



Restoring Public Confidence in Tunisia's Political System

Crisis Group Middle East and North Africa Briefing N°62

Tunis/Brussels, 2 August 2018. Translation from French.

What's new? Tunisia is going through a governmental crisis sparked chiefly by a dispute between political forces about whether the prime minister, Youssef Chahed, should resign and by a struggle for control of Nida Tounes, one of the two main parties in the governing coalition.

Why does it matter? The crisis has paralysed the government and parliament, divided and discredited the political class and undermined public confidence in the country's institutions. It has reduced the government's capacity to deal with unexpected events, such as jihadist attacks or large-scale riots, and has fuelled the drift toward authoritarianism.

What should be done? Major political parties and trade unions should put an end to the crisis while remembering that only parliament can decide what happens to Chahed. If he were to step down and if political and social tensions were to become more acute, the formation of a government of "technocrats" would be the best of bad options.

I. Overview

Tunisia is going through a governmental crisis sparked chiefly by a dispute between political forces about whether the prime minister, Youssef Chahed, should remain or resign. The crisis is resolvable but its outcome is uncertain. The results of the municipal elections held on 6 May 2018 have destabilised the parliamentary and government coalition led by Nida Tounes (nationalist) and An-Nahda (Islamist) to the latter's advantage. This has exacerbated an internal struggle for control of Nida Tounes in the run-up to parliamentary and presidential elections in 2019, pitting the head of government, Youssef Chahed, a marginal figure in the party when he took office in August 2016 who is now more powerful, against the president of the republic's son, Hafedh Béji Caïd Essebsi, who was catapulted into the party's executive directorship in January 2016 thanks to support from his father. The current crisis has weakened institutions, paralysed parliament, government and public administration and fuelled authoritarian temptation.

The main political parties and trade unions should come to an agreement on how to end the crisis while bearing in mind that the constitution provides that only parliament has the power to decide Youssef Chahed's fate.

Should the signatories of the Carthage Agreement (the government of national unity's roadmap, signed on 13 July 2016) fail to find a compromise to end the crisis and should political and social tensions increase in the coming months, the formation of a government of "technocrats" could provide a temporary solution to increase confidence in political institutions, dampen political quarrels and reduce resentment toward the political class.

II. A New Balance of Power in the Coalition

While the abstention rate of 66.3 per cent in the municipal elections held on 6 May 2018 could be interpreted as a rejection of the entire political class, Nida Tounes was hit harder than An-Nahda.¹ In comparison to the 2014 parliamentary elections, the former lost two thirds of its support and the latter lost half. This boosted the political weight of the Islamist party, changed the balance of power in the governing and parliamentary coalition, and raised a question mark over the tacit agreement between Islamists and non-Islamists in place since the 2014 parliamentary and presidential elections.²

Unlike An-Nahda, Nida Tounes saw these local elections more as a national contest and an opportunity to fine-tune the party's political and clientelist machinery in preparation for parliamentary and presidential elections in 2019 than a local endeavour. After receiving more votes than any other party in the parliamentary elections in late 2014, it slumped to third position, twelve points behind "independent" lists and eight points behind the Islamist party.³

An-Nahda had promised Nida Tounes that the election results would not affect the balance of power within the government of national unity, regardless of how many votes it obtained. However, the results significantly strengthened the Islamist party's negotiating position in coalition discussions – at the Assembly of the Representatives of the People (ARP, the Tunisian parliament)'s Consensus Commission; during consultations on the Carthage Agreement; talks between An-Nahda's president, Rached Ghannouchi, and the head of state, Béji Caïd Essebsi, who sometimes acts as president of Nida Tounes; and the more or less formal discussions between the leadership of the two parties.

The terms of the tacit agreement that President Essebsi and Ghannouchi have tried to maintain since the end of 2014 seem to be in question. This agreement limited An-Nahda's negotiating power within the coalition and obliged the Islamist party to refrain from disturbing clientelist and regionalist balances of power. A more ambitious position would have exposed the party to virulent criticism, nationally and

¹ "Elections municipales 2018 – résultats finaux", Independent High Authority for Elections (ISIE), www.isie.tn/elections/elections-municipales-2018/resultats/resultats-finaux.

² Since 2 June 2016, a government of national unity, formed at the instigation of the president of the republic, Béji Caïd Essebsi, and led by Youssef Chahed, brings together several political parties and micro-parties. The two most influential civil society organisations – the Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT) and the Tunisian Confederation of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts (UTICA), members of the national dialogue quartet in 2013 and winners of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2015 – helped to draft its program, the Carthage Agreement.

³ "Elections municipales 2018 – résultats finaux", *op. cit.*

internationally, with anti-Islamists fearing it might become politically hegemonic and take control of the public administration in Tunisia.⁴

The Islamist party played the democratic game without self-restraint. Since its tenth congress, in May 2016, An-Nahda has made repeated statements indicating its intention to discard political Islam and sought to reassure Tunisia's European partners.⁵ It opened its ranks to many non-Islamists from the country's diverse social, regional and political backgrounds, including former members of the party of former President Ben Ali, overthrown in January 2011, some of whom were elected as its representatives in the municipal elections. Among the businessmen and women from the comparatively wealthy region of the Sahel (east coast), the most anti-Islamist elements have lost some of their political and administrative influence to those more favourable toward sharing power with An-Nahda.⁶

Under pressure from its grassroots activists and locally elected representatives and making the most of the conflict within Nida Tounes, An-Nahda, which had won 28 per cent of municipal councillor seats in local elections, took executive control of 36 per cent of municipalities between mid-June and the start of July 2018.⁷ This strengthened its territorial base to the disadvantage of its nationalist ally.⁸

An-Nahda, easily the most organised and disciplined Tunisian political party, is now the largest party in parliament and in municipal councils. It holds six ministerial and secretary of state posts out of the 36 in Chahed's government of national unity. It continues to build its base within central and regional government, with a growing number of its supporters and members holding "senior positions in public administration".⁹

III. The Governmental Crisis

During the summer of 2017, the president of the republic, and leaders of Nida Tounes and An-Nahda had reached an agreement to remove Youssef Chahed, the head of the government and a Nida Tounes member.¹⁰ Like his predecessor, Habib Essid, Chahed displayed an autonomy befitting his role as the main head of the executive branch, as defined by the constitution. He launched a selective "war on corruption" that indirectly targeted the interests of the Nida Tounes parliamentary

⁴ This tacit agreement reserves a minority position to members of the Islamist party within important professions, trade unions, the security apparatus, banking institutions, public enterprises and private oligopolies. Crisis Group interviews, political leaders, political commentators, January-July 2018. See also Crisis Group Middle East and North Africa Report N°177, *Blocked Transition: Corruption and Regionalism in Tunisia*, 10 May 2017.

⁵ Crisis Group Middle East and North Africa Report N°180, *Stemming Tunisia's Authoritarian Drift*, 11 January 2018. Crisis Group interviews, European diplomats and international officials, Tunis, April 2018.

⁶ Crisis Group interviews, businessmen, security official, Tunis, January-July 2018.

⁷ Municipal councillors elect mayors.

⁸ "Ennahdha remporte 30 % des sièges, mais rafle 37 % des postes de maire", Businessnews.com, 12 July 2018.

⁹ Law n°2015-33 dated 17 August 2015, fixing the higher-level civil positions in accordance with the provisions of Article 92 of the constitution.

¹⁰ Crisis Group interviews, Nida Tounes and An-Nahda leaders, senior public administration officials, political activists, September-November 2017.

bloc and the leadership of both Nida Tounes and An-Nahda. He also devoted part of his time to preparing his candidacy in the 2019 presidential elections.¹¹ This plan conflicted with the political calculations of the head of state, the leadership of Nida Tounes represented by his son Hafedh Béji Caïd Essebsi and the Islamist party, whose president, Rached Ghannouchi, also considered running for president in 2019.¹² Ghannouchi has since reportedly renounced his presidential ambitions.¹³

On 3 March 2018, the head of state reopened consultations with the signatories of the Carthage Agreement to try to establish a new roadmap for the government of national unity (Carthage II). Talks stalled on the question of what to do about Chahed. On 28 May 2018, at a meeting of Carthage Agreement signatories, Ghannouchi spoke strongly in favour of keeping the head of government in office, against the position taken by the president of the republic, Nida Tounes, the Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT) and his own party's executive office (its senior decision-making body). Some political activists and commentators interpreted this as tacit support for Youssef Chahed's candidacy in the presidential election and the beginnings of a major reorganisation of the political landscape.

According to this scenario, An-Nahda, which is pursuing the contradictory objectives of avoiding the limelight of Tunisia's political scene while gradually increasing its influence, would transfer its support from Hafedh Caïd Essebsi's Nida Tounes to a new Nida Tounes or another "secular" political party emerging from Nida Tounes and led by Chahed. This could form a genuine counterweight to the Islamist party and oblige it to respect the tacit agreement of 2014, though possibly on more favourable terms.¹⁴ Following An-Nahda's president's reversal in late May 2018, the head of state suspended the consultations.

On 29 May 2018, in a speech televised at peak time on the main public service channel, Chahed, now backed by An-Nahda, the executive office of which ended up backing its president, blamed Nida Tounes's electoral rout on its executive director, Hafedh Béji Caïd Essebsi.¹⁵ On 6 June 2018, he dismissed the interior minister, Lotfi Brahem, former commander in chief of the National Guard who is considered by a number of political leaders and senior officials to be anti-Islamist, and also sacked about a hundred senior security officials.¹⁶

On 15 July 2018, in an interview granted to the private television channel Nessma, President Essebsi broke his silence, which had lasted since the suspension of the talks on Carthage II at the end of May.¹⁷ He said that Chahed should resign (the position

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Crisis Group interviews, An-Nahda supporters, Tunis, March 2018.

¹⁴ Crisis Group interviews, Nida Tounes and An-Nahda activists, political commentators, Tunis, May-June 2018.

¹⁵ "Ce que vous devez retenir du discours du chef du gouvernement, Youssef Chahed", Huffpost-maghreb.com, 29 May 2018.

¹⁶ "Tunisie. Faux coup d'État, vraie crise politique", Orientxxi.info, 3 July 2018. Crisis Group interviews, senior public administration officials, journalists, Tunis, June-July 2018. "Limogeages et nominations au ministère de l'Intérieur, attentat de Ghardimaou: Ghazi Jeribi fait le point", Huffpost-maghreb.com, 10 July 2018.

¹⁷ "Interview du président Béji Caïd Essebsi sur Nessma TV: un couac de communication", la-presse.tn, 17 July 2018. This interview was reportedly conducted without the backing of his official advisers. Crisis Group interview, NGO official, Tunis, July 2018.

taken by the Nida Tounes leadership) or ask parliament for a vote of confidence (the position held by some senior figures in An-Nahda) if the political crisis continued.¹⁸

On 16 July 2018, the president of the republic chaired an extraordinary meeting attended by the main protagonists of the Carthage II talks that was supposed to decide the government's fate.¹⁹ Following this meeting, An-Nahda's executive office issued a "diplomatic" communiqué, which several commentators described as designed to reassure its partners, notably the president of the republic.²⁰ This communiqué called on Chahed to announce he would not be a candidate in the 2019 presidential elections – even though "nobody could prevent him from standing as a candidate" according to the constitution and the country's institutions.²¹

France and the European Union believe that the government's instability is delaying reform and view Chahed as a dynamic politician able to implement Tunisia's commitments to its donors.²² A number of foreign diplomats and experts at international organisations believe that the UGTT is mainly to blame for blocking economic reforms, fragmenting the chain of command within public administration and encouraging an explosion of corporatist pay claims, which have generally been met and which place a burden on the state's budget.²³

The UGTT, which won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2015 for its role in the national dialogue quartet that resolved the political crisis of July 2013, has indeed opposed the Chahed government, particularly on economic and social issues. For example, it hardened its position at the time of the Carthage II talks by declaring that a change

¹⁸ "Caïd Essebsi: Youssef Chahed doit démissionner ou solliciter le renouvellement de la confiance de l'ARP (video)", Leaders.com, 15 July 2018. The constitution of 26 January 2014 states that parliament can adopt a motion of censure if at least one third of deputies make such a request. If 109 deputies out of the total 217 vote for such a motion, the prime minister must resign. The latter may also request, on his own initiative, a vote of confidence from parliament. In this case, 109 deputies must vote in favour of the prime minister and his government remaining in office. On 30 July 2016, following the head of state's initiative in forming a government of national unity, Youssef Chahed's predecessor, Habib Essid, appeared before parliament and was dismissed because 118 deputies voted against him in a vote of confidence. Finally, the president of the republic can ask parliament to schedule a vote of confidence in the government. In this case, the prime minister must receive 109 votes to remain in office. In all three scenarios, the president of the republic's proposal for a new head of government must receive an absolute majority (109 votes). See Articles 97, 98 and 99 of the Tunisian constitution of 26 January 2014. Crisis Group interviews, politicians, Tunis, January-July 2018.

¹⁹ Attended by the president of An-Nahda, Rached Ghannouchi, the executive director of Nida Tounes, Hafedh Béji Caïd Essebsi, the UGTT secretary general, Nourreddine Taboubi, the president of the employers' organisation, Samir Majoul, the head of government, Youssef Chahed, and the president of parliament, Mohamed Ennaceur.

²⁰ Crisis Group interviews, political commentators, Tunis, July 2018.

²¹ Crisis Group interview, NGO official, Tunis, July 2018. "Déclaration du bureau politique d'An-Nahda sur les derniers développements nationaux", An-Nahda, 16 July 2018. In September 2017, An-Nahda had already adopted this position on Youssef Chahed's candidacy. "Ennahdha réitère son appel à Youssef Chahed de ne pas se présenter à la présidentielle de 2019", Huffpostmaghreb.com, 17 July 2018.

²² Crisis Group interviews, foreign diplomats, international affairs expert, French journalist, senior government official, parliamentary opposition party official, Tunis, June-July 2018.

²³ Crisis Group interviews, European Union members, international affairs experts, Tunis, January-July 2018.

in government was a “question of life or death” for the trade union.²⁴ But the UGTT complains that the international community has unjustly accused it and that it has a right to review government strategy in its capacity as a signatory to the Carthage Agreement.²⁵

The question of whether Chahed should go or stay could in principle be settled by parliament, but the protagonists of this crisis are unable to determine exactly how many deputies would vote for a motion of no confidence in the prime minister.²⁶

On 28 July 2018, the balance of forces within Nida Tounes swung in favour of Youssef Chahed and against Hafedh Caïd Essebsi. The ARP approved Chahed's appointment of a new interior minister, Hichem Fourati, with 148 votes in favour, thirteen against and eight abstentions.²⁷ The session's main stake was whether parliament, particularly Nida Tounes deputies, would support Chahed, ensuring the appointment resembled a vote of confidence in the government.

Officially, the almost unanimous support of Nida Tounes deputies for the new interior minister was dictated by security considerations – Fourati's political independence and three years' experience as cabinet director at the Interior Ministry (2015-2018) made him, in their view, the best candidate for the job. But their position, debated at length in internal negotiations,²⁸ signalled official backing for Youssef Chahed from Nida Tounes and most of the economic lobbies that support it, and represented a defeat for the party's executive director, Hafedh Caïd Essebsi, and his father, the head of state.²⁹

Despite this apparent outcome, there is no guarantee that deputies will vote for Chahed or will even attend the session if a vote of confidence in Chahed is put to the assembly. Nor are there any guarantees that An-Nahda and its generally disciplined parliamentary bloc will continue to support Chahed.

The fight between those in favour and those against Chahed therefore continues unchecked, with each camp claiming to be nearing victory in order to gain ground.³⁰ Many changes in positions are possible, particularly as there is no clear ideological divide: for example, anti-Islamists find themselves on the same side as Islamists. New controversies may emerge at any moment and weaken either side.

Those on the losing side in recent developments – the UGTT, the Popular Front (a parliamentary opposition bloc formed by left-wing and nationalist Arab parties whose ten deputies present at the vote for the appointment of the interior minister voted against),³¹ and the head of state could react and even join forces. Moreover, the uncertainty in neighbouring Algeria, whose president is one of the key supporters of

²⁴ “Tunisie: Sami Tahri, le changement du gouvernement est devenu une question “de vie ou de mort”, *Tunisienumérique.com*, 12 June 2018.

²⁵ Crisis Group interviews, trade union officials, Tunis, June 2017.

²⁶ To remain in office, Chahed needs the votes of 109 of parliament's 217 deputies.

²⁷ “Vote de confiance à M. Hichem Fourati, ministre de l'Intérieur”, *Majles.marsad.tn*, <https://majles.marsad.tn/2014/fr/vote/5b5cf8664f24d055b431003c>.

²⁸ “Coup de théâtre: Nida votera la confiance à Fourati mais somme Chahed de soumettre son remaniement dans 10 jours”, *Leaders.com.tn*, 28 July 2018; “O. Hattab: Nidaa Tounes accordera sa confiance au nouveau ministre de Chahed”, *Réalités.com.tn*, 28 July 2018.

²⁹ Crisis Group interviews, political leaders, senior public administration officials, Tunis, July 2018.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ “Vote de confiance à M. Hichem Fourati, ministre de l'Intérieur”, *op. cit.*

the consensus between Béji Caïd Essebsi and Rached Ghannouchi – rather than between Youssef Chahed and Rached Ghannouchi – could influence Tunisian politics in 2019. Considering that President Abdelaziz Bouteflika could decide not to run for a fifth term in presidential elections scheduled for spring 2019, uncertainty lingers on his eventual successor and therefore on Algeria's future position vis-à-vis changes to the political landscape in Tunisia.³²

IV. Weakened Institutions and the Drift toward Authoritarianism

The battle for control of Nida Tounes and the weakening consensus between An-Nahda and Nida Tounes has slowed down the work of the parliament, the government and public administration. Dozens of bills are stalled at committee stage and the deadline for voting on the 2019 budget, crucial in the increasingly problematic macroeconomic context, is approaching (December 2018).³³ There is no sign of any compromise emerging on the appointment of members of the Constitutional Court, an essential step in implementing the 2014 constitution, or on the appointment of a new president of the Independent High Electoral Commission (ISIE), who will be crucial to the organisation of parliamentary and presidential elections.³⁴

The uncertainty surrounding the Chahed government's future is acting as a brake on the machinery of the state.³⁵ Many senior public administration officials have almost stopped working by precaution. The appointment of personnel occupying "senior public administration posts" on partisan grounds has occurred more frequently in recent years. The clientelist networks of the political parties have penetrated the administration, dividing it and affecting many senior officials. As the director general of a ministry noted:

We are here to implement the policies decided on by the politicians. But they come and ask us for specific favours, which means we are unable to implement their policies according to the law of the land. Hundreds of appointments to key posts have been decided on the basis of political, regional and family affiliations and some senior officials are aligned with one or the other warring clans. Whether the current government falls or not and whether Hafedh Béji Caïd Essebsi or Youssef Chahed comes out on top will determine whether quite a lot of people have a job or not and could even mean they will have to answer to the judicial system. This explains why, as a precaution, and so that they are not able to be

³² Since the end of 2013, the Algerian government has expressed support for the Tunisian consensus on several occasions. This forms part of the strategy of national reconciliation and the domestication of political Islam begun by President Abdelaziz Bouteflika at the start of the 2000s. Crisis Group interviews, Algerian and Tunisian security experts, Algerian academics, leader of an extreme-left Tunisian party and a Tunisian political activist, 2015-2018. Also see Crisis Group Middle East and North Africa Report N°164, *Algeria and its Neighbours*, 12 October 2015.

³³ Crisis Group interviews, NGO officials, Tunis, July 2018.

³⁴ The previous president resigned on 5 July 2018. See Seif Soudani, "Tunisie. La démission du président de l'ISIE aggrave la crise politique", *Lecourrierdelatlas.com*, 5 July 2018.

³⁵ Crisis Group interviews, senior public administration officials, Tunis, July 2018.

identified as supporters of one side or the other, senior officials have practically stopped work.³⁶

This underlying conflict between administrative personnel and political actors recalls that of the second half of 2013, when there was a strong authoritarian drift among senior civil servants and anti-Islamist activists. This stemmed from the conviction, rooted in Tunisian political culture, that only a strong executive branch and public administration are capable of avoiding the alleged aberrations of popular sovereignty (parliamentarianism slowing down decision-making, political parties creating division and conflict, corruption among political leaders, etc.).³⁷

Yet politicians have taken centre stage since 2013, a trend confirmed by the recent election of 7,212 municipal representatives in a free and democratic vote for the first time in Tunisia's history and the greater autonomy granted to local government as part of the decentralisation process under way since the adoption of a new constitution in January 2014. But squabbles between political leaders, partly fuelled by the behind-the-scenes influence of businessmen and businesswomen, are gradually reducing their support base.³⁸ A growing number of ordinary people see politicians as venal intermediaries who are only interested in gaining a foothold in the state apparatus to use it to their personal advantage. They hold them responsible for most of the ills from which the country is suffering, particularly the increase in clientelism, rising cost of living and the deterioration of the security situation, of infrastructure and of public services.³⁹

This could strengthen the position of technocrats, especially those within the security apparatus. More and more Tunisians believe that only technocrats are capable of preserving the state and its institutions.⁴⁰ Such a mindset could favour "adventurism" – namely attempts at authoritarian reassertion – as evoked by President Essebsi in September 2017.⁴¹

V. Ending the Crisis and Rising to the Challenges

It is crucial to prevent the current crisis, which has exposed the divisions within the political class and weakened institutions, from encouraging unrest or, worse, jihadist attacks, which would in turn harden these divisions and create conditions favourable for an authoritarian takeover. The attempt by several politicians to blame the government and An-Nahda for the jihadist attack on 8 July 2018 near the border with

³⁶ Crisis Group interview, senior public administration official, Tunis, July 2018.

³⁷ See Crisis Group Middle East and North Africa Briefing N°37, *The Tunisian Exception: Success and Limits of Consensus*, 5 June 2014.

³⁸ Crisis Group Report, *Blocked Transition: Corruption and Regionalism in Tunisia*, op. cit.

³⁹ Crisis Group interviews, residents of the interior and peri-urban zones of the capital, Tunis, Kairouan region, January-July 2018.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ "Entretien. Le président Béji Caïd Essebsi à Assahafa et à La Presse: 'Le système politique actuel ne peut assurer le développement et la stabilité du pays'", *Lapresse.tn*, 6 September 2017.

Algeria, which killed six members of the security forces, gave a foretaste of this kind of behaviour.⁴²

The political scene is unlikely to see any easing of the bitter disputes between the various actors in the immediate future. The fact is that the balance of forces between Islamists and non-Islamists is changing, even as Nida Tounes's structural weakness is exacerbating the fears of political, administrative and economic actors about the growing presence of An-Nahda in state institutions. Moreover, Youssef Chahed's plan to create a political force that can act as a counterweight to An-Nahda is a long way from becoming a reality. The approach of parliamentary and, especially, presidential elections in 2019 is destabilising the consensus established since the parliamentary elections of 2014 and encouraging certain economic and financial pressure groups, whose interests could be prejudiced by a change in the political landscape, to seek confrontation.

The main political parties and trade unions should come to an agreement on how to end the crisis while remembering that the constitution provides that only parliament has the power to decide Youssef Chahed's fate.

On the one hand, the UGTT leadership should try to preserve social peace in the name of national unity rather than opt for confrontation by supporting potentially explosive protests when the summer lull ends in September. Tunisia has no choice but to fully comply with the increasingly firm recommendations made by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which is concerned about containing inflation and stemming the rise in public debt. Some of these recommendations will have a significant social cost in the short term. Freezing or reducing the state's wage bill will limit the government's capacity to buy social peace by distributing public sector jobs. The increased fluctuation of foreign currency exchange rates will further reduce the purchasing power of Tunisians.⁴³

On the other hand, the government should speed up ministerial work and help prepare the forthcoming elections. The ARP should create the institutions provided for in the constitution of January 2014 (Constitutional Court and other independent constitutional bodies). It should appoint a new ISIE president who has the required competence, integrity and impartiality. It should also push for the adoption of legislation currently stalled in committees.

Should Chahed be forced to step down and if this is accompanied by social and political tensions provoked by the debate about the composition of a new government of national unity, the formation of a government of "technocrats" would be a solution of last resort.

⁴² "Tunisie: Un expert en sécurité écarte tout lien entre l'attaque terroriste de Jendouba et les dernières nominations dans les organes sécuritaires", *Tunisienumérique.com*, 9 July 2018; "Tunisie: Opération terroriste, l'UGTT fait le lien avec la crise politique et réclame le départ de Youssef Chahed", *Tunisienumérique.com*, 8 July 2018; "Ennahdha portera plainte contre 'les laïcs' qui l'accusent de terrorisme", *Réalités.com*, 19 July 2018; "Attentat à Ghardimaou: Ennahdha et le gouvernement pointés du doigt", *Réalités.com*, 8 July 2018.

⁴³ "Tunisia: Third Review under the Extended Fund Facility, and Request for Waiver of Applicability and Modification of Performance Criteria", International Monetary Fund, Middle East and Central Asia Department, 10 July 2018, www.imf.org/en/Publications/CR/Issues/2018/07/10/Tunisia-Third-Review-under-the-Extended-Fund-Facility-and-Request-for-Waiver-of-46070. Crisis Group interviews, economics experts, members of international financial institutions, Tunis, June-July 2018.

Although this would be an admission of the failure of the political class, it would reassure those senior public officials who believe that political parties have subverted the chain of command in ministerial departments for clientelist and electoral ends. Moreover, it would probably help assuage the resentment of large sectors of the population, whose attitude recently changed from “indifference to distrust of politicians”.⁴⁴

By temporarily withdrawing from government, the main political parties would no longer be able to hold governance hostage. They would have the necessary time to deal with their internal problems – particularly at Nida Tounes’s congress, which might be held at the start of 2019 – and focus on preparing new political programs. In doing so, they could spark a more in-depth debate on the causes of the current crisis – the conflicting legitimacies of the head of state and the head of government, the increase in clientelism and the growing influence of shadowy power-brokers, the excessive personalisation of political negotiations channels, the failure to reform the public administration and reflect on its relationship with political leaders – in order to avoid repeating past mistakes.⁴⁵

VI. Conclusion

For the ordinary citizen, whether Youssef Chahed continues as head of government and his eventual victory against Hafedh Caïd Essebsi are secondary issues. The priority is for political parties to demonstrate that they have rediscovered the sense of the state and that stable and effective executive and administrative authorities rise above political squabbling and strengthen confidence in institutions.

Tunis/Brussels, 2 August 2018

⁴⁴ Crisis Group interview, Tunisian journalist, Tunis, July 2018.

⁴⁵ Crisis Group reports, *Blocked Transition: Corruption and Regionalism in Tunisia* and *Stemming Tunisia's Authoritarian Drift*, both op. cit.

Appendix A: About the International Crisis Group

The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with some 120 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries or regions at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international, regional and national decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a monthly early-warning bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in up to 70 situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports are distributed widely by email and made available simultaneously on its website, www.crisisgroup.org. Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

The Crisis Group Board of Trustees – which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media – is directly involved in helping to bring the reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policymakers around the world. Crisis Group is chaired by former UN Deputy Secretary-General and Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Lord (Mark) Malloch-Brown.

Crisis Group's President & CEO, Robert Malley, took up the post on 1 January 2018. Malley was formerly Crisis Group's Middle East and North Africa Program Director and most recently was a Special Assistant to former U.S. President Barack Obama as well as Senior Adviser to the President for the Counter-ISIL Campaign, and White House Coordinator for the Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf region. Previously, he served as President Bill Clinton's Special Assistant for Israeli-Palestinian Affairs.

Crisis Group's international headquarters is in Brussels, and the organisation has offices in seven other locations: Bogotá, Dakar, Istanbul, Nairobi, London, New York, and Washington, DC. It has presences in the following locations: Abuja, Algiers, Bangkok, Beirut, Caracas, Gaza City, Guatemala City, Hong Kong, Jerusalem, Johannesburg, Juba, Mexico City, New Delhi, Rabat, Tbilisi, Toronto, Tripoli, Tunis, and Yangon.

Crisis Group receives financial support from a wide range of governments, foundations, and private sources. Currently Crisis Group holds relationships with the following governmental departments and agencies: Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Austrian Development Agency, Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace, European Commission, Directorate General for Neighbourhood Enlargement Negotiations, Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, French Development Agency, French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, Irish Aid, Japan International Cooperation Agency, Principality of Liechtenstein, Luxembourg Ministry of Foreign Affairs, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs.

Crisis Group also holds relationships with the following foundations: Carnegie Corporation of New York, Heinrich Böll Stiftung, Henry Luce Foundation, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Korea Foundation, Oak Foundation, Omidyar Network Fund, Open Society Foundations, Ploughshares Fund, Robert Bosch Stiftung, Rockefeller Brothers Fund, and Wellspring Philanthropic Fund.

August 2018



International Crisis Group

Headquarters

Avenue Louise 149, 1050 Brussels, Belgium

Tel: +32 2 502 90 38. Fax: +32 2 502 50 38

brussels@crisisgroup.org

New York Office

newyork@crisisgroup.org

Washington Office

washington@crisisgroup.org

London Office

london@crisisgroup.org

Regional Offices and Field Representation

Crisis Group also operates out of over 25 locations in Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East and Latin America.

See www.crisisgroup.org for details

PREVENTING WAR. SHAPING PEACE.