

## TUNISIA: BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS FOR DEMOCRACY



*Young Tunisians discussing the new Constitution during the Model Constituent Assembly event.*

### Dear reader,

What you are now holding in your hands, is a special issue of the Pontis Digest dedicated to Tunisia.

Among its neighbours in the region, Tunisia is the “good news” of the Arab Spring. Working in the country since the first half of 2012, we have soon become very fond of Tunisia. Not because of its beautiful landscapes and holiday climate, but much more so thanks to the incredibly enthusiastic and dedicated people we have had the opportunity to cooperate with or meet through our project.

For Tunisia, the last three years have been a rocky path. The country witnessed its first free elections, the cumbersome creation and later dissolution of the coalition government, assassinations of opposition leaders,

rule of the technocratic cabinet and a very complex and not always smooth constitution-making process. All this accompanied by political divide, economic recession and rumblings of social unrest.

Despite the latter, in 2014 Tunisia is standing strong, supported by its new constitution it is being celebrated around the world for many achievements: A balanced and progressive approach to the contentious issues of religion and state, commitment to human rights and the promotion of gender equality. The parliamentary and presidential elections scheduled for this autumn are expected to open a new chapter in the country's democratic transition. The reform agenda awaiting the next government is large and weighty, and we all keep our fingers crossed for the country to move

on successfully with the process of transition.

In this issue of the Pontis Digest, we are discussing the current political as well as socio-economic development in Tunisia with Djordje Todorovic, the Director of the International Republican Institute's office in Tunisia and the activities of the civil society with Mouheb Garoui, the Executive Director of our partner organization, I Watch Tunisia.

Inside this edition you can also find a report on local advocacy activities and the civil society initiatives in the various regions of Tunisia, and an article elaborating on youth perception of participatory democracy.

We wish you an interesting read.

**Tatiana Žilková**  
Pontis Foundation

## INTERVIEW

# Djordje Todorovic: Tunisia – a country on a bumpy road but with a bright future



*Djordje Todorovic – Director of IRI Tunisia*

**How would you, in general terms, assess the political developments in Tunisia three years after the Arab spring? Has Tunisia succeeded in reconstructing its political and legislative framework?**

*I would say that I am a moderate optimist about political development in Tunisia. It has been three and half years since the revolution here, and although things could have been better, Tunisia has actually been a very bright example. I would say maybe the only successful country of the post Arab spring period.*

*Tunisia has been doing very well in managing the transition. The National Constituent Assembly has created and adopted the new Constitution. Elections are a little bit later than people expected but will take place this fall. I think that although it's been a bumpy ride, Tunisia has a bright future and good chance of proper transition and change.*

*Reconstructing the political and legislative framework is a work in progress. The first big step is the adoption of the*

*Constitution and the upcoming elections. In my opinion, the next government will have a lot of work when it comes to reform, because Tunisia still has the heavy bureaucratic system of the old regime. A lot of administrative and legislative change will have to come and a lot of reforms will have to be put in place following the elections. I would add that another big step in the process will be the local elections which are scheduled to take place next year and this will be the first step towards proper decentralization of Tunisia and directly elected local government.*

*What is missing in Tunisia is an open market economy and open competition. Tunisia faces a big challenge with its economic system. Change will need to happen in investment laws and laws about public administration, in short, the regulations in obtaining all stamps, permits, documents from the state. These are the issues that are still very heavy and that require lot of work and a lot of time. The new government will have to figure out the way to reform all*

*this. Once they do, it will be a big step towards a better future for Tunisia.*

**How would you assess the situation of the civil society? Are the civic initiatives as enthusiastic three years onwards? Are the mushrooming organizations aware of the role they can play in society?**

*Civil society as well as political pluralism is a new, post-revolution thing in Tunisia. Before, a few credible civil society organizations existed, but they were heavily prosecuted by the former regime. Following the revolution, great change in this field has been taking place and many people are resorting to associating with civil society organizations and initiatives. But as we have seen in many other countries in transition, sometimes the understanding of the actual role of the civil society is lacking. The best civil society initiatives that I personally have encountered in Tunisia are the regional and local groups, people who genuinely organize their little towns and governorates rather than central national civil society groups. And I think that there is still a lot of learning and a lot of development ahead of the civil society, towards playing their major role.*

*I would say that there is a very important role for the civil society in the field of elections and domestic observations. There are some very good initiatives in protecting women's rights and in representing youth. But I think that in future there will be a much bigger role for civil society in the field of accountability, in actually fighting for little things and for little changes in their specific areas of work and interest. You can see that in Tunisia the expectations that came with the revolution were very high. And I think that the political leadership has not met all these expectations. Tunisians are coming to a realistic awakening and they are learning that not everything happens overnight and that serious change takes time. Civil society should be helping to manage and channel these expectations.*

A civil society will eventually take shape, and people who not only are good practitioners but who also have very good understanding of the role and the position of the civil society in Tunisia will take the lead. This is a work in progress. It will take time and there is development but also challenges that we see daily. I am hopeful that civil society will have a larger role in Tunisia in the next year or two. There has definitely been progress already.

The international community is playing a very important role here. I think that their activities, such as the exchanges among civil society people from Tunisia and Eastern and Central Europe, and other parts of the world which have gone through a similar transition, both the good and bad experiences – are very useful for Tunisian civil society. They are learning from experiences elsewhere in the world and basically making short-cuts toward some better solutions.

Tunisian civil society has been playing a very important role during the Constitution drafting process, notably in protecting some of the key values entrenched in the basic law. Many roundtables and discussions took place with the help of civil society where the members of the National Assembly spoke to the citizens about what citizens wanted to see in the Constitution. Civil society has also been strong in election observation, providing credible oversight of the work of the electoral administration and political parties. What I think is missing right now and what can enhance the future role of the civil society is the accountability of political leadership in following up on all the promises that politicians have made. That is, being constructive in helping to achieve those goals and solve the problems of Tunisians together with the political leadership. Another key area of work, in my opinion, is fighting corruption in all levels of society by organizing different means and tools and providing citizens with ways to report and to stand up to existing corruption.

**Your last Survey of Tunisian Public Opinion from June 2014 showed an increase in people's satisfaction with the government's performance and democracy in general. On the other hand, there seems to also be dissatisfaction related to interest of political parties to**

**address citizens' needs. What do you think causes this sort of discrepancy?**

Well, I can tell you one thing. Tunisians love democracy and freedom, but they don't like their politicians. I don't think this is a new thing. Everywhere in the world when you talk to citizens they will give you a very similar answer. The biggest problem and challenge is that the expectations of Tunisian citizens were very high. And we have seen this time and again in many countries in Central and Eastern Europe, following the changes that happened one or two decades ago. People's expectations were very high just because of the change of political system.

The problem is that a change in political system doesn't necessarily always bring about economic improvement. In Tunisia it would take a lot of changes in the way that things are done, in the mindset of people, in the bureaucracy and the things that have been set for several decades before the revolution. Politicians in Tunisia are new.

time. This may be the main reason why politicians don't necessarily get a lot of positive responses. They're sometimes considered quite self-centered, promoting themselves and their own interests rather than the interests of the people. I reckon, this will change with maturity that will come with the next elections it will also change with the performance of the next government.

The key thing is that there is not going to be any turning back in Tunisia. I think that people here love democracy and freedom of choice and they are now getting to the stage where they will actually be able to say "ok we will choose something else" if a government doesn't really do a good job. Politicians in Tunisia have to understand what the interest and priorities of the people are. It happened elsewhere and it is part of democratic transition. It's something that will help the future of Tunisia.

**Is the role of the social media still very strong in Tunisia? Do the citi-**



*Djordje Todorovic has been present in Tunisia since the revolution, worked with political parties, representatives of the National Constituent Assembly and the civil society. IRI led a big international elections observation mission in 2011, and is preparing one for the autumn 2014 elections.*

They didn't have experience of political pluralism until three and half years ago. They also didn't have experience in campaigning. A lot of communication before the 2011 elections was based on big promises that some poli-

ticians genuinely made because they thought that things were going to be easier. Again, I think it's a result of lack of experience. Tunisian politicians are learning and Tunisian citizens are learning and they are maturing over

**zens trust the information shared via these channels?**

*Well, social media was one of the tools for organizing the revolution in Tunisia. Facebook is definitely number one source of communication and even information. It plays a strong role because this is a much accepted channel of sharing information. Obviously, not all this information is correct or accurate. I think that for some people in Tunisia Facebook represents a sort of a "word of mouth" so they know there is a lot of gossip and rumor in it. But some take it very seriously. And definitely I would not underestimate the role that Facebook, in particular, is playing in information flow in Tunisia.*

**The pre-electoral campaigns and voter registration are ongoing in Tunisia. Are you expecting an increase in participation compared to the 2011 elections? Are there any interesting developments concerning elections, which you would like to highlight?**

*Recently the voter registration timeline just got extended. Right now we're getting a relatively high number of people who are registering in the process. But one thing was evident in the beginning of registration: many people were not interested in registering. I would evaluate this as a very strong sign that they don't like what they are seeing or hearing from the political leadership. We are approaching the time when political parties will have to submit their lists for parliamentary elections. Politicians are now getting out and openly starting their campaigns. This is a very interesting time because when you are getting closer to the elections, things are getting clearer and they are taking shape, and this is building up momentum. But again I think that the registration and the low numbers in the beginning is a sign that many voters in Tunisia are considering whether they are willing to vote or not. I honestly think that some of them are wondering if the political leaders are going to represent their interests.*

*In sum, it is very hard to predict if there will be an increase in the number of voters. I personally would expect that the turnout will be lower than in 2011. But I may be wrong.*

**IRI is working with political parties in Tunisia. In the newly created multi-party system, how would you identify the institutional and ideological development achieved by political parties in Tunisia? Are the parties well equipped to represent the interest of their constituencies?**

*Political parties are all very young in Tunisia. However, there are many of them and they are at different levels of development, organizational and ideological. The spectrum is wide. It seems though, that they are learning their lesson very fast. Some understand that they will need to start communicating directly to the people and trying to learn about what the interests and problems of the constituencies are. It is a work in progress. I think that some parties are doing better than others. The larger, stronger parties are definitely better equipped, organized, founded and better supported. But then some new, young parties are also doing a lot of grassroots work and spending time in local communities, trying to talk to the citizens and understand their problems. An important thing to mention is that parliamentary elections and presidential elections are just the first step. The second important step will be the local elections taking place next year. Then we will talk even more about the direct impact of daily problems and local interest and the specific interests of citizens in the areas where they live.*

*The last time I checked there were about 160 registered political parties, which is a huge number. But I would say that there are only 10 to 12 significant parties. This is one of the phenomena of post-revolution Tunisia. For the first time in pluralist democracy many people resorted to starting and organizing political parties. That was an occurrence that marked the 2011 elections. I think that Tunisian citizens are lot more interested in mergers and in larger options and less political parties compared to last elections, because it was very confusing.*

*There will be a lot of players in these elections, as the number of parties is about the same. Some disappeared, some new ones emerged, and we will also have several independent candidates.*

**How is Tunisia dealing with the question of secularism of the State? Is the religion versus state question dominant in political discourse, notably before the upcoming elections?**

*It is important to understand that Tunisia is very homogenous country in the sense that the majority of citizens are of Tunisian ethnicity and of Muslim religion. Some of them are more secular than others but in general the Tunisian political system has been very secular and has been very strongly organized and based as a civilian state. I think that even comparing the political Islamist movement in Tunisia to other Islamist movements in the world is not accurate. Tunisian Islamists are a lot more moderate and more prompt to compromise than similar movements in the other countries in the Middle East and North Africa.*

*The Tunisian Constitution which was developed in a parliament dominated by Islamists has strong secular values and it guarantees protection of the secular system in Tunisia. I don't think that secular versus Islamist is a big debate here in the sense of the governance. I think it is a much bigger debate in the sense of values present in the society and there is big competition between some political forces on that ground. But I genuinely think that the Tunisian political system is secular and unless something drastic happens it's not going to change very much towards something different. In spite of existing divides, Tunisians, because of their history and culture, prefer to have dialogue and reach an agreement rather than tends towards antagonistic and radical solutions.*

**Jana Desiatniková**  
Pontis Foundation

# ADVOCACY IN THE HEART OF LOCAL ACTIVISM

The civil society in Tunisia has a crucial role to play in the ongoing political and social transition. However, as is the case in many countries undergoing transformation from an oppressive regime, active experience in promoting participation of citizens in decision-making processes is missing among the civil society activists.

Building on this demand, the Pontis Foundation has been working closely with civil society organizations in Tunisia on strengthening their capacities to develop activities and projects, and support their cause vis-a-vis state institutions.

To back local activism and advocacy activities, especially outside of Tunis, we supported five advocacy projects of the local CSOs in five different regions of Tunisia. The range of problems addressed through the advocacy campaigns, was wide and community-specific. These activities took place during the months of June – November 2013 in Djerba, Gafsa, Medenine, Monastir and Regueb.

The reception of the campaigns by both the public, the local and in some cases the national authorities exceeded our expectations and those of our partners. The activities brought about many positive results in terms of stimulating dialogue between the citizens, the decision-makers and the citizens. Moreover, they have provided a unique opportunity for our civil society partners to gain practical experience in the field of advocacy.

To illustrate the variety of issues, which local civil society is attempting to tackle, let me introduce three entirely different case studies.

## Weekend on a Bike

Monastir, a coastal town surrounded by various popular tourist sites, is home to several universities and a significant part of its population is comprised of students. Interestingly, it is also one of the few municipalities in Tunisia, which has a couple of kilometers of cycle routes. A growing number of the town inhabitants use bicycles as a means of daily transportation. However, there are still many of those who consider it

a somewhat eccentric activity and a sign of poverty.

A group of student activists from different faculties of the local university (Enactus ENIM) put together a series of events and activities, including a social business to promote the idea of cycling as an environmentally friendly and economically advantageous activity, which could additionally attract a greater variety of tourism.

The whole project started with a survey of approximately one thousand inhabitants of Monastir. It revealed that even if environmental issues are not among the top concerns, the town's population feels more threatened by pollution and its effects on

the first bike rental shop – Tounes Tbasket, the social business project of Enactus ENIM.

A second “Weekend on a Bike” event, opened by the Mayor of Monastir, took place in October 2013, this time with side activities such as concerts and workshops. Both events were attended by hundreds of students, town residents, municipal representatives and media.

The popularity of bikes has grown substantially in Monastir in the last couple of months and different organizations from the region have already started similar promotion activities. Both, the public and students embraced the idea of bike transportation with enthu-



*Students of the Monastir University kicked off the Weekend on Bike, one of the activities to promote the use of alternative and environment friendly means of transportation.*

health. On a socio-economic note, the economic crisis has led to a lack of resources and price increase, which have created a substantial financial problem in the day-to-day lives of the population.

Based on the survey findings, a campaign was launched in June 2013, promoting the use of bicycles in the town and this also influenced the decision making processes in the municipality towards support of alternative means of transportation. The information campaign culminated in a weekend event, which saw hundreds of the city's residents parading around the town on bicycles and a launch of

siasm. The demand for bike rental in Tounes Tbasket has increased.

Although more systematic cooperation with the municipality is still to be set up properly, a couple of follow-up meetings have taken place already. In any case, the project is a great example of the efficient engagement of students and the public in a common cause.

## She's participating, she's active!

A large number of women in the rural areas of Tunisia are not aware of their rights and are absent from civic life. In this conservative environment, their



*Women of Regueb drawing up a list of priority issues to be discussed with the regional authorities.*

role of is often perceived solely within the framework of maintaining households, taking care of the children, or working on the farms. A few years ago, a group of women from the small town of Regueb in the Governorate of Sidi Bouzid founded the organization Voix d'Eve, which has been working with women in the region ever since.

The rural area around Regueb is famous for intensive agricultural production, but also for bad employment practices and labor law violations. The majority of women in the region work on the farms, falling victim to the negative health effects of improper practices, such as long working hours without adequate compensation or lack of protection against chemicals used in agricultural production, among others. Many of them feel powerless and unable to defend themselves against such practices or to promote other important rights and interests.

The advocacy campaign *"She's participating, she's active!"* was focused on making women aware of their rights and possibilities and increasing their skills and ability to participate at the public life. The project consisted of successive activities, information campaigns and workshops for both women and men, and setting-up of a committee of women participating in finding solutions and voicing concerns to the regional authorities, according to the specific problem of the community. The project included a set of activities aimed at members of the civil society and the local government.

Since the inhabitants of Regueb are not used to being confronted with civic activism, creative forms of implementing the activities had to be found. A campaign to raise awareness was implemented by organizing activities for children in the neighborhoods, and approaching women through children.

At the end of the project, committees of women in each neighborhood were created to talk to women on a door-to-door basis and to find the most pressing issues and ideas on improving their situation. These were later presented to the Ministry of Women.

Although initially greeted with apprehension, the public in Regueb appreciated in the end, the fact that the project helped with the discussion of some burning local issues. It stirred a great interest among women and set the basis of possible cooperation with the Ministry of Women.

### **Transparent Hiring Processes in Gafsa Phosphate Company**

The level of unemployment in the Gafsa Governorate has been increasing and the number of new job opportunities is very limited due to lack of investment. Gafsa is a large industrial town, which hosts a phosphate production company, employing over 5000 Tunisians, most of them from the region. The company has recently witnessed numerous strikes over working conditions and lack of transparency in hiring processes. The production of phosphates has stopped

several times during these strikes, which led to major losses in the economy of the region. Moreover, these strikes hamper investors from creating new employment opportunities.

An ideal solution to this problem would be for this state owned company to adopt transparent policies in the creation of which the citizens would be consulted. This would in turn increase public trust in the company and lead to more effective dialogue mechanisms.

I Watch Gafsa, a local branch of our main partner organization in Tunisia decided to attempt to stimulate discussion on the problematic issues related to company processes and local economy. The advocacy project was implemented through polls, discussions, and roundtables with local authorities, citizens, media and trade unions.

The long-term expected impact of this advocacy project was to stimulate the creation of a higher independent commission, which would be responsible for recruitment in the phosphate company. The immediate objective, however, was not to create the commission itself, but rather to gather the different stakeholders around one table to address citizens' doubts and anxiety and to build effective dialogue between citizens and decision-makers.

An opinion poll among the citizens of Gafsa, as well as the employees of the phosphate company provided recommendations for more transparent decision-making in GPC. The results of the poll were shared with local officials, media and civil society through roundtables, attended by 100 people including representatives of the company, representative of the Ministry of Environment and other bodies of the Tunisian Government, Tunisian citizens, media and civil society. While Gafsa citizens expressed very positive feedback towards the project, the representatives of the company basically refused the recommendations.

However, the Ministry of Environment and other Government representatives promised a follow-up after internal government consultations. The follow-up agenda of the project includes another campaign in the mining region, and presenting the

recommendations at parliamentary level, using the networks of I Watch Tunisia and its working contacts in the Assembly.

Even though direct confrontation with the company concerned is very unlikely to lead to the desired

change in employment practice, it can increase dialogue on the matter, on both regional and national levels, thanks to a very wide media coverage of the campaign. The recommendations might further serve as advocacy tool for further negotiation processes

and be utilized as a basis for more systematic activities.

Tatiana Žilková  
Pontis Foundation  
and  
Michal Cenker  
Pontis Foundation

## INTERVIEW

# Mouheb Garoui: In the beginning we did not understand why the Slovaks were interested in Tunisia or why they wanted to spend money on Tunisian activists

**The “I Watch Tunisia” is an NGO dedicated to fighting corruption at all levels of society. How are you dealing with this goal? What are the main activities to prevent corruption and to promote ideas of revolution in your country?**

*The story of “I Watch” started in March 2011 and since then we have been trying to fight and eventually eradicate corruption. That is how we define ourselves in the first place. We consider this a long process that everyone should be involved in, thus we have started with damage limitation caused by corruption, announcing cases of corruption and bribery and engaging citizens in fighting it. We, in “I Watch” think that a key move in achieving our goals is to include youth in fighting corruption because young people are motivated to fight this phenomenon. They are the first ones to be affected by corruption, for instance when it comes to recruitment and related bribery. In addition to that, I Watch has had different activities focusing on capacity building. That is because we can't fight corruption and we can't limit the damage it causes if we don't have extensive capacities to do so. Therefore, we are focusing on training new members, introducing them to our structure and to the main and most effective tools in fighting corruption. Our members spend quite some time attending seminars and international conferences, and we are trying to bring in international experience and practices, so that we have something in our hands when engaging in fighting corruption. I Watch also produces*

*papers and reports assessing the level of transparency in Tunisia and promotes its ideas via Whistleblowers and Billkamcha campaigns. So, in a nutshell, this is what we do.*

**Can you identify any trends or developments when it comes to the corruption in Tunisia? Any changes in the attitude of the citizens?**

*I think awareness has increased and some major changes have occurred. After the revolution people are more skeptical about the efforts of the state to fight corruption which resulted in a lack of trust in the Parliament and the Government. On the other hand, people trust civil society more, although it has very limited power to shape legislation. We just push and put more pressure on*

*the Government, but we don't create the laws. At the moment, there are still so many laws missing. For example, in Tunisia we lack laws that incriminate corruption right away or laws that protect whistleblowers. Also, a constitutionally anchored Commission to fight corruption was established but it is not yet very effective, as people don't trust this Commission. In “I Watch” we are skeptical about its destiny. The main challenge for civil society is to bridge this gap between citizens and government.*

**I Watch is constantly trying to encourage whistleblowers to speak out and to help citizens report cases of corruption via Whistleblower and Billkamcha campaigns. Could**



Mouheb Garoui – Executive Director of I Watch Tunisia

you tell us more about how these campaigns operate?

These campaigns operate online. As I mentioned before, we want to engage youth in fighting corruption so we focus more on online and field activities. We have an annual ceremony in January where we award the Whistleblower of the year from among the people who were actual victims of corruption and were subject to pressure or persecution. To identify the candidates we follow the news, TV or social networks. There is always something that indicates that these are cases of corruption. Then we contact these people, meet with them and by the end of the year in December we launch a website where people can vote online and choose their candidate and name those who deserve the award.

The Billkamcha campaign is a crowd mapping website where citizens can report cases of corruption. Any citizen can contribute to this page. Unfortunately, we don't have legal support for this campaign. So, for now we are keeping reports in our database. We don't show the information publicly until we have a legal background to defend people and to go to court. We hope we will soon have the capacity to treat and analyze data and all the cases that we receive through the Billkamcha website, or directly through the office. This can be a step in establishing legal assistance for whistleblowers and victims of corruption.

As the 2<sup>nd</sup> free elections are coming up how would you describe preparations? What are the main faults and problems that are at last starting to cause distrust in politicians?

I think that preparations for the elections are really on track. Political parties have already started pre-electoral campaigns and we have started recruiting and training observers. The registration process for elections has already been set up as well. All voters are required to register in order to be admitted to elections. But there must be slight disillusionment among citizens. A much higher number of voters was expected to register. At the moment, we have about 7 million voters in Tunisia but only 5 million have registered so far. So there are many people not registered and they are neither willing to register, nor to vote. This is a challenge for politicians; because the higher the number of votes you receive, the more trust you get from the local and international community. When it comes to the preparations, the atmosphere is very encouraging for elections. 23 political parties have signed the Ethical code of elections in which they commit not to promote violence or to violate the law. All these commitments were signed by the most powerful political parties in Tunisia. This is very reassuring for civil society and the international community.

"I Watch" is implementing various projects and activities around the

elections, could you tell us what these are?

The most interesting activity that we are implementing is observation of campaign finances for the elections. This basically means observing political parties' expenses and the use of resources during electoral campaigns. This is in addition to the election days when we will be observing both rounds of presidential elections and parliamentary ones as well. For this purpose we are planning to recruit 1000 young people, to engage them in the process.

**SlovakAid and Pontis Foundation are cooperating with the NGO sector in Tunisia and with "I Watch" as well. Does the transfer of Slovak transition experience help in building professional capacities of the non-governmental sector in Tunisia?**

I think that our partnership with the Pontis Foundation and SlovakAid is very special. Whenever we publish annual financial reports or donations on social networks and our page people start wondering about one thing. Why are the Slovaks interested in Tunisia? Do they have enough money? Are they so rich that they can spend money on different NGOs in Tunisia? So this kind of partnership seems to be unusual. However, when we first visited Bratislava in 2012 and were told about the history of transition of Slovakia we understood that this is very close to Tunisia. We think that people of Slovakia have come through hard times and similar changes to those, which Tunisia is going through at the moment. Neither country is big, in terms of geography and demography. We have many similar aspects when it comes to transition to democracy. The Pontis Foundation has given us this opportunity to learn about the Slovak experience. When our first project started in 2012 we focused on capacity building on project proposal writing, leadership and communication skills. All these aspects played a very important role in our growth. We had to grow slowly because we couldn't manage large amounts of funding. We had to start from the bottom and grow institutionally, so that we could operate, secure funds and internet communication and all the basics that every NGO needs. Most of these needs were provided by SlovakAid and Pontis. The



*I Watch is a non – governmental organization, focusing on empowering young citizens and promoting transparency and fight against corruption. I Watch is the main project partner of the Pontis Foundation in Tunisia.*



training, visits and exchanges about Slovak and Tunisian experiences helped us build our professional capacities and those of our partners in the non-governmental sector.

**What are the main components of the project Building partnerships for democracy in Tunisia I and II? How do you see the project developing and what do you consider to be the main benefit / added value?**

The main components of the project are capacity building, i.e. training and activities focusing on promoting democracy and transparency. We were able to promote democracy and transparency, and increase our ability to fight corruption. These projects have helped us to explore other regions of Tunisia. We cover 13 out of 24 regions which means that more than half of the country has an access to our activities. Also we learned to work with different donors and NGOs from other countries. Now we cooperate with the Slovaks, Swedish, British and others. So having

the Slovaks on our side, having Pontis on our side is very valuable for our independence.

**Right now you are attending the Transparency International Summer School on Integrity. Is this experience enriching for you in any way? Are you planning further cooperation with TI?**

Our partnership with Transparency International started last year. They had a project in Tunisia and they contacted I Watch to be their national contact. We gladly accepted and since 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2013 we have been TI's national partner in Tunisia.

They also want to make I Watch the official national chapter in Tunisia. This process takes approximately one year and every chapter goes through being partner, national contact and then fully accredited chapter.

From the cooperation with TI we are expecting to gain technical expertise and assistance. We already benefit from

TI chapters in 90 countries all around the world. We benefit from the contacts of TI when it comes to experience and content because TI is good at publishing reports and providing service. We also contribute to TI reports. They are giving us a capacity building budget to pay full-time staff.

Regarding the Summer school, unfortunately, I couldn't attend because my visa came late.

But we will have TI Summer School in Tunisia. It will be hosted by I Watch and it will take place on 18<sup>th</sup> August in Tunis. About 40 young professionals will come from the middle-east North Africa region to learn more about the efforts in fighting corruption in the Arab region and international and local experiences. They will be divided into groups and each group will work on a project during the summer school and eventually this project will be given grant from TI to implement it.

Jana Desiatniková  
Pontis Foundation

## THREE YEARS AFTER THE REVOLUTION, THE TUNISIAN YOUTH HAS LITTLE FAITH IN POLITICIANS

Plenty has been said about the critical role of youth in the revolution movement across North Africa and the Middle East in recent years. Experts have been pointing out the demographic trends, which have led to a disproportionately large population of young women and men. Having little access to employment and the socio-economic mainstream, as well as having many political grievances, they were seen as a potential force driving the violent movements. However, especially in Tunisia, we are witnessing a flood of young, pragmatic activists who are enthusiastic and globally interconnected.

Three years after the outset of the political changes which enabled citizens to exercise their right to participate in public life by enjoying among others, the freedom of assembly, opinion and association, the question still stands whether the young activists will be able to consolidate the achievements of the revolution movement. Can the demographic charac-

teristic be turned into an opportunity for innovation and growth and is the youth able to fulfil the role of agents of change in the post-revolution transition? What obstacles are the young Tunisian population meeting in their efforts to secure a voice in the design of a new political system?

In order to better understand the position in which those young people see themselves in the system of participatory democracy and their ability to contribute to the decision making processes in the country, "I Watch Tunisia" conducted a survey among 1500 young people in five governorates of Tunisia, notably Sousse, Sfax, Medenine, Gafsa and El Kef. The survey focused on the prominence of participatory democracy in the eyes of the youth and their interest in politics.

The growing distrust in politics should not be interpreted as a complete indifference towards public affairs. In fact, more than half (52 %) confirmed that they do have interest in politics, with

9% being keen followers of political life. Interesting gender dynamics have been revealed, as men claimed to be more interested in politics (59 %) than women (47 %).

Despite the recent efforts made by various sectors of civil society in promoting participatory democracy, this concept remains unknown or unclear to most of the Tunisian youth. Only slightly more than half of the respondents (51 %) have even heard of participatory democracy, and a mere 10 % of these claim to know exactly what it means.

The indifference towards politics is clearly mirrored by the knowledge of the youth in relation to the new constitution. In spite of the drafting and approval process being in the center of public debate for over a year, 40 % were revealed as having no knowledge of the new constitution. The results were no different regarding youth's knowledge of the recent electoral law.

When it comes to municipal governance, which should be able to build much closer local contacts and dialogue with citizens, only an average of 10 % of the young people surveyed had an idea about municipal decisions. A remarkable 79 % showed no interest in the meetings and debates led by the local and regional authorities.

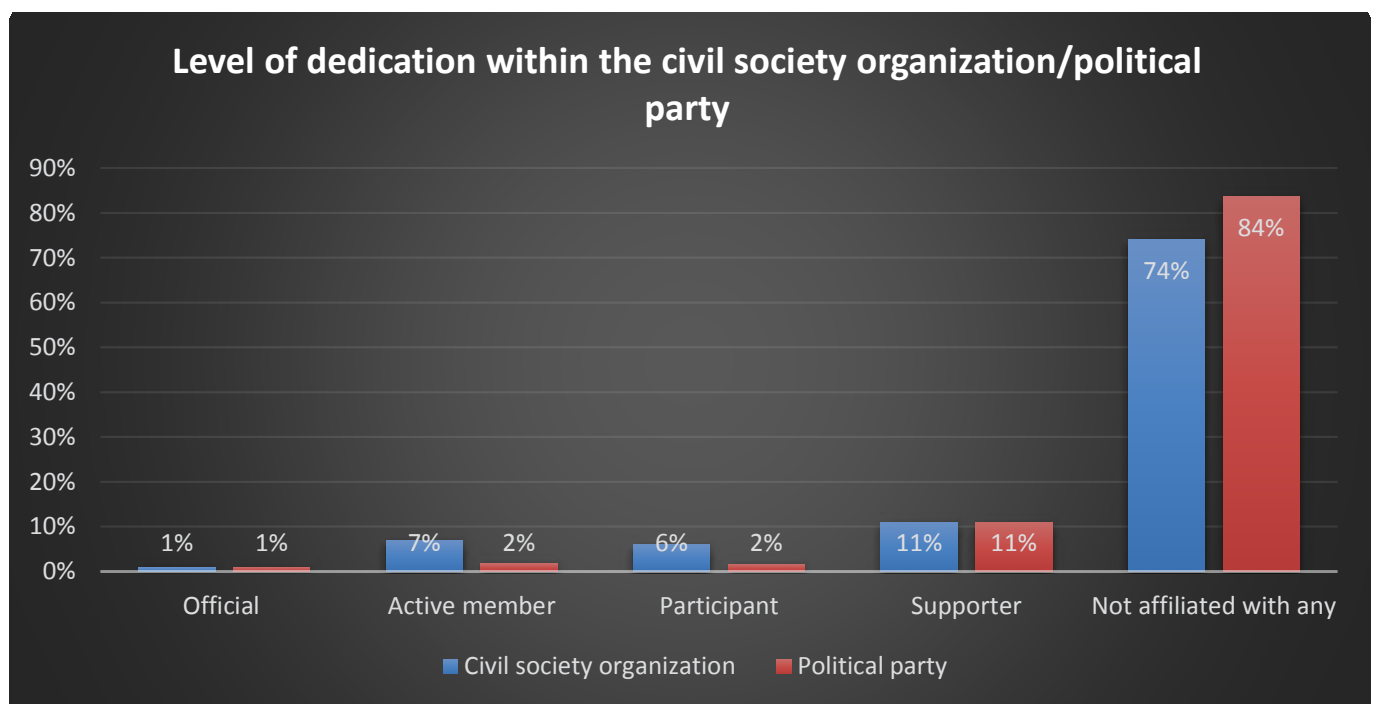
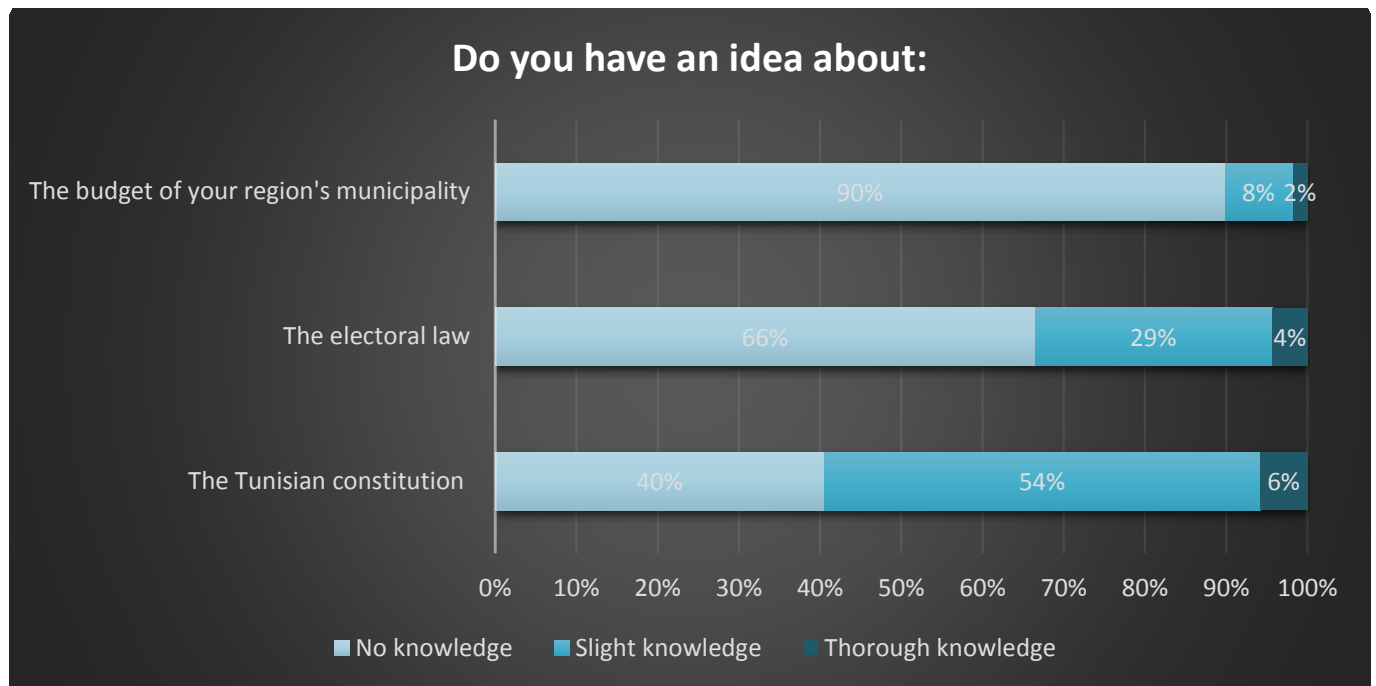
14 % of the respondents said that they knew that the municipality or special delegation in their region had already set forth participatory democracy initiatives, such as public meetings, while 5 % had taken part.

However, two thirds of them judged their participation to have no impact on the consultation process or on the final decision.

When it comes to the participation of young people in civil society initiatives, and youth activism, the survey revealed that about 14 % of interviewees belong to an association or a trade union and 11 % support an association or a trade union. About 5 % indicated that they were members of a political party and only 11 % claimed to support one of the parties. However, a large majority, 85 % of the surveyed youth said that they were

not part of any civil society organizations.

The Tunisian youth has little faith in politics or in political institutions. Moreover, the relationship between the junior and senior members of political parties is further marked by a sentiment of distrust. This is clearly reflected in voting intentions, with 39 % of the respondents intending to vote in the coming municipal elections. While 29 % remain undecided, a large number, 27 % of them, revealed that they intend to boycott the elections.



Besides voting and contributing to associative and political life, the youth is resorting to other ways of engaging in their communities. In fact, strikes, sit-ins and signing petitions are recognized as common ways of expressing one's opinion. According to the survey, 31% of the respondents said that they have already taken part in a sit-in or a strike, 15% have signed a petition, and 13% participated in political meetings in the last year. During the same period, 63% have watched National Constituent Assembly debates on TV and 39% have used social networks to express their political opinions.

Regarding the expected effects of participatory democracy, the vast

judged harshly by the youth. Only a third of those surveyed trust their representatives, and even less, 27% trust the regional Special Delegations. The President is trusted by 41% of the young people surveyed.

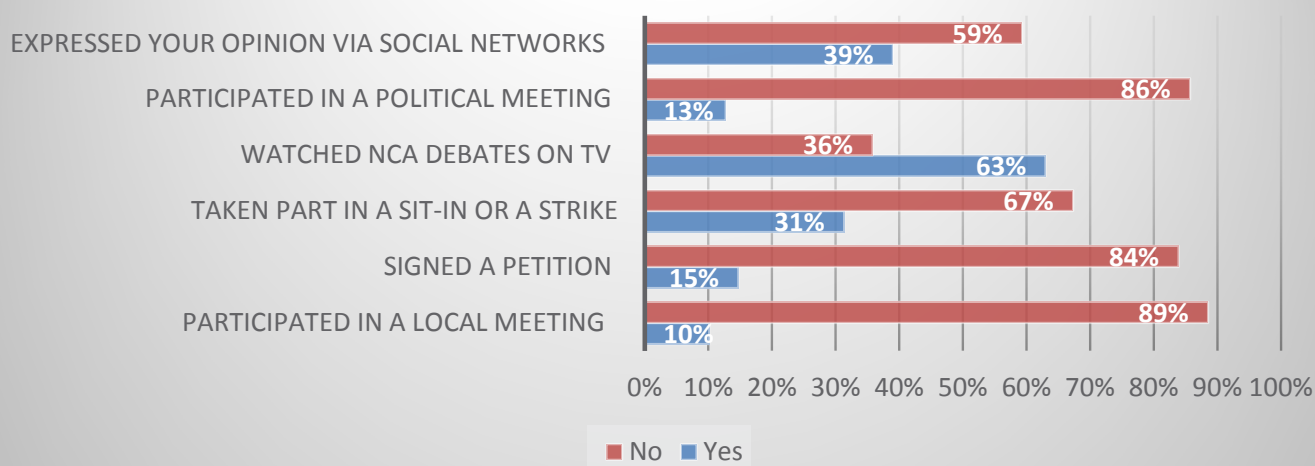
The top ranking topic of concern for youth is employment. This comes as no surprise, given the soaring rates of unemployment in the country, especially during the current economic downturn. Regional development came in as the second most important subject, followed by security and the fight against terrorism, poverty alleviation, education and environment. At the bottom of the list we can find topics such as access to health-care and fighting corruption.

period, and the second factor is the impact of the economic and political crisis.

On a more positive note, in spite of feeling left out from the decision making processes, there are some examples of successful cooperation and consultation between civil society and the Tunisian institutions, namely during the constitution drafting period.

Youth do not consider associations, political parties or trade unions as the only way to express their civic engagement, and their political commitment is particularly expressed through other non-established forms. Thus, the rising demand to enhance participation of the youth in the pub-

## During the last year, have you:



majority of the youth think that it leads to committing citizens to public life, increases the transparency of the decision making processes and improves their effectiveness. In addition, it is seen as a tool to monitor the work of the elected bodies, and enhance citizens' patriotism and their willingness to pay taxes.

Despite the lack of confidence in their political representatives, resentment of the youth towards politicians varies. The country's cabinet is somewhat better off compared to other political institutions, with almost 49% of youth trusting their actions. As a directly elected institution, the National Constituent Assembly is

These results indicate that the Tunisian youth has had enough of party politics. They are disappointed at the way politics are conducted, many of them are willing to contribute, yet are not aware of the appropriate channels. They are growing weary of unfulfilled promises and their perception of politics has been distorted. The survey findings suggest that this distrust of state institutions and politicians leads the youth to boycott the elections, which further limits the representativeness and legitimacy of the elected institutions. Generally, two main factors have had a negative impact on the perceived role of Tunisian political institutions. The first one is the protracted transitional

lic life can be perhaps best achieved through activism on a local and grass-roots level. Youth activism is perceived as the starting point for this large segment of population in order to have a voice in their societies. To achieve a substantive change the youth movements will have to consolidate the agenda of the many different young people they represent, and consider ways in which this platform may be incorporated into the policies and institutions of the state.

**Tatiana Žilková**  
Pontis Foundation  
and  
**Dhia Elhak Ammar**  
I Watch Tunisia