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Tunisia's exception faces serious obstacles

On October 9 the Tunisian National Dialogue Quartet was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. The Norwegian Nobel Committee's motivation stressed the Quartet's decisive contribution to the building of a pluralistic democracy in Tunisia after the 2011 Jasmine Revolution that toppled long-time dictator Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali. The Quartet is composed by four NGOs and civil society organisations: the Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail (UGTT, the most relevant trade union of the country), the Union Tunisienne de l'Industrie, du Commerce e de l'artisanat (UTICA, the employer's association), la Ligue tunisienne pour la défense des droits de l'homme (LTDH) and the Ordre National des avocats de Tunisie.

The role of these actors in solving the 2013 institutional crisis marked by the assassinations of Chokri Belaid and Mohamed Brahmi is universally recognized. The Quartet avoided the implosion of Tunisia, by urging the most relevant parties, Ennahda and Nidaa Tounes, to set aside their differences, and involving them in a National Dialogue that resulted in a new Constitution and two rounds of elections in 2014.

In a region sometimes characterized by a return to authoritarianism (Egypt) or ravaged by enduring civil wars (Libya), Tunisia has always been considered a successful example of transition towards democracy

and rule of law. However, the Nobel Prize should be considered a starting point for the country and not a final achievement. The Arab Spring exception is nowadays facing security and economic threats, often combined. Tunisian economy entered in recession last August: the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) went down by 0,7% in the second quarter, after a 0,2% decrease in the first part of the year. The slowdown was in part a result of the terrorist attacks that affected the tourist sector, one of the main sources of income of Tunisia economy.

Tunisian government reaction to the economic crisis was controversial: on September 22 Prime Minister Habib Essid signed an agreement with UGTT on a wage increase for the public sector workers for the second time this year. This policy, which represents an increase in public spending, contradicts the International Monetary Fund programme worth \$1,7 billion agreed in 2013. Furthermore, the government is facing pressure for the contentious economic reconciliation bill. Approved by the executive on July 14 and submitted to the Parliament, the divisive draft is intended to clear former officials accused of corruption if they reveal their stolen wealth and accept to return the funds to the country.

The bill was opposed not only by the Instance Vérité et Dignité, the transitional justice committee that considered this measure detrimental to its powers, but also by Tunisian people. Several protests against the bill were held in September, despite the state of emergency in force since July 4 and lifted on October 2. Police dispersed demonstrators, causing an international outcry by relevant NGOs and stressing how Tunisian delicate transition is still far from being accomplished.