

CORDOBA WORKSHOPS REPORTS

Lessons Learned from the Experiences of Dialogue and Collaborative Work between Islamist and Secularists in Tunisia

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THE CORDOBA FOUNDATION OF GENEVA

CFG is a non-profit Swiss non-governmental organization working in the field of peace promotion. We are working primarily on tensions and polarizations in Muslim-inhabited societies, and we aim to strengthen the theoretical and practical resources for conflict transformation in Muslim-majority countries. Established in Geneva in 2002, our Foundation promotes the exchange between cultures and civilizations, in the spirit that prevailed in Cordoba in the 10th century. The Andalusian city called "Capital of the Spirit" remains an almost unique model of peaceful coexistence and mixing of ideas.

www.cordoue.ch

EL JAHEDH FORUM

The El Jahedh Forum is a cultural and intellectual platform that emphasizes the importance of both local and international dialogue. It contributes to trends in the advancement of innovative thinking to gain historical knowledge that controls the strategies of nations facing challenges. Its goals are achieved through knowledge, freedom, democracy and unity in order to achieve development with a modernity connected to its heritage. The El Jahedh Association is a Tunisian non-governmental organization, which obtained the governmental license on June 12, 1990 and was registered in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Tunisia No. 77 on October 22, 1990. It was classified as Cultural Association by decision of the Ministry of the Interior on 23 November 1992.

www.jahedhforum.org

NORTH AFRICA PROGRAM

The North Africa Program is jointly developed with the 'Religion-Politics-Conflict' Bureau of the Human Security Division (HSD) of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA). The area of interest of this program is the polarizations and tensions existing at the intersection of religion and politics and / or involving political actors with religious references. Inclusive, participatory and peaceful societies in the region are the overall goal of this program. The objectives to contribute to this are 1) to reduce tensions between Islamists and secularists, 2) to reduce the factors leading to the political exclusion of religiously inspired actors, and 3) to respond to violent religious discourses with alternative discourses and practices.

CONTENTS

THE CORDOBA FOUNDATION OF GENEVA.....	3
EL JAHEDH FORUM.....	3
NORTH AFRICA PROGRAM.....	3
THE GENERAL FRAMEWORK.....	5
THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT.....	6
THE UNSTABLE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ISLAMISTS AND SECULARISTS	7
THE DIFFICULT COEXISTENCE BETWEEN ISLAMISTS AND LEFTISTS.....	8
THE ISLAMISTS' RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER (NON-LEFTIST) PARTIES.....	10
CHALLENGES TO POLITICAL COEXISTENCE AND SOCIAL COHESION	11
THE FACTORS UNDERLYING SUCCESS AND LESSONS LEARNED.....	13

THE GENERAL FRAMEWORK

In cooperation with the Religion, Politics and Conflict desk of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs and the Al-Jahedh Forum, the Cordoba Foundation of Geneva organized three workshops in Tunisia on the problematic interface between religion and politics, and the possibility of establishing a dialogue between Islamists and Secularists, especially Leftists. The aim was to facilitate the creation of political conditions supportive of the transition to democracy, while eschewing all forms of political violence.

The aim was to support Tunisia at this difficult juncture, the free world having welcomed the Tunisian revolution, which ran a civilized and peaceful course. In the delicate and theorny process of transition from tyranny to democracy, Tunisians have endured seven years of difficult and complex challenges, including doctrinal and ideological differences and contradictions.

The urgent need to persist with efforts to extricate Tunisia from her current predicament was thrown into sharp relief by successes on more than one level. Three elections – to the National Constituent Assembly, the Parliament and the Presidency of the Republic – had been conducted in a calm atmosphere of personal commitment. Those successes in turn facilitated the successful formation of coalition governments in the immediate wake of the revolution: first the Troika, then the so-called national unity government ushered in by the Nidaa Tounes (big-tent) party.

From the outset, the organizers strove to invite politicians, activists, youth and researchers to participate in these various workshops, with an eye to the diversity of

views and experiences. These meetings brought together a broad array of Islamists and leftists, including those from the radical left-wing Popular Front, as well as liberals, socialists, nationalists, trade unionists, and constitutionalists from within Nidaa Tounes and elsewhere. The desired aim was to promote peaceful coexistence between political actors with different ideological backgrounds, with the aim of supporting the democratic transition and social cohesion from impacts that could demolish the entire edifice, dragging Tunisians back to the days of arbitrary despotism.

The controversy over the role of religion in Tunisian society re-surfaced after the emergence of the Islamic trend movement (*Mouvement de la Tendence Islamique*) as a political actor (now named Ennahdha, literally *the Renaissance Movement*). When this movement began, its ideology was influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood movement, and so its discourse drew no line between religion and state, or between Islam and politics. However, the revolution ushered in marked changes to the public sphere, and Ennahdha's position on several political issues significantly evolved. This stirred up doubts about the problematic relationship between religion and politics: had a decisive historical balance genuinely been struck in Tunisia, or had we to date seen no more than delaying tactics, and the pursuit of material gains?

Are the indicators robust enough to suggest that the transitional process in Tunisia will not be affected by persistent ideological differences on the issue of religion vs. state?

Did Ennahdha reach a final decision on the question of political Islam: did it opt consciously and irreversibly to defend

democracy and uphold the civil state? Could the overall situation be affected by the other elements within the arena of political Islam, such as Hizbut-Tahrir, or the Salafi circles, in all their varied configurations? Is it possible to overcome the differences between the Islamists and the various secular parties, including the Tunisian left and the Popular Front?

Is it possible to attenuate the Islamic/secular dispute in Tunisia in terms of the relationship between religion and politics without negative repercussions for the position of the two parties on social issues? This is the framework within which the three dialogues were held between the two parties.

The first workshop was organized on 3 March 2017 and was entitled "Religion and Politics in the Tunisian Context". The aim of this workshop was to situate the problem in its evolving local historical context, and thereby lay bare the deep roots of the dispute.¹

The second workshop was held on 19 May and was devoted to the evaluation of two important experiences that had a direct bearing on the relationship between Islamists and Secularists. The first, known as the 18 October initiative, occurred before the revolution, in the era of President Ben Ali. The second concerned the Troika government following the elections for the National Constituent Assembly.²

The third workshop on 23 September 2017 focused on the alliance between Nidaa Tounes

and Ennahda, an alliance that at the time of writing continues to hold up, and became known as the National Unity Government after the removal of Prime Minister Habib Essid (following a vote of no-confidence) and the appointment in his stead of Youssef Al-Shahed.³

These experiences of dialogue yield cumulative benefits, including numerous lessons that serve to explain the Tunisian context, through analysis of the constituent elements of power, and the failures of the current post-revolutionary political situation. The following notes highlight the findings captured by the three workshops.

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

For a long time, the relationship between religion and politics has been one of the most important problems raised in Tunisia. Historically, there were rarely calls to separate religion from the state, but the political leadership was careful, since the constitutional party led by President Bourguiba established a national state after independence, to subject Islam, as a religion, culture or discourse, to the requirements of political and social reform. When the independent state was established, President Bourguiba recruited Islam into the service of the state, and this became an official policy of the ruling party. Bourguiba's policy on the religious issue left a profound mark on society and the state, but it remains controversial. Those who defend it argue that there is no

¹ Rapport d'atelier : Religion et politique dans le contexte tunisien actuel : <http://cordoue.ch/publications-mega/workshop-reports/674-rapport-d-atelier-religion-et-politique-dans-le-contexte-tunisien-actuel>

² Rapport d'atelier : Evaluation de l'expérience de la Troïka : <http://cordoue.ch/publications->

[mega/workshop-reports/686-rapport-d-atelier-evaluation-de-l-experience-de-la-troika](http://cordoue.ch/publications-mega/workshop-reports/686-rapport-d-atelier-evaluation-de-l-experience-de-la-troika)

³ Rapport d'atelier : Evaluation de l'alliance Nidaa Tounes – Ennahdha : <http://cordoue.ch/publications-mega/workshop-reports/719-rapport-d-atelier-evaluation-de-l-alliance-nidaa-tounes-ennahdha>

justification for a link between religion and politics, because that would lead to "absolute tyranny". In this sense, they fear any political movement that derives its legitimacy and policies from religion, for they believe that religion is a personal matter. They point out that recognition of Ennahdha was and still is conditional upon its respect for democracy. On that basis, they believe that democracy in Tunisia still stands a good chance, despite the persistence of this controversy, and that Ennahdha simply needs to convince citizens that it stands by the statement it released during its last conference, when a line was drawn separating the political from the religious as its president Rashid Ghannouchi announced that his movement is not a part of "political Islam."

Although the Zaytouna (now Zaytouna University) closed its doors after independence in 1956, its influence has continued in many forms, especially in the religious and cultural spheres, serving as a defensive repository of religion and identity. Some considered that modern elites did not deal objectively with Zaytouna, although its representatives did not speak with one voice. There was still an overarching power relationship between the regime and the teachers of Zaytouna, its graduates, and those influenced by it. Nevertheless, some of the Zaytounites stood with Bourguiba and supported him in what he did, and thus religion as a whole was at the disposal of the state, followed its policies, and endorsed its positions and views.

The question of an "Islamic state" arose only with the emergence of the Islamic movement. That slogan was rejected by the anti-Islamist movement, which considered that the state should be non-ideological, even as the Islamic movements tried, from their inception, to defend the theocratic concept. Although the Islamic trend movement's pronouncements

and texts did not include a call for the establishment of an Islamic state to replace the modern state established by the constitutional party led by Habib Bourguiba, the ideological dimension of the state was present in the perception of the first generation of Islamists, which made no separation between the religious and the political. On this basis, the Islamist movement in Tunisia was accused by its opponents, especially the Leftists, of being a movement for the establishment of a theocratic and priestly system, and indeed some time elapsed before it denied the charge and distanced itself from it.

THE UNSTABLE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ISLAMISTS AND SECULARISTS

The first nucleus of the Islamic movement was born well away from the public eye, but after a while it began to interest the press, the elites and the remaining Zaytouna elders. The message of its founders ran counter to the prevailing discourse, whether in mosques, official circles or universities. It soon made headway and imposed itself across the country. When the secret movement was discovered, it moved to announce the establishment of a party and applied for a permit from the Ministry of the Interior. Although it declared itself to be democratic and renounced violence, Bourguiba responded to the plan by arresting the movement's leaders and main cadres.

This shift from secrecy to openness, and the beginning of the establishment of a political discourse responsive to the demands of elites on freedoms and multi-partyism, has complicated the multi-faceted relationship between Islamists and Secularists. Notwithstanding doubts about the movement's actual orientations and affiliations, the positions of the parties

diverged widely. The first trial of the leadership of the movement was an important test for these elites, most of whom stood against the regime and defended this emerging movement's rights of expression and organization. This angered Bourguiba and almost drove him personally to pronounce a death sentence on Ghannouchi.

Then mediators intervened, leading eventually lead to the release of the Islamists, enabling them to resume their activity more vigorously and maintain relations with many secular parties. In the last years of President Bourguiba's reign, a coordinating body was formed between the main opposition parties, led by the Social Democrat movement, founded by the former Minister of the Interior and Justice, Ahmed Mestiri. The Free Islamic Movement was invited to be an active member this body, the first of its type in the history of the independent state.

After the coup by Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in November 1987, the country entered a new phase, and the movement participated in many initiatives and consultations with the parties. Although Ben Ali had his own motives and aims, he allowed Ennahdha a margin of freedom and accepted its participation in the "National Charter", which he proclaimed to be a document binding on all sides and civil parties. The movement signed the document even though official recognition was not forthcoming. The political situation soon deteriorated and the movement found itself in direct confrontation with the regime, leading to its exclusion from political life throughout the rule of President Ben Ali.

The movement maintained its opposition to the regime from the diaspora. At first none of the opposition parties approached it, but gradually the scope of repression and disqualification expanded to include other parties. At that point, initiatives took shape

among two or more parties. Ennahdha took part in most of these initiatives, which were short-lived and had limited impact within Tunisia. Perhaps the most important of these attempts was the Aix-en-Provence dialogue in France, which brought together many opposition factions, and almost led to the formation of a political front uniting all those opposed to the regime, including Islamists, and a section of the radical left represented by the Tunisian Communist Workers Party, were it not for some differences that caused the attempt to fail.

These efforts continued, aiming to marshal an opposition able to transcend ideological differences with the Islamists, focusing on political common ground. To this end, a well-known text was published by Aziz Krishan, an intellectual and political activist who was among the founders of the Leftist Horizons Movement. This clearly and boldly called for an alliance between Islamists and Secularists to organize opposition to the Ben Ali regime. Consultations thus continued, until autumn 2005, when conditions favoured the October 18 initiative, discussed below.

THE DIFFICULT COEXISTENCE BETWEEN ISLAMISTS AND LEFTISTS

From the outset, the Islamic trend movement collided with the Bourguiba regime and the Constitutional Party, while the clash with the left, on an ideological level, remains unremittingly fierce to this day. Left-wing students attempted to overpower the Islamists from the moment when they first made an appearance on university campuses. They linked them to the Muslim Brotherhood in the Mashreq (Egypt and the Eastern Arab world), and tried to hem them in, to prevent their expansion and the spread of their ideas, which the Leftists called reactionary. The Leftists also believe that the authorities

encouraged the Islamists and facilitated their emergence as a weapon against progressive forces in the country, and in universities in particular.

For their part, the Islamists were not ready for dialogue with the Leftists, neither inside nor outside the university. So the two sides clashed from the start. In the confrontations, the Islamists found a chance to establish their presence and achieve the wider deployment they sought. The bloody clashes between the two sides entered the annals of the history of student movements. Rather shrewdly, the regime observed the conflict at arm's length, as the various opposition parties wore themselves out.

Currently, the left is represented in various parties and tendencies. Of these, the most important is the Popular Front, which after the revolution offered the loudest opposition to Ennahdha, and to this day leads a broad and comprehensive campaign against Ennahdha's presence in government. Despite the experience of October 18, which was co-built by the Tunisian Communist Workers' Party, it entered into a struggle for pre-eminence with the second left-wing faction, the National Democrats. That attempt was a historic failure, to be replaced by continued hostility against the Islamists, especially after the experience of Ennahdha in government. In addition to the ideological and political hostility between the two parties, which escalated during the rule of the Troika, enmity between them mounted because of the assassination of the leading face of the left, Chokri Belaïd, after the revolution in February 2013. The Popular Front believes that Ennahdha planned the assassination, and that the Salafi elements affiliated with Ansar al-Sharia who carried out the assassination were merely tools used to commit the crime.

For this very reason, some Leftists were involved in this dialogue in the hope that the two sides could find common ground as a political basis for coexistence. But the distance between them seems complex and wide.

The radical left position regarding the Islamists in general, and Ennahdha in particular, was evident during the dialogues initiated by Cordoba Foundation of Geneva and the Al-Jahedh Forum in Tunis. The critique of Ennahdha presented by these leftists focused on the following aspects:

1. The crux of the criticism was the ideological reference of Ennahdha, which they believed to be totalitarian in both substance and intention. They regard the evolution of the movement's rhetoric, its change of slogans, and its involvement in the process of democratic transition, as no more than tactics and doublespeak.
2. The left demands the severance of links between Ennahdha and the Muslim Brotherhood. This is an issue the left is not prepared to relinquish, seeing it as an effective weapon in its fight against Tunisian Islamists. The Leftists are proceeding from this issue to continue their historic battle against the Islamists; they did not believe Rashid Ghannouchi when he said that Ennahdha was no longer part of political Islam.
3. The demand that Ennahdha undertake a serious and profound self-criticism of its experience in government. The left worked against the Troika, and they hold it responsible for all the troubles that took place in Tunisia after the revolution. On this basis, they strongly objected to any form of coordination with Ennahdha, whether they were in power or not. They considered that a prerequisite for participation in any coalition government, i.e., they linked their

participation to Ennahdha's departure from power.

4. The Popular Front is still working hard to constrain Ennahdha's political and media activity, and pressuring them to recognize their political and moral responsibility for the post-revolution assassinations, which resulted in the deaths of two leaders of the Popular Front. The Front considers this recognition to be a precondition for the possibility of direct dialogue with Ennahdha.
5. A genuine separation between preaching and politics. This separation is confirmed by Ennahdha in its positions and statements, but in general the left, especially the Popular Front, remains sceptical, seeing only dissimulation and manipulation, rather than a genuine separation. They thus accuse Ennahdha of continuing to exploit religion for political reasons.

On the other hand, the Ennahdha Islamists defend their new "identity" which they believe has crystallized clearly after the revolution, especially after the experience of the Troika. In this context, they affirm that they have modified their political and intellectual course, as arrived at during their tenth Congress. In other words, they consider themselves not only to have been actively involved in the drafting of the new constitution, but to have maintained their commitment to democracy when in power, participating in coalition governments without monopolizing power. They believe they have proved their ability to move from the preaching side to the political side, with the result that they are now a civil party with an Islamic reference, as they describe it. Accordingly, they demand that the left drop its rejectionist tendencies, a demand dismissed by the Popular Front, which insists it is a

democratic front and shows no such tendencies.

Regarding the assassination of Chokri Belaïd and Mohamed Brahmi, Ennahda denied any involvement, stressing that killing and assassination are entirely alien to its political *modus vivendi*. Ennahdha considers the accusation to stem from the imbalance of power between the two parties, since the Ennahdha movement is currently ranked second after Nidaa Tounes, while the Front ranks third or fourth according to opinion polls.

THE ISLAMISTS' RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER (NON-LEFTIST) PARTIES

The Islamists' relationship with the non-radical left in Tunisia is generally less tense. On many occasions, it has led to rapprochement and coordination between the two parties, even an alliance, or, to put it more precisely, joint action within coalition governments.

Before the revolution, most of the Tunisian opposition factions managed to coordinate among themselves and unify their positions against the regime. This was due to the impenetrability of the regime and its repression of its various opponents without distinction between left and right. Accordingly, the opposition parties discussed common ground, and found that, under the circumstances, the issue of freedoms, the release of prisoners and the demand for freedom of expression and organization were the main high-priority issues in 2005. On this basis most of the parties met and formed the so-called October 18 Movement. Perhaps the most noteworthy aspect of this initiative was the agreement between Ennahdha and the Tunisian Communist Workers Party led by Hama Hammami. Although the initiative

subsequently failed to hold up in the political arena, it did nevertheless decide on a linkage of intellectual to political endeavour through the issuance of joint texts on religion and the state, freedom of belief, and women. This was considered an important achievement, unprecedented in the Arab region. This is why the experience gained media exposure and the participants were invited to talk about it. Although this rapprochement did not last, especially between the Islamists and the Leftists after the revolution, it clearly paved the way for the experience of the Troika in 2011, which captured the world's attention, even though it ended in dangerous political deadlock."

The main difference between the two experiences was that the former was almost the formation of a political front against the regime, whereas the second was the formation of an alliance for the collective administration of government among those parties that accepted cooperation with the Ennahdha movement. Although this tripartite government did not withstand the political crisis that erupted in the country following the assassinations of Chokri Belaïd and Mohammed Brahmi, it revealed the potential for pragmatic understandings between some parties on running the country. The reasons for the failure of the Troika were not doctrinal or ideological, rather the lack of a viable political programme for the management of a difficult and turbulent transitional period.

The Troika government's existence, and its relative strength for two years in a decidedly stormy political environment, can be attributed to the fact that the three coalition parties formed part of the October 18 initiative, which helped them overcome their ideological difficulties and enabled them to piece together a sort of interim political programme.

The third experiment was not expected, because it took place between two parties that fought a no-holds-barred election battle in which all available political weapons were used to win votes. Ennahdha and Nidaa Tounes regarded each other as mortal enemies to be eliminated, but the leaders of the two parties met nevertheless, agreed to halt the war between them, and also to form a joint government, rising above past differences, divergent paths and concepts. Although this coalition failed to please large numbers of people, who later left the party Nidaa Tounes, the agreement demonstrated the willingness of many Tunisian politicians to establish coexistence regardless of orientation, and to organize a competitive political life without exclusion or violence.

CHALLENGES TO POLITICAL COEXISTENCE AND SOCIAL COHESION

The three workshops organized in Tunisia revealed significant weaknesses in the relationship between the Islamists and the Secularists, as explained by the mood of apprehension that still afflicts that relationship. Some of these aspects can be mentioned:

- It can be seen that confidence between Secularists and Islamists remains neither monolithic nor deep-rooted. It is fragile, and temporary, but beset with fears and concerns, overt and implicit, which demand of the parties greater serious efforts to achieve genuine rapprochement and to accommodate the positions of others. Despite the experiences mentioned in the field of joint action, there is a conviction, in many secular circles, whether declared or hidden, that Ennahdha is engaged in doublespeak. They base this on several

factors, including the contradictions between Ennahdha leaders' statements and their principles.

- The interweaving of religion and politics in Ennahdha's history, in its documents and references, is still a major factor behind persistent caution, especially as its opponents, among whom the left are generally most vocal, constantly bring up Ennahdha's historical record to demonstrate its lack of faith in democracy and the civil state.
- Despite Ennahdha's declaration that it is a Tunisian movement, and that it is not a part of political Islam, the Tunisian elites were not generally convinced. Thus many of them can still be seen repeatedly to stress Ennahdha's relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood, as evidenced by specific declarations or statements made by its main leaders, with the movement's leader Rashid Ghannouchi at their head.
- Although the legal bodies, especially the judiciary, did not level against Ennahdha any serious accusations of having engaged in violence after the revolution, a sizable portion of the local left and others political families, believed that Ennahdha had encouraged the Salafi-Jihadist movement as a part of its political plan. These circles continue to hold the movement directly responsible for the wave of terrorism that swept through Tunisia and led to the deaths of scores of security and military services personnel, as well as Chokri Belaïd and Mohamed Brahmi.
- The left is an important component of politics in Tunisia, and its influence is clear in parliament and in trade unions and cultural fields. However, the Tunisian left is divided, riven with contradictions,

though many of its factions are still driven by a powerful ideological tailwind. This helps to explain the persistent tension and rancour between these Leftist factions and the Islamists, especially Ennahdha. It is unlikely that the two sides will cooperate on a joint venture, at least during this phase, and if they are to be brought together at all, it must be under the auspices of institutions. Against this backdrop, the left remained the political grouping at the farthest remove from the Islamists, at a time of convergence and intersection among a significant number of Tunisian parties and currents, including the constitutionalists in power who had previously fought Ennahdha and imprisoned its members.

- Young people stay away from the general political debate at the national level. This is one of the main shortcomings of the Tunisian experience, whereby young people remain in one valley while the ruling political class – and the opposition – occupy another. As a result, most of the initiatives on public affairs were still monopolized by the 1970s and 1980s generation, who were still immersed in their various ideological conflicts when they found themselves in post-revolutionary positions of responsibility within successive governments or the legislative establishment. Meanwhile, other generations remained without a political life and culture under the rule of President Ben Ali, who excluded them from the world of politics. After the revolution nearly all young people felt frustrated, tending towards resignation and non-participation in public affairs, on account of the difficulties confronting the country and the political parties' failure to mobilize the younger generations and

help them play their part in the democratic transition.

- The Tunisian context suffers from economic and social fragility, which is clearly reflected in relations between the parties. Whenever a crisis breaks out in the country due to a failure to combat rising prices, unemployment and disputes between different groups, the parties palm off responsibility on to each other. Relations become strained, accusations and counter-accusations mount up, and genuine dialogue grinds to a halt as each party seeks to pull the rug of legitimacy out from under the other.

THE FACTORS UNDERLYING SUCCESS AND LESSONS LEARNED

- The October 18 initiative can be seen as a vital formative moment in the relationship between Islamists and Secularists, albeit building on previous experiences of coordination among the components of the Tunisian opposition, including the Ennahdha Movement, known then as the *Mouvement de la Tendence Islamique*. Although the parties that contributed to the success of this initiative subsequently went their separate ways, this experience left a decisive impact in terms of a potential appetite for rapprochement or even an alliance with the Islamists. This was borne out by the formation of two governments: firstly the Troika, and then the national unity government that grew out of agreement between Nidaa Tounes and Ennahdha, embracing six parties and four national organizations. These were fragile and unstable experiments, but they can be built upon in the future.
- Although the political and ideological struggle between Islamists and

Secularists continues to this day in Tunisia, the seven years of the revolution forced the two sides to agree to work within the constitutional institutions, above all the parliament. It is worth pausing to stress the significance of a situation that enjoyed unanimous acceptance, insofar as no party dared openly to declare its scepticism about the rules of the electoral and institutional game. This is the factor most likely to ensure that the experiment will continue, with increasing sophistication, into the next phase. In this democratic context, the two parties managed despite their differences to reach a consensus that led to the drafting of a joint constitution and the drafting of dozens of difficult laws, including legislation that promoted the gains of Tunisian women. The management of differences within elected representative institutions serves as an opportunity to focus peaceful mechanisms on the management of relations between different parties within society at large.

- When the country is in danger, there is a willingness among different parties and currents to maintain political dialogue even when it becomes extremely heated. The use of dialogue is an important means of removing risks and prevent the country from descending into violence to resolve its differences. This has already been demonstrated at several political junctures.
- The various political forces were able, from their respective corners, to marginalize violent groups and create public opinion antithetical to their plans and objectives. Although Ennahdha initially failed to appreciate the seriousness of these groups, hoping to reduce their danger by trying to influence

- them, it did later decide to participate with the rest of the forces in confronting them, to protect the state and civil peace.
- In an atmosphere of freedom and pluralism, it is no longer possible for some parties to call for another to be closed down and crossed off the list. The most that can be done is to prevail upon this or that party to bring to bear sufficient pressure to keep the relevant party well away from power, but through democratic practice and without resorting to violence. In Tunisia, the belief has taken root that the ballot box is the final arbiter of political conflict, and that every individual has an equal opportunity to exercise basic rights, which include changing the balance of power governing a party's maintenance of power: or departure. This will deepen faith in the common destiny of all.
 - Ennahdha's declaration of its separation between the political and the civil is an important step in its transformation into a civil political party. But this important declaration still needs the spade work on the ground. It is a long path that must be seriously and assiduously pursued by the movement. Ennahdha is trying to be cautious and alert to possible pitfalls along the way, but its struggle with its opponents, and the multiplicity of currents within the movement, expose it to intense political and media pressure.
 - Ennahdha's adherence to democratic choice is clear in its literature and declared positions, but it must try harder to ensure that its practices are consistent with its slogans. Having considered itself to be one of the moderate Islamic movements, it must now explain what it means by "democratic Islam".
 - The Tunisian political parties, especially Ennahdha and Nidaa Tounes, must eschew a bullying style of politics at moments of electoral gain and victory. This sort of self-aggrandizement can only cause anxiety for small parties, further enflame inter-party conflicts, and perhaps lead to authoritarian practices scarcely compatible with democracy.
 - Consensus is a crucial option, and model, especially during transitional stages, and when political power is very finely balanced. This is confirmed by the Tunisian experience, which, but for the consensus approach, would have been unsustainable. However, consensus can also pose a threat to political life when the major parties control the rules of the game, allowing the opposition the narrowest of margins for manoeuvre while they monopolize decision-making and seize state institutions. Competition is one of the basic prerequisites of democratic life.
 - The importance of regional and international factors cannot be underestimated, in protecting the Tunisian experience from collapse and a descent into internecine fighting, as happened in the rest of the so-called Arab Spring. There is a European and American desire to make Tunisia an exception on the democratic front. However, the West has failed in return to give Tunisia the support it needs to overcome its economic and social challenges, despite knowing full well that this is an important and necessary condition to protect democracy and ensure stability and civil peace.
 - Although some parties have striven, and still strive, to pin the responsibility on to Ennahdha for the various structural and

political difficulties now facing Tunisia, as evidenced by its failure to manage the affairs of the state, there is a baseline of awareness that the Tunisian situation entails challenges too thorny for any single party to grasp, that the country must negotiate crises that have objective and structural causes, and that all the parties that participated in successive governments, including Ennahdha, will bear various levels of responsibility for past and unresolved contemporary

failures. Accordingly, the Tunisian experience must be tackled objectively, at arm's length from calculations of political gain or loss for one party or another, allowing the entire arena sufficient time for imbalances to be rectified and mistakes to be corrected, while distinguishing between the subjective and the objective aspects, especially in cases of political transition, which occur more often than not under considerable pressure in a fissile environment.

