

**Address by H.E. Mr. Khemaies Jhinaoui,
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Elcano Real Instituto

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Excellencies, Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am particularly delighted to address this forum and I would like to express my appreciation for the efforts made by the organizers of the event. I hope that it will lead to a moment of rich and stimulating exchanges.

It has been agreed that I will discuss with you today Tunisia's transition and foreign policy. Yet, before touching on these two issues, let me first clarify the term "Arab Spring" that has been associated with Tunisia since 2011. Explaining and contextualizing this term might be useful in offering a glance at elements of singularity that account for Tunisia's unique experience of revolution and transition.

As early as 2011, President Beji Caid Essebsi grasped the singularity of the Tunisian experience and warned against a monolithic perception of the Arab region that does not account for individual experiences of different countries.

President Essebsi, then Prime Minister, explained at the G8 Deauville Summit in 2011, that there is no Arab Spring as such, but the beginning of a spring that could blossom in Tunisia.

I am confident that many now agree that this early diagnosis was relevant and accurate. President Essebsi's prediction came true because it was premised on a

realistic understanding of different conditions in different countries in the region and on the belief that democratization has different paths.

The path chosen by Tunisia might be the most transformative, but Tunisia does not seek to stand as a model, nor to offer a unique template for change. Tunisia's revolution and democratic process are the product of a singular experience and a combination of multiple home-grown factors.

Let us start with the revolution itself. It was probably the first internet-enabled uprising. Leaderless, youth-driven and with no ideological labels, it ushered in a new narrative of change.

Consider now the transitional process. After the euphoria of deposing an autocratic regime and igniting an unruly wave of rebellion across the region, Tunisians woke up to the sour reality of a complex, sometimes violent, and protracted transitional process. The polarization of society and politics along ideological demarcation lines and the ensuing escalation of brinkmanship between religious and secular forces seeking to unilaterally forge the country's destiny, resulted in stalemate and led so many to lose faith in democratic processes.

Caught in an ominous gridlock, political protagonists came to the conclusion that unilateral means of achieving a satisfactory outcome could lead to utter chaos. The moment was ripe for all parties to move away from zero-sum positions towards the identification of win-win outcomes.

A vibrant civil society, led by a Quartet including the historical Trade Union organization, the Employer's Federation, the Bar Association and the League of Human Rights, acted as a consensus builder, a mediator and a guarantor. With the Quartet's help, conflicting postures were harnessed into a consensus-based paradigm accounting for as broad a spectrum of opinions as possible.

Tunisia's model of conflict resolution and its unique consensual approach have saved democracy in Tunisia and have won international acclaim, culminating in the 2015 Nobel Peace Prize awarded to the National Dialogue Quartet.

Such a compromise is unprecedented in the whole Arab world. It offers a potent illustration that Islam and democracy can co-exist and it denies the "Arab Exceptionalism" argument, a long held dogma in political sciences serving to account for the chronic condition of authoritarianism in the region.

It demonstrates, that Arab culture and heritage are soluble in democratic processes when they are home grown.

As a case in point, Tunisia's post-revolution constitution breaks many taboos. It enshrines secular universal values and democratic standards. It asserts the freedom of conscience, belief and worship and provides for gender equality. Most importantly, it settles the debate on religion and politics by upholding that Tunisia is a civil state based on citizenship and the rule of law.

Consensus on the constitution paved the way in 2014 for the holding of the second free and fair elections, both general and presidential, which made it possible for Tunisia to witness a second peaceful transfer of power and to graduate from an "emergent" to a "consolidated democracy", according to Samuel Huntington's "two-turnover test".

Electoral success was further enhanced at the local level with the organization last May of the first free and fair municipal elections. Of the 7212 council seats, 47% were won by women and 35% by youth under 35 years old.

On a parallel front, Tunisia had to defeat the terrorist threat, taking advantage of chaos and the proliferation of weapons and militias in neighboring Libya. Despite their marginality and their numerical insignificance, extremist and terrorist elements and networks have been dangerous and lethal.

Fortunately, our security forces have recovered and achieved many successes, relying on the unanimous rejection by the population of terrorism and extremist ideologies. Tunisia is, now, as safe as any European country.

These major achievements are not totally surprising. Tunisia is a three-thousand-year nation with a rooted awareness of statehood and with a singular capacity of survival and renewal. It further enjoys a solid reformist tradition and a reputation of being a pioneer among Arab countries. Indeed, it was the first to adopt a constitutional charter in 1857, the first to abolish slavery in 1846 and the first to grant women equal rights in 1956.

Tunisia also prides itself on an educated population, a vibrant civil society, a large middle class and a diversified economy that could promptly rebound.

These achievements, however, should not give way to complacency and self-congratulation. As we commemorate the 8th anniversary of the 2011 revolution, we are aware that we still have a long way to go. Samuel Huntington's "two-turn-over test" might be a comforting yardstick, but democracy cannot be reduced to electoral processes.

Democratization is, in fact, the result of a broader process of human development that brings into play a great many things, including civic culture, education, history and social and economic welfare. Democracy does not come by decree or by elections only. It is a patient all-inclusive accumulative process built up over time and across various sectors.

So far, Tunisia has demonstrated resilience and tenacity in the face of transitional challenges, but the path forward is still fraught with risks. Chief among them is the expectation gap that we have not yet managed to bridge. The sudden collapse of the Ben Ali regime unleashed a wave of unrealistic social demands and democracy came to be perceived as a panacea to all problems.

Despite various programs designed to meet expectations and despite unmistakable signs that recovery is under way, unemployment particularly among college graduates, budgetary pressures and regional development disparities remain stubbornly challenging.

Democracy has to fulfill its promise in terms of economic opportunity. Solutions have to be found to offer new horizons of hope for young people, in particular. Failure to meet expectations could result in disillusionment, fuel social unrest and derail a promising democratic process.

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Tunisia's transition challenges have been compounded with specific problems inherent to our region. The situation in Libya, in particular, is of utmost concern. Libya's troubles are Tunisia's problems. We are concerned about the security risks arising from the proliferation of arms, conflicting militias and the training camps for terrorist organizations.

We have no lessons to give, no democratic model to export, but we are working hard, however, with all Libyan parties and other neighboring countries to create an environment conducive to dialogue between all Libyans. That is a real challenge for Tunisia's foreign policy which requires tact, discretion and credibility.

This is the guiding principle of President Essebssi's initiative on Libya. It builds on previous understandings, particularly the Skheirat Agreement and seeks to open a new channel of dialogue between the Libyan parties under the United Nations supervision and on the basis of national unity and the territorial integrity of Libya.

On a broader regional scale, the landscape is also gloomy and alarming. In Yemen and in Syria, legitimate yearnings for democracy and freedom have turned into an unprecedented humanitarian tragedy and led to utter chaos and destruction.

The Palestinians, on their turn, are being thrown into a wilderness of despair. The intoxication of power has driven Israel into imposing unilateral actions and the policy of “fait accompli” on Palestinians, thus undermining prospects for a genuine peace.

The rise into force of terrorist and extremist groups which found in the region’s instability a window of opportunity in terms of arms, movement and recruitment, is a major trans-border threat that requires a collective response and a proactive diplomacy.

The globalization of jihadism and its “uberization”, lethal creativity and barbarism proved time and time again that no country is safe. Tunisia, France, Britain, Turkey, Sweden, Spain and many others have all experienced the scourge of terrorism and its toll in human suffering.

Dealing with this transnational phenomenon goes beyond each individual State’s capabilities and requires strong regional and international cooperation and that is also part of the main challenges to our foreign policy.

We firmly believe that terrorism and its underlying ideologies have no future. We are confident that the message of tolerant and moderate Islam will ultimately win the battle of ideas and will cut off the supply sources of terrorists and their recruitment appeal. Economic deliverables, inclusive development and education are also powerful antidotes against extremism.

From a regional perspective, our diplomacy builds on its constant fundamental values.

In this respect, Tunisia is attached more than ever to regional integration within the Arab Maghreb Union. We believe firmly in the common destiny of this entity and in the considerable economic and political benefits of regional integration.

Against all odds, we are relentlessly endeavoring to advance this common project, held to ransom by the never-ending territorial conflict of the Western Sahara.

As our identities are multiple, our diplomacy is confirming its strategic interest in possibilities for a stronger cooperation with the Arab world, Africa and Europe. It is at the same time reaching out to reinforce traditional friendships and explore fresh opportunities with America and Asia.

In Africa, we have opened new diplomatic missions, joined COMESA, Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, and won an observer status within Cedeao, a west Africa 15 country economic community.

With the Arab world, we seek to play a convening role by promoting understanding, peaceful settlement of conflicts and common work on education, economic issues and development priorities. I hope that the next Arab League summit which we will host in Tunis next March, will contribute to restoring trust in the Arab League and faith in joint Arab action.

In the Mediterranean, we remain convinced that we share a common destiny and fully committed to mobilizing all our efforts to ensure a true partnership between both shores.

Spain, it has to be underscored, played a leading role to initiate the Barcelona Process in 1995 and has been always instrumental in advancing the euro-mediterranean agenda, trying to convert the *mare nostrum* region into a common space for peace, stability, and shared prosperity.

The Union for the Mediterranean UfM took the lead on this agenda starting from 2008 and tried to focus on concrete cooperation projects in specific areas that are more visible for citizens and more conducive to regional integration such as transport and urban development, water, energy and environment.

More than two decades after launching the Barcelona process, one has to recognize that the results are far below expectations although the challenges facing the Euro-Mediterranean region today require more than ever stronger

collective and concerted responses. An in-depth assessment will help us reinvestigate this process in a more inclusive approach.

In this regard, we place great hopes in the initiative undertaken by President Macron to convene the 5+5 summit this summer in Marseille to “find the thread of a Mediterranean policy”, an initiative which will involve civil society in an attempt to be more inclusive. We hope that this summit will be an opportunity to talk about youth, mobility, exchanges between the two shores and would lay the foundation for a new, inclusive and efficient Mediterranean policy.

With Europe, our first economic partner, the stakes are high.

I take this opportunity to reiterate my gratitude to Spain for its unwavering support within the European Union. Indeed, Spain has been of great help to Tunisia since the conclusion of the Association agreement in 1995. Today, we still rely on its active role within the European Union because we consider Spain as Europe's conscience to advance a robust agenda for democracy support in Tunisia

Our shared history going back to the Phoenicians, our strong Mediterranean bonds, our mutual economic and security interests and Spain's own experience of transition and understanding of the challenges it involves, all serve as considerable assets for such a role.

For the European Union, the success of the democratic process in Tunisia has a historical and strategic value. It offers an unprecedented opportunity for the European Union to have, for the first time, a truly democratic partner in the Arab world.

Unfortunately, the EU economic support to the democratic process in Tunisia remains below expectations and so far did not really rise to the stakes entailed by the Tunisian transition experience.

Conversely, failure in Tunisia will have far-reaching ramifications and will lead to further despair, loss of faith in democratic means and an exacerbation of radicalism in the region.

Fortunately, a small investment could prevent failure and yield strong dividends. Tunisia, a small manageable country with an educated population and a relatively diversified economy, is well poised, with the leading support of the European Union, to graduate, at an affordable cost, as a narrative of inclusive democratic enlightenment and as a model of economic success.

The European Union has a real stake in Tunisia's democracy and an important role to play in mobilizing support and helping success.

It is now a moment of promise for our relations with the European Union. We are looking forward to a long-term partnership driven by values, based on programs and oriented toward results.

This new partnership shall include building together a foundation for inclusive economic growth, strengthening people to people contacts, deepening cooperation on shared security challenges and advancing regional peace and stability.

Another central component to the partnership we are envisaging shall be the opening up of perspectives through the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA).

If it accounts for Tunisia's specific conditions and stage of development in various sectors and if it matches the efforts and sacrifices that Tunisia is expected to make with similar efforts and risk-taking from the European side, the DCFTA, we are currently discussing, could be a cost-effective tool conducive to fresh opportunities for our respective business communities and supportive of the reform momentum that we are leading to overhaul the macroeconomic policy framework and to fully establish an open and business-friendly environment.

Issues of free mobility and access to EU development mechanisms as well as flanking measures to mitigate the impact of unequal competition have to be addressed with vision and courage. This is not about mercantile interests or legal and technical issues. What is really at stake here is a civilizational project that could forge a new destiny and herald a new era of hope and peace for Tunisia, Europe and beyond.

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On a global scale, the landscape is also gloomy and the international community is witnessing unprecedented and alarming challenges to multilateralism and global governance as based on accepted rules that would leave no room for unpredictability and irrationality in the conduct of international affairs.

Many unilateral decisions and initiatives taken by major global powers on the basis of their sole national interest (such as the decision to pull out of the Paris climate agreement, or the withdrawal from the UN Human Rights Council...) seem nowadays to undermine the world order established after World War II, an order meant to be controlled by international organizations to ensure that no single country would use its power to impose its will on the others. This is what was behind the creation of the United Nations and other multilateral organizations and programs.

While admitting that Multilateralism could be a long, difficult and sometimes even frustrating process of decision making at the global level, one has to recognize that isolationism and unilateralism are no alternatives. Even worse, they are detrimental to both global peace and prosperity.

The return to nationalism and bilateral deals does not hold answers to the transboundary challenges of today's globalized world. Today, we need innovative solutions to advance global issues not testing old and failed recipes that led to destruction and annihilation.

As a young democracy, Tunisia is firmly committed to the respect of international law and to the principles enshrined in the UN Charter. It believes strongly in multilateral mechanisms and attaches great importance to the United Nations as a collective global governance body. It is with this spirit that my country is preparing to join the security council as a non-permanent member in 2020. During its mandate it will focus on such priorities as :

- promoting sustainable peace and strengthening ties with regional partners, including the African Union and the League of Arab States;
- contributing actively to peaceful and negotiated settlement of disputes including conflicts in Africa and the Middle East,
- fostering the participation of Women and Youth in peace processes, conflict prevention and dispute settlement;
- promoting more coherence and efficiency in the UN counter-terrorism architecture, and adapting the action of the Security Council to the needs of the States facing this scourge;
- achieving greater effectiveness of peacekeeping operations;
- and fostering a collective and consensual response to Climate Change induced challenges and cyber-threats to the international security and development.

Along these priorities we will be as well a strong advocate of the UN reform aimed at streamlining and improving its efficiency and improving the delivery of its mandate. In this respect we fully support the vision of the UN Secretary General when he said, I quote :

"The goal of reform is a 21st-century United Nations focused more on people and less on process, more on delivery and less on bureaucracy. The true test of reform will be measured in tangible results in the lives of the people we serve – and the trust of those who support our work." End of quote.

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The establishment of democracy has brought in new ambitions and roles, without departing from fundamentals that have marked our diplomatic tradition since independence in 1956.

At the same time, the democratization process has entailed new methods of governance based on the national interest and free from the whims and arbitrary impulses of authoritarian rulers. That is a delivering and empowering novelty.

It has brought in new constraints through mechanisms of control and accountability mainly by Parliament, but also by media, civil society and public opinion. As the result of the introduction of these new actors, we have always to keep a result-oriented agenda.

This new performance-based accountability and national interest requirement have led us to reshuffle some priorities and to focus on productive areas of action that respond to national imperatives. Economic diplomacy has thus moved up the scale of priorities. The focus is on promoting trade, tourism and foreign investments. Today, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and our embassies abroad are more and more involved in promotional activities and act as economic facilitators and catalysts. More often, the direct beneficiaries or 'end-users' are business enterprises, not the government *per se*.

These are just some of the issues that Tunisia foreign policy has to follow and deal with during its this transition period.

At the end I would like to thank again the Elcano Real Instituto for this opportunity and thank you for your interest and I hope we will have an interesting dialogue.

On a less formal note I will end by quoting Winston Churchill about dialogue when he said "Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak; courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen".

Thank you