CSO's were both financially and ideologically supported by the regime.<sup>49</sup> Women's organizations were part of a political 'secular' agenda, and the interdependent relationship between state and 'civil society' was built upon the regime's interest in their contribution to state development of the gender program,<sup>50</sup> a pattern true for other authoritarian countries as well. Moreover, these 'state-sanctioned' organizations were often run by state officials. As an example, the organization Union Nationale De La Femme Tunisienne (UNFT) was chaired by Ben Ali's wife Leila Ben Ali.<sup>51</sup>

Out of around 20 registered women's organizations in Tunisia, only a few of them were autonomous,<sup>52</sup> thus, the independent organizational life was severely restricted.<sup>53</sup> Independent civil society organisations were not allowed to take part in policy making processes, they were subject to arbitrary arrest and harassment by the state and they did not receive any state funding.<sup>54</sup> Even if there existed a number of Tunisian women's organizations (independent and dependent), few joined together to form a stronger network. Those human rights- and women's organisations that were independent from the state<sup>55</sup> and could have gained particularly much from collaboration rather showed this lack of capacity to co-ordinate their agenda with other

<sup>45</sup> These were: Minister of Culture Moufida Tlatli, Minister of Women's Affairs Lilia Laâbidi, Secretary of State to the Minister of Higher Education Fawzia Charfi, Secretary of State to the Minister of Education Rifaat Chaabouni and Minister of Health Habiba Zéhi Ben Romdhane; UI, *Tunisien – Sociala Förhållanden*; Worldwide Guide To Women in Leadership

<sup>46</sup> Golding: [2] 2010: 9

<sup>47</sup> Chalbi-Drissi, H; Golding, K.: [2] 2010:9

<sup>48</sup> However, it rather exist an absence of this view from Islamists in Tunisia; Dalmasso, E, Cavatorta, F: 2010: 221-222

<sup>49</sup> Goulding, K. [2] 2010:8; Goulding, K: [1] 2009:126

<sup>50</sup> Dalmasso, E, Cavatorta, F. 2010:221

<sup>51</sup> Golding, K: [2] 2010: 24

<sup>52</sup> Such as The Association of Tunisian Women for Democracy (AFTD), Association des Femmes Tunisiennes pour la Recherche et le Développement (AFTURD) and the Collectif Maghreb Egalité

<sup>53</sup> Carnegie

<sup>54</sup> Amnesty International, *Tunisia- Women's rights*

<sup>55</sup> Such as for example Ligue Tunisienne pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme (LTDH)

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organisations; resulting in vague frontlines and inability to address issues of human, political and women's rights further.<sup>56</sup>

Thus, although women's associations and networks existed prior the revolution, the Tunisian civil society was severely restricted, especially non-women's organizations. Again, those women's organizations that were allowed by the regime were not free but controlled by the state in different ways- mainly through state funding, but also by state officials holding leading positions in the organizations.

### 3. The revolution: December 2010- July 2011

#### 3.1. *The North African Context*



Fig. 2 Map of Tunisia

The uprisings seen in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Algeria<sup>57</sup> were based on democratic, socioeconomic and political demands. Explicitly that would be protests *against* mass unemployment and corruption and demands *for* the resignation of dictators, free and fair elections, and the creation of new constitutions.<sup>58</sup> As food prices, unemployment rates and oppression increased, civilians mobilized to seek a change in the inequalities in their countries. Observers are united in the perception that the protests were driven by a diverse group of people and not radicals. Neither was it driven by political parties or any specific civil society organizations. Moreover, women were part of all revolutions and protests in the whole region.

##### 3.1.1. Brief background on the Jasmine Revolution

The Tunisian protests all started in December of 2010 after a young student, Muhammad Bouazizi, set himself on fire. The local police had taken away from him his only way to earn money and provide for his family, a vegetable cart. The death of Bouazizi was the starting point of massive demonstrations and protests against the regime; against corruption and unemployment. A combination of restless wishes for a new constitution and the catalyst of organizing people: social media,<sup>59</sup> helped to spread the message and mobilized a massive amount of protesters to public arenas. The activists created a massive influx of people to public spaces, in spite of vague networks and lack of a structured organization. Protests were reported

<sup>56</sup> Golding, K: [2] 2010: 7

<sup>57</sup> As well as in the Middle East: Yemen, Bahrain, and Syria.

<sup>58</sup> DN: 2011-03-22; Carnegie Endowment

<sup>59</sup> Such as blogs, Twitter and Facebook; L. Ben Mhenni

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as peaceful and the demands of the activists were secular.<sup>60</sup> Ultimately, in mid January 2011, Tunisia's dictator Zine el- Abedine Ben Ali was forced to resign.

The uniqueness of the people's protests was not only its lack of formal leaders, but also the fact that the protesters represented a much diversified group. One of the participants in the protests, Salim Amamou, Deputy Minister for Youth and Sports in Tunisia told how the uprising became a revolution of the whole people, the protests came from everybody.<sup>61</sup> Protests involved different religious and political understandings, young as well as old, women and men. The unity behind the issues that activists' chanted for was striking.

### 3.1.2. Women's part in the Jasmine revolution

It has been said that the protests could not have succeeded without the support and participation of women<sup>62</sup>. The New York Times states, "the female factor in this new Arab dawn may yet prove to be one of the most powerful and fundamental ones in reshaping the region"<sup>63</sup>

Women participated in the Jasmine revolution, shoulder by shoulder with other groups of protesters<sup>64</sup>. They were blogging and protesting, questioning social, political and religious orders as they marched for democracy, proving to be part of the uniting factor amongst women and men in the joint struggle towards democracy in their nation. As such the participation of women should not be underestimated. Women claimed their rights and defiantly demonstrated their reluctance to the authoritarian regime. The combination of high education and the extended possibility of networking through social media as well as strategies for organizing themselves without any formal leader did most certainly affect women's participation in the demonstrations of democratic demands.<sup>65</sup>

In conclusion, proof of an unexpected mobilization and a new version of civil society activism were revealed through the protests. The citizens worked united in the struggle for unity and dignity. Women showed during the protests that they were ready to take part in changing the country.<sup>66</sup>

## 4. POST revolution: February 2011 until July 2011

The outcome of the Jasmine Revolution has given Tunisia a potential of becoming a stabilizing democratic country and a good example for other neighbouring countries in North Africa. This result will, however, depend on the outcome of coming elections, the level of civil society involvement and people's tendencies to rely on radical populist alternatives, as described below.

### 4.1. Radicalization

After the revolution, a worry is that if the protesters' needs are not met, and if the political and economic situation is not strengthened, radicalization might flourish. Indeed, as World Politics Review puts it, youth unemployment could increase populist ideas and make poor people

<sup>60</sup> Byman, D: 2011:49

<sup>61</sup> S. Amamou

<sup>62</sup> Peace Women; WWICS

<sup>63</sup> NYT: 2011-02-22

<sup>64</sup> This is also true for other countries in the MENA region; Bahrain, Yemen, Syria, as well as protests in Algeria and Morocco.

<sup>65</sup> Time [2]

<sup>66</sup> 60% of the MENA regions population is under 30 years old. 36 % of the household expenditures go to food, and ¼ of the young people in Tunisia stands without a job; Time [1]; The Economist

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vulnerable to radical influence.<sup>67</sup> Another source of anxiety is the current-order weak structure of politics. The fear of a conservative outcome of the constituent assembly is present.<sup>68</sup> The political void before the upcoming assembly election in October could benefit winds of radicalization and make Islamists use their organizational capacity to reach power. This could particularly happen if secular/moderate political movements are not mobilizing enough to form viable political options. However, even if future development of radicalization in the region still is a concern in the contemporary security discourse, there are observers who question the actual threat of a 'rising tide of radical Islam'.<sup>69</sup>

#### 4.1.1. Political Islam

The current interim Prime Minister Béji Caid Essebsi mentions how Tunisia could be a role model in building a new state where democracy and religion are unified, i.e. mentioning political Islam<sup>70</sup> as an alternative.<sup>71</sup> In Foreign Affairs it is being argued that political Islam would only be accepted by young Tunisians if it included freedom of belief, assembly and freedom of expression.<sup>72</sup> As conservative fundamentalists portray women's rights as a westernized phenomenon pushed upon the Arab countries,<sup>73</sup> some women's rights activists believe that political Islam poses a direct threat to the development of a more gender equal society, primarily because of its combination of religion and politics.

The Tunisian and Egyptian bloggers Lina Ben Mhenni and Wael Abbas hold that because of the oppression of Islamists, people have looked upon radicals as martyrs who could solve all different problems. Ben Mhenni mentions that the postponement of the election until October is opening up for Islamists to mobilize people in the mosques and drive propaganda to limit the freedom of women.<sup>74</sup> Another observer, Nadya Khalife, of Human Rights Watch's women's-rights division, mentions how Islamists have promoted the buildup of mosques inside of schools.<sup>75</sup> Still, the bloggers mention how Islamists need to be included within the democratic political system, just as anybody else.<sup>76</sup> Certainly democracy and civil society could hinder radicals' advancement through information sharing (e.g. free media) and free elections where people would get the opportunity to disclose the populism within the Islamists ideas.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>67</sup> World Politics Review [1]

<sup>68</sup> Africa Research Bulletin

<sup>69</sup> "Not a single sultan overthrown in the last 30 years [...] has been succeeded by an ideologically driven or radical government. Rather, in every case, the end product has been a flawed democracy- often corrupt and prone to authoritarian tendencies, but not aggressive or extremist" writes Jack A. Goldstone in Foreign Affairs, p. 14-15; "Radical Islam no longer seems to be the central game" says another security analyst in Africa Confidential.

<sup>70</sup> There exists diverse versions of Political Islam; and both the radical and the more democratically compatible/secular model have been suppressed during years of dictatorship in Tunisia. Political Islam must not mean conformity between political and religious values, where religion is used to legitimize one's power over another. The power could rather come from democratic elections where religious leaders stand outside of the corridors of political power. It would say that even if politics and religion could not be kept apart in these countries, political and religious institutions should be separated;

Fazlhashemi, M.

<sup>71</sup> DN: 2011-05-27

<sup>72</sup> Anderson, L. 2011:4

<sup>73</sup> Grami, A. 2008; NPR; Freedom House *Women's rights Survey- Tunisia 2011*

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ben Mhenni, Time [2]

<sup>76</sup> Ben Mhenni, L., Abbas, W.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid

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## 4.2. Politics after the revolution

Since there was a lack of leaders in the protests and no political parties stood as representatives for what the protesters asked for, the National Unity Government (NUG), formed in the political sequel after the fall of Ben Ali, did not represent the protesters. Right after the revolution, the NUG was formed by Mohammed Ghannouchi, the previous Prime Minister during Ben Ali. Apart from the political opposition<sup>78</sup>, trade unionists, independents and members from the Ben Ali regime were also included in the NUG. Negotiations between these different representatives were difficult, and new protests rose against the NUG because of the old regime's involvement. Consequently, the first interim-regime did not see any support from the people and Mohammed Ghannouchi resigned.<sup>79</sup> The trade unionists soon resigned from the NUG.<sup>80</sup> Moreover, it must be mentioned that the previous ruling party RCD was resolved after the protests. Most likely new parties will emerge out of its old structure. Whether women will have a place in that process is uncertain.

### 4.2.1. Taking decision about the election date

The current lead political figure is the second Prime Minister after the revolution; Beji Caid El Sebsi. His main task is to arrange an election to an assembly which will write the new constitution.<sup>81</sup> The assembly is to be elected in October 2011, at the same time as a new government is elected. The assembly's writing of the new constitution for the country is one step further towards creating a new political landscape in Tunisia.<sup>82</sup> An election where president and parliament are elected will occur after the October election, when the constitution is written. Different views have been portrayed about the date of the election. Initially, 24 of July was decided but politically involved spokespersons alarmed that difficulties might occur when going for election just a few (six) months after a revolution. The main arguments were that the possibility to organize, mobilize, and create an election campaign was going to be difficult for new political parties. They were thus indicating that doubtful 'democratic' elections would take place ahead if the election had not been postponed. On the other hand, representatives from civil society and political parties still claim that the postponement of the election to October 2011 was a bad sign. In the end of May 2011, the electoral commission decided to postpone it until 16 October. However, the final date for the assembly election (23 October) was decided by the Prime Minister Beji Caid Sebsi in the beginning of June 2011.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>78</sup> The opposition consisted of three oppositional parties; *Progressive Democratic Party* (PDP), *Democratic Forum for Work and Liberty* (FTDL) and *Ettajdid* (Renewal). PDP had no previous parliamentary representation but one position as minister –Najib Chebbi- in the government of 2009. The FTDL did neither have any seats in parliament but was offered one position in the government of 2009. However, the FTDL minister resigned from the former government because of the constraints from the regime. The third party invited to the National Unity Government, Ettajdid had only minor representation (2 seats) in parliament and it was the only oppositional party without earlier linkage to the RDC;

Carnegie  
<sup>79</sup> Carnegie

<sup>80</sup> However, the FTDL minister resigned from the former government because of the constraints from the regime.

<sup>81</sup> DN 2011-03-22

<sup>82</sup> This election was postponed in May by the President of Tunisia's independent election committee, with the motivation "*The time would not be enough to prepare all that is necessary for transparent elections*".

This decision has however not been popular neither amongst civil society nor by political parties. The Tunisian blogger Lina Ben Mhenni says "*The transitional government is not working to restore the country*" and the spokesperson of Al Nahda expresses a similar view; Reuters [1]; Ben Mhenni, L.

<sup>83</sup> Amamou, S.; Al Nagar, M.; Carnegie; Reuters, [2]; News Daily

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#### 4.2.2. Women's role in building a new constitution, parliament and government

Women have already been denied access to the transition processes after the fall of Dictator Ben Ali. When The Tunisian *High Commission for the Realisation of Revolutionary Goals, Political Reforms and Democratic Transition* met in mid March 2011, discussions got stuck around those who were present (former regime members) and those who were *not* present, and the conclusion was that in addition to neither having representatives from certain provinces nor young people, women had also been excluded from the Commission.<sup>84</sup> However, the interim government was created with two female ministers included (out of 21); Lilia Labidi, minister of Women affairs and Habiba Ben Romdhane, minister of Public Health.<sup>85</sup>

#### 4.2.3. Gender parity on the constituency Lists

The one major accomplishment regarding women's rights is the possible 50 % political representation of women in Tunisia. The commission has aimed at creating a constitutional assembly with gender parity. The Prime Minister Caid El Sebsi did not agree with the commission, instead arguing for 30 % women on the ballots.<sup>86</sup> Still, on 11 April it was finally decided that gender parity should be applied on party candidate lists in the Tunisian election.<sup>87</sup> A so-called "zipper system" will be practiced, where every other name on each party's list is a female. With the 50 % quota on the electoral lists, the parties are forced to look for female candidates. In spite of this accomplishment, one risk is that in each constituency there might be only one candidate elected – and if men are put on top of each constituency-list women might get under-represented, despite the gender parity. In a changeable political environment as the one in Tunisia up until the October election, new parties are formed and old structures are modified. The 50 % quota forces these political actors to recruit women into politics, and it creates an opening for women to become part of new political structures when the political scene is as dynamic as it is.

It is noteworthy that 67 political parties have announced participation in the parliamentary election, but only around 3-4 of them have women in leading positions. It has been proved a challenge to maintain the agenda of women's rights in transition and consolidation of democracy. Other more 'urgent' questions are put on the agenda, and women's rights are still often used in political bargaining.<sup>88</sup> The Progressive Democratic Party (PDP) has a female Secretary General, Maya Jribi, but in the case of Tunisia, further information regarding women's participation in the main political parties: *Ettajdid* (the communist party), *El Majd* (the Tunisian Communist Workers' party) and *The Social Liberal Party* (PSL) have not been found, due to the ongoing political process.

Summarizing this, truly *any* acknowledgement of women in politics is argued to have a value, irrespective of future policy outcome regarding women's rights. The parity resolution is a step towards a more equal representation, and it has a symbolic value as it to some extent gives a public recognition of women in politics. The committee has adopted a proportional

<sup>84</sup> Neither was any women nominated to join Egypt's committee to reform the constitution; Voice of America; Magharebia

<sup>85</sup> In the interim government formed 17 of January 2011, out of 21 ministers in total; CIA, World leaders *Tunisia*

<sup>86</sup> Women Dialogue

<sup>87</sup> Tunisia Focus, *L'AFTRD se félicite de l'instauration de la parité femme- homme*

<sup>88</sup> Razavi, S. 2000: 39; The Washington Post 2011-02-20

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representation which in combination with the gender quota has given the possibility of lifting several female party candidates to power as well as ensuring more inclusive representation.<sup>89</sup>

#### 4.2.4. Muslim parties

It has been argued that Islamists in Tunisia and Egypt act pragmatic once they now have been given the opportunity to become part of politics.<sup>90</sup> Likewise, the authors of the book *Civil Society and Democratization in the Arab World – The dynamics of activism* conclude with mentioning how Arab religious movements thirst for inclusion and democratic practices, as shown in the quotation below:

*Islamist movements are increasingly calling for democratic practices and procedures to be implemented [...] the dichotomy [between] pro-democratic secularism vs. authoritarian Islamism is problematic*<sup>91</sup>

The most prominent political Islamist alternative in Tunisia is Al Nahda (also Ennahda). It is an organization and a party with some connections to Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, and it is headed by the spokesperson Rachid Ghannouchi.<sup>92</sup> Because of its religious tendencies, Al Nahda was banned under the Ben Ali regime. The leader of the party, Ghannouchi, has been visible in media since the fall of Ben Ali, and apart from other political statements, he has also expressed Al Nahda's view on women in society and politics. He has repeatedly mentioned that the CPS will not be interfered with or rejected, and mentioned that women will enjoy equal rights as well as being able to run for any political position. Even if being a conservative Islamist alternative, Ghannouchi means that democracy includes every citizen and that women should be included in politics, and democratic values of individual freedom are promoted.<sup>93</sup> Notably, Al Nahda did also call for parity between men and women in the upcoming October election.<sup>94</sup>

Most of the more influential Islamists lived abroad during the regime of oppression, but those who were staying in Tunisia were "forced to form a coalition with unlikely secular and communist bedfellows".<sup>95</sup> This might be a source of what appears as Al Nahdas pragmatism, showing their willingness and flexibility to cooperate; characteristics that could be a positive possibility during a period of political transition to democracy. Naturally, there might still appear those in Al Nahda who do not seek women's participation in politics.<sup>96</sup>

#### 4.2.5. The Salafis

Besides Al Nahda, another political force is the Salafis. The Salafis have significant political influence without having a political party. Therefore, when it comes to radicalization and the most distinctive threat against women's rights, the Salafis need to be considered. The Salafis are an ultra-conservative assembly of radical Muslims, and even if not a political party, their existence will affect the political future of Tunisia. They do not see any reason for women to

<sup>89</sup> Women Dialogue

<sup>90</sup> Hamid, S. 2010; 40

<sup>91</sup> Dalmasso, E and Cavatorta, F. 2010; 219

<sup>92</sup> However, Al Nahda rather links itself to the Turkish AKP than the conservative Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt.

<sup>93</sup> Financial times; Reuters [3]

<sup>94</sup> Dawn

<sup>95</sup> Foreign Policy

<sup>96</sup> La Croix, S

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gain any political or social role in society.<sup>97</sup> It is argued that as Al Nahda becomes more 'liberal' and creates more space for secular beliefs and women's emancipation, the regressive Salafi movement is gaining momentum backwards. This will most likely increase conservatism and create a zero-sum game overall in Tunisian Islamist politics.<sup>98</sup>

As the Arab world's most secular state, Tunisian women have a lot more freedoms than their neighboring sisters. However, these freedoms might not always be compatible with a conservative way of living. Tunisian women are worried of what might happen if religious parties get too much power in free and fair elections.<sup>99</sup> When considering women's rights, there is certainly a need to observe the actions taken by reactionary movements such as the Salafis. A vibrant civil society could certainly contribute to such monitoring.

### 4.3. Civil society

Taking the weaknesses described in the chapter '*Organized women and a vibrant civil society?*' into account, civil society is slowly developing in Tunisia in the void after the revolution. Experts argued from the beginning that new NGO's were to emerge and gradually create activism focusing on human- and women's rights, as well as forming groups founded to monitor upcoming elections.<sup>100</sup> As noted prior to the revolution, the women's organizations that were not connected to the regime were persecuted. Today, it has been observed that women's organizations are uniting towards the goal of creating a democracy where women are represented.<sup>101</sup> Encouragingly, in a poll in which the respondents (men and women) were asked about the gender parity quota, a larger number voted *for* the quota than those who voted against it,<sup>102</sup> showing the acceptance for women's participation in politics.

#### 4.3.1. Women in social movements

The Tunisian Sophie Bessis, Deputy Secretary General of International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) notes that "the major and some of the most respected figures in [Tunisian] civil society are women"<sup>103</sup>

Still, organizations such as the Tunisian League for Human Rights, who are promoting democracy and political pluralism, have explicitly expressed that their focus is on general questions rather than specific questions - such as women's rights. This is why it is of great importance that women's organizations take a step forward as an actor in the transition process, speaking loud about their wants and needs. Which they are; already in March researchers, women politicians, NGOs and people from the reform commission met to discuss the future of the democratization and gender parity on the lists to the constitutional assembly.<sup>104</sup> The women's associations in Tunisia are currently adjusting the agenda for future struggles towards women's rights, searching for the protection of gender equality in the upcoming constitution.<sup>105</sup>

Khadija Cherif, a long-time feminist activist, claims that the women's movement in Tunisia is a model for democracy and secularism, and holds that "the force of the Tunisian feminist

<sup>97</sup> La Croix, S

<sup>98</sup> Ibid

<sup>99</sup> NYT

<sup>100</sup> Carnegie

<sup>101</sup> FIDH

<sup>102</sup> 45.2% are for and 41.1% are against; Women Dialogue

<sup>103</sup> FIDH

<sup>104</sup> Women Dialogue

<sup>105</sup> Ibid

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movement is that we've never separated it from the fight for democracy and a secular society".<sup>106</sup>

Democracy means equality, and Sophie Bessis argues that independent women's organizations such as AFTD, AFTURD and the Collectif Maghreb Egalité could use their earlier position as 'opposition' to the Ben Ali regime to act for and demand women's rights, transparency and democracy from the interim government when creating the new Tunisian political agenda.

Likewise, women could serve as actors for change outside of politics and conventional civil society (read: CSOs), particularly in this era of 'Netivism'. Female bloggers have had the power of turning public spaces into something reachable and social media are increasing the opportunities of getting one's own voice heard.<sup>107</sup> This is true for women as well as men in all different Arab countries, and not only Tunisia. These are certainly factors that will help to increase ordinary citizens' and women's, possibility to have a say in political and public issues.

The major question is whether women's movements and a former vague civil society could transform into a sustainable part of formal politics. Women working in a shifting political setting will also need to form alliances and work both inside and outside of politics in order to forward their message.<sup>108</sup> If women have reached a seat in parliament or a post as a minister, what can assure that these women do not present the views of their men, fathers or brothers? Leila Rahbani, University professor at the Lebanese University argues for this connection in her article about Arab women, that "[Tunisian women are] tied to political heritage and the influence of their slain relatives"<sup>109</sup>

Similarly, it is discussed that 'modern' reforms could not change gender relations more than at the surface. Al Jazeera reports:

*But the test here will be how well will economically disenfranchised women - from the south or the centre - fare in the polls. There are issues of opportunity, social capital, capacity, access, awareness, and power involved.*<sup>110</sup>

Those who actually benefit from women's advancement in politics and civil society might only be a small privileged group of women in specific geographic areas, such as larger city regions.<sup>111</sup>

To sum up, women are engaging and mobilizing in Tunisia to have their voices heard. They know how to organize themselves from earlier experiences of civil society organizations and they know how to share information. The largest challenge is thus to create the right networks to get themselves into politics and to not get women's rights rationalized away for larger questions, but rather included in human rights questions.

## 5. Concluding discussion

This paper has sought to envision structures within the Tunisian society where strengths and weaknesses for democratic transition exist. It has further had the ambition to begin to map out the possible ways of creating stable democracy in Tunisia, where women play a part of politics and civil society. In the move from authoritarianism towards democratization it is important that

<sup>106</sup> NPR

<sup>107</sup> Wheeler, D. 200; 18

<sup>108</sup> Razavi, S. 2000; .ix

<sup>109</sup> Rahbani, L. 2010

<sup>110</sup> Al Jazeera [2]

<sup>111</sup> Esposito, J.L 1998; viiii-xi

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both political parties and civil society organizations are strengthened; this is in order to achieve transparency, accountability and to reduce corruption. In the long run democratic structures within parties need to be adopted and civil society movements must be able to function regardless of their position towards the ruling party; a transparent political environment needs to be created.

Despite the conscious efforts done by the Ben Ali regime to enhance the position of women in civil society and political parties up until the revolution, women's participation in these areas have been present, but not free. Given the reluctance towards women's rights in radical Islam, women could play a particular role in creating a more open political environment where inclusive forms of democratic development are prevalent. To sustain women's inclusion/participation and lessen the impact of radical forms of Islam, several aspects need to be considered. The tool *electoral engineering* usually referred to as quota systems or reserved seats in order to make female representatives part of the political picture is one way to go. Gender parity quotas have already been decided for the party lists in the Tunisian election in October. In addition, support for establishing *women's wings of political parties* and *capacity building of female members* of parliament could be considered as ways of empowering women within parties and those women elected.

The challenges in creating an inclusive democracy are the next step. Several Tunisian observers note the challenge of creating a democracy within a context where democratic values have not existed before; certainly, democratic values are not built overnight.<sup>112</sup> The difficulties of *uniting in the same definition of democracy*, understanding democratic ideals and how to rebuild a system that has been entirely corrupt are obvious. The political culture might make it difficult for some political parties to accept a defeat in elections. Anyhow, it needs to be repeated that during demonstrations the protesters were all united, regardless of their political opinion. Liberals and conservatives stood side by side.

In a post revolution context where oppositional parties are poorly developed, the transformative political arena has been filled with former governmental representatives. Formal and informal networks in Tunisian politics pose a threat towards those underrepresented; women, youth and other groups. As Ben Ali's politicians are allowed in the transition government, they might try to capture power in the coming political events. In one sense, not only women's questions could be delegated to the political backseat, but also minorities' and rural citizens' questions might be ignored. In order to avoid informal male centred networks and create structures of internal democracy within the political parties, *political institutions need to be strengthened*. Participation of politicians from the Ben Ali regime involved in the transition process does not only undermine the transitional work and trigger new protests from a wider audience, but also underpin informal (male) dominated networks, making it more difficult for new (female) political leaders to emerge. Indeed, *as part of a transitional justice process, those connected to Ben Ali, who are found to have committed human rights abuses, need to be brought to justice in order to kept from dominating the political process*. Nevertheless, this does not exclude the importance of reconciliation efforts to pave the way for future cohesion in society.

The ethnic, economic and religious diversity of elected women will be a future subject of analysis - urban or rural, certain tribes or different classes are all distinctions that might affect female representation. At the same time, this might be as much of a problem with already existing representation of their male counterparts. Moreover, those actually working for women's questions inside the government should *keep a tight contact* with autonomous

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<sup>112</sup> Amamou, S; Ben Mhenni, L., Abbas, W; Goldstone, J. A. 2011; 14

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movements on the outside, and not only be satisfied with *feminizing political parties*, but also *listen to the needs of women outside of politics*.<sup>113</sup>

In terms of women's rights, the Tunisians gathered around the country's avant-garde in gender questions and women's political representation, well-developed education and their stable economy. There exists a pride amongst Tunisians over their developed country, a factor that Ben Ali used to sustain his autocratic rule.<sup>114</sup> The distinguished role of Tunisian women in society, the large middle class sector, and an overall educated population are all three factors that create good conditions for a democratic transition in Tunisia. In comparison, in other countries in the region, women have not participated in public life to the same extent, literacy rates are much lower and poverty is prevalent. However, since such a large part of women's organizations had connections to the Ben Ali- government, it might turn out to be challenging to involve persons without strings attached to the former government. The organizations that have existed up until the revolution, without support from Ben Ali's regime, have not attained any larger momentum until just recently.<sup>115</sup> In spite of this, it has been seen that women have identified the women's movement to fight for democracy. They are *educated and capable*, but there is a need to *further strengthen their unity* and maintain the movement's momentum in order to avoid women's questions to be dropped out of the agenda.

At the same time, women worry about a radical backlash.<sup>116</sup> Even if people are prone to embrace the new values of democracy, military attempts to gain power might occur, which in the long run could block Islamists from power and strengthen radical tendencies.<sup>117</sup> It has been suggested that political exclusion creates a risk that radical Islamism will evolve; some observers say that Al-Qaeda could capitalize on the situation to recruit North African fighters during a period of political unrest as the current one in Tunisia.<sup>118</sup> The risk occurs if no development is reached, youth employment increases, or the new constitution fails to give the people what they have been asking for. Both women's rights and democracy would then be at stake, and the recruitment of young men on the countryside to radical movements such as different cells of Al-Qaeda might become easier. The momentum of Islamist movements and parties are one of the challenges seen from a gender perspective in Tunisia. Political Islam needs to be considered as a natural factor within this context, as inclusiveness of Islamists in the political system is the most important factor if radicalization is to be avoided, a thought not only shared by observers, but also a view agreed upon by bloggers from Tunisia and Egypt.<sup>119</sup> Therefore, it seems better to be *inclusive of Islamists* in the political system. In one sense the gender parity quota is not only a step taken towards women's equal political representation. Recalling that women's organizations are uniting towards the goal of creating a democracy where women are represented lends credibility to the assumption of this Memo, that women could provide a counter-force to radical Islam. Should the political ballots result in close to equal representation of women and men in politics, the women there would thus be likely to provide a strong counter-balance to any attempt of undermining women's rights in the name of Islam. Thereby, the risk of radicalization is indirectly reduced.

<sup>113</sup> Razavi, S. 2000; viii

<sup>114</sup> Goulding, K. 2010; Langohr, V. 2004; 200

<sup>115</sup> Golding, K. 2010

<sup>116</sup> "Many fear that what started as a women-driven secular Arab spring might give way to an Islamist summer" Goulding, 2011:2; Ben Mhenni; FIDH

<sup>117</sup> Goldstone, J. A. 2011:16

<sup>118</sup> Lesser, I, *Europe in the driver's seat in Libya*; National Times 2011-03-24; Byman, D. 2011

<sup>119</sup> Goldstone, J.A. 2011; 14-16; Taleb, N.N., Blyth, M. 2011; 39; Hamid, S. 2011; 40, Ben Mhenni, L., Abbas, W.

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At last, the recommendation must be to support the development of capacity at individual level - with both male and female representatives - as well as to support the enabling structures. This could for example happen through workshops where activists and members of NGOs from Arab countries are connected with activists that have participated in other revolutions that succeeded. A pan-Arab network between different Arab bloggers, activists, and journalists was already created during the revolutions, and this network could be used to share experiences and information about state building in this political sequel. Certainly, such pan-Arab networks could also benefit from drawing up strategies on how to seize the opportunity to empower women during the transition to democracy. Moreover, these networks could benefit from financial and educational support from the West/the European Union. As the European Union considers its future assistance to Tunisia and the wider region in areas of democracy support, transitional justice and reconciliation processes, women need to be included in order to create and enhance the full potential of these countries.

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