



## AN ANALYSIS OF TURKISH-TUNISIAN RELATIONS IN LIGHT OF ARAB SPRING

**Gökhan DUMAN**

İzmir Demokrasi Üniversitesi, Siyaset Bilimi ve Kamu Yönetimi Bölümü,  
gokhan.duman@idu.edu.tr

*Başvuru Tarihi/Application Date:* 16.01.2018

*Kabul Tarihi/Acceptance Date:* 08.12.2018

### ÖZET

Tunus'taki ayaklanmalar, Arap ülkeleri için yeni bir dönem başlattı. Yasemin Devrimi gerçekleşikten sonra bile ülkede gösteriler ve protestolar devam etti. Otokrasiden demokrasiye geçiş, İslam ve demokrasinin uyumluluğu ile ilgili tartışmaları beraberinde getirdi. Sonuç olarak, Arap Baharı'nın başından itibaren, büyük ölçüde Müslüman nüfusa sahip olan Türkiye Cumhuriyeti, ayaklanmaların yaşandığı bölgedeki Tunus ve diğer ülkeler için bir rol model olarak gösterildi. Bu bağlamda, bu çalışma şu sorulara odaklanmıştır; Tunus'un takip etmek için bir modele ihtiyacı var mı? Tunuslular Türkiye hakkında ne düşünüyor? Türkiye-Tunus ilişkisinin geçmişi ve bugünü nedir? Avrupa Komisyonu tarafından finanse edilen Marie Currie Araştırma Projesi'nin bir parçası olan bu çalışma, yukarıda belirtilen sorular çerçevesinde Tunus'un durumunu ortaya koymaktadır.

### ABSTRACT

Uprisings in Tunisia started a new are in the region of Arab countries. Manifestations and protests took place in the country even after the Jasmine Revolution had happened. Transition to democracy from autocracy brought discussions regarding the compatibility of Islam and democracy. Consequently, from the beginning of Arab Spring, Republic of Turkey with majorly Muslim population was pointed out as a role model for Tunisia and other countries in the region where uprisings took place. In this context, the following questions became the main subjects of this study; does Tunisia need a model to follow? What do Tunisians think about Turkey? What is the background and actuality of Turkish-Tunisian relationship? This study, which is a part of Marie Currie Research Project funded by European Commission, shows the Tunisian reflection regarding the aforementioned questions

**Keywords:** Tunisia, Turkey, Arab Spring, Jasmine Revolution

## 1. Introduction

Since early 2011, the World started to witness a change that took place in Arab countries, first in Tunisia, then Egypt, Libya and many other. People from the countries listed above became the actors of protests; manifestations and sit-ins. Consequently, populations of Arab countries raised similar concerns and demands for freedom, democracy, end of corruption and nepotism. Street protests are nothing new, for instance, teachers gather because of low salaries, or workers rally against the decrease on their rights and work conditions. However, the uprisings in the Arab countries were totally different than before. Their ‘anger’ and ‘grudge’ was not directed to *sole* problem of their country. They targeted the whole system as problem and they marked their rulers as the source of the problem. Consequently, one of the most striking common features of the outcry from Arab countries was that it was raised by ordinary people who constitute the core of their societies. They were not politicians; they were not any certain groups like teacher or workers, they were the “people” without any distinction who occupied streets and stayed there all day long. They have demonstrated to the outside world that people possess the power.

The protests immediately put Arab countries under the spotlight in international politics. Every mass media channel started to broadcast what were happening in the squares of Tunisia first, then Egypt. They even sent their reporters to have live broadcasts from the region. Consequently, these uprisings were indicated and labeled as the beginning of a new era in World politics majorly by western mass media. Following the protests in Arab countries, we saw people who occupied the streets in some European countries like Italy, Spain, etc. The “Arab Spring” represented the success of collective actions; most importantly, that actions without violence could change certain political systems. With the Arab uprisings, Muslim societies understood that they were at the core of their states; they were the sovereign ones, not their rulers.

The famous uprisings were initiated as protest movements against the system itself in general and against the rulers in particular, but then it gradually converted into “revolutionary movements” seeking to change the status quo. After long years living under repression and political manipulation, the people of Tunisia wanted to take charge, and demanded a change in their political system. In the beginning of the protests, their hatred and anger were visible. However, their real demands started to be understood after the scale of protests increased. What Tunisian people asked was a genuine democracy. Within the conditions of manifestations and protests, people had an opportunity to discuss their political thoughts that were not possible before. They started to question the real meaning of terms that belong majorly to the Western part of World, like ‘democracy’, ‘people’, ‘freedom’, ‘vote’ and so on. Alongside with peaceful protests and manifestations, this questioning made people more aware of what was the problem in their country. They have also shattered the widespread perception in the West regarding the irreconcilability between democracy and Islam.

Tunisian people’s demand for democracy triggered another discussion about the future of the countries, where manifestations had happened. However, the initial declaration from West was highlighting the dangers for the authoritarian rulers to be merely replaced by radical Islam. It is to say that right in the beginning of the protests, Tunisian people deemed to accept a simple change of the ruler. This has ultimately increased the already existing trends for ‘Islamophobia’. However, it is important to say that from the very beginning, Tunisians sought for genuine democracy for the future of their country. In addition to the fear of radical Islam, scholars and politicians from Western part of the World started the discussion about how Islam can be compatible with democracy and tried to point out certain countries as examples or role models for the Arab countries where the revolutionary movements took place. In the mind of some Western intellectuals, the religion of Islam could be an obstacle on the way to achieve a genuine democracy for Arab countries.

Some of Arab countries that experienced the uprisings already had elections for the office of the President and/or the Parliament. However, these elections were only viable on paper and always conducted under the absolute control of the rulers. At this point, it is possible to say all those years people of Arab countries were disillusioned about the election system, the reality of having rigged elections without any real effect on the political system. In a functioning democracy where elections

are the indispensable part of the political system, the people is at the center of the system and also the people provides legitimacy to the system. When the system loses its legitimacy and credibility in the eyes of the electorates, people start to demand more than cosmetic modifications. Briefly, having elections is not proof of any kind of democracy. If people lost their credence in the system, then the change is unstoppable. On the topic of democracy, the main question for the Arab countries was and still is that how Islam can be compatible with democracy?

While the arguments against compatibility of Islam and democracy often circle around, there are some arguments in the Muslim world favoring the concept of democracy and arguing the inherent democracy embedded in Islam. They believe that it is possible to have an “Islamic democracy.” According to them, it is not possible to adapt the complete western democracy with western values and limits, but a kind of democracy which contains certain important elements of Islam alongside with necessities of democracy can be formed and be applied in Muslim societies. Even recently, when the Arab Spring was happening and re-shaping the region, this discussion was on the agenda of eastern thinkers.

As with the eastern thinkers, many scholars from the west also argue that Islam and democracy cannot be compatible. Even after the uprisings in Arab countries, some argue that another autocrat will simply take the power of governance. As under autocratic regimes, strong and viable opposition groups could not be formed, only the Islamist became the most powerful opposition in many Arab nations. Basically, Islamists are the groups that embrace a political view of Islam and reject secular forms of government. In other word, they reject any western value in the game of democracy. However, the big picture of Tunisian political life, which was shaped rapidly after the revolution and the escape of Ben Ali from the country, did not give any sign that the country was rolled towards radical Islam. For instance, significant number of women were elected in Tunisia; even the parties that are considered as Islamist did not make their propaganda around Shari’ah or head-scarf. They often tried to convince their people and Western observers that they would not interfere in the lifestyle of people or people’s freedom.

From the first day of protests and manifestations scholars from East and West are talking about the future of the region in general, about Tunisia in particular as it was where whole *revolutionary* street protests started. As Arab countries have majorly Muslim populations, while discussing their future, most of the scholars make frequent references to Turkey as a *role model*. This is one of the reasons that this article focuses around the Turkish-Tunisian relations. The place of Turkey in the discussion of having democracy in majorly Muslim society is pivotal. With its majorly Muslim society, the Republic of Turkey has a functioning democracy within laic state structure and this characteristic places Turkey at the center of debates about the future of the region. Consequently, the Turkish experience of having a democracy in majorly Muslim society became a case study for the debate about compatibility of Islam and democracy. Proponents of this compatibility indicate the success and viability of the Turkish case. When we take a glance at the Middle East-North Africa region, it would not be possible to talk about another democracy except the Republic of Turkey, which functions and puts people’s will at the core of the system. But for Turkey, it is quite common to say that it is a “bridge” between the east and the west, which holds regular elections, and puts people as sovereign of the territory of Turkey.

Within the perspective of these discussions, recent popular question is: can Turkey be a role model for Arab States in which transformations to democracy are happening right now? There is no certain answer for that question.

This article has been written as a result of mobility time that I spent in Tunis for the project ‘SpringArab’. During the time of mobility, the host university; Université de Tunis, provided necessary tools and documents in order to facilitate the research. With provided necessary documents from Université de Tunis to access libraries, National Library of Tunisia and National Archive of Tunisia were visited several times in order to search for related written sources about history of Tunisia, Arab Spring and Revolution in Tunisia. For the research project I used oral history as a primary method for methodology as a result of being in the region. Multiple conversations have been conducted with local people of city of Tunis, the capital of Tunisia. Manifestations, demonstrations

and sit-ins also have been observed by first hand. Hence, majority of the information for this article have been gathered personally.

## 2. Historical Roots of Turkish-Tunisian Relations

For a Turkish citizen, Tunisia is a country that has similar food and cultural elements. Even some of food in Tunisian cuisine has Turkish names. Possibly, Tunisia is among a few countries that Turkish citizen can order Turkish coffee by its name on a café shop. Hence, there is an undeniable proximity between Tunisian and Turkish culture. On the relations of Turkey and Tunisia, it would not be wrong to argue that two dimensions, history and actuality, are the reasons behind this proximity between Turkish and Tunisian societies.

On the perception of history, people of Anatolia and people of Tunisia had lived under the same flag for a significant period of time. Under the Ottoman Empire's rule, different types of people lived as *subjects* of the Ottoman Sultan, who had the absolute authority over the Ottoman Empire's territories. Even though there is no direct territorial connection between Anatolia, also known as Asia Minor, and Tunisia, the effect of Ottoman Dynasty was prominent then. The Ottoman Era of Tunisia started back in 1574. Ottomans conquered the territories of Tunisia and started to apply their way of governance in the country. Under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, Ottoman Turkish became the language of the governance as the records and reports had been written in that language. While Ottoman Turkish was the language of the ruling circle in Tunisia, Arabic was in use among the population of Tunisia. It is also possible that many words, which have Turkish roots, are still in use in daily life. Consequently, it is possible to say that, Ottoman Empire's effect on culture of the country is visible even today. While Tunisia was the part of the Ottoman Empire, the country was ruled by Tunisian families within certain autonomy. Ruling elites of Tunisia were often appointed by the Ottoman Empire and called with titles like '*bey*' and '*pasha (pacha)*', which was the title for the chieftain. Traditionally, bey served under pasha in the provinces of the Ottoman Empire. Even today it is possible to see the usage of '*pasha*' in the names of streets of modern Tunisia. Accordingly, Tunisia was one of the several '*beyliks*' or '*eyalet*' (there are no exact translation of beylik/eyelet to English, however it is possible to translate it as principality, province) of the Ottoman Empire. Until the beginning of 1800s, no major problems occurred under the Ottoman rule and by the hands of pashas. As stated earlier, local rulers had certain autonomy under the Ottoman rule, and to protect that autonomy they even applied more European governance methods. However, by 1830, France conquered Algeria and the effect of politics of France started to be seen in Tunisia. In late 1800s, the Hayrettin Bey of Tunisia tried to implement series of reforms in order to stabilize the country; however, his efforts did not give any positive outcome and France gained control of the Tunisia by 1881. Right after, France became *protector* of Tunisia.

Tunisia lived under French protectorate until 1956. Starting with the independence, Neo-Destour (New Constitutional Liberal Party) governed country first under the rule of Habib Bourguiba, then Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, until the Jasmine Revolution took place in the country in 2011. During the mobility time in Tunisia, I had chance to talk with Tunisians regarding the history of both countries. As Habib Bourguiba was known with the changes that he accomplished in Tunisia, many Tunisians made connections with Mustafa Kemal Atatürk directly when they heard that I am from Turkey. Interestingly, Tunisian people know more than expected about the founder of the Republic of Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. After the Independence War of Turkey, under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the National Assembly of Turkey abolished the Ottoman Sultanate and by 1923 declared the new born state of Turkey as Republic of Turkey. Hence, as many Tunisians already know the history of the Republic of Turkey, they pointed out the similarities between the process of establishments of both Tunisian and Turkish republics. Tunisians often stated that on all his reforms and changes Habib Bourguiba inspired by the history of modern Turkey in general, and the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. They even said that they consider Habib Bourguiba as Mustafa Kemal Atatürk of Tunisia. While Tunisians made several connections between Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and Habib Bourguiba, in his book '*Sauver la Tunisie*' Lotfi Maktouf indicates that methods of Habib

Bourguiba and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk were slightly different from each other. According to him, while Mustafa Kemal Atatürk gave his fight against the Sultanate of Ottoman Empire, and tried to implement westernized reforms in the name of modernity, Habib Bourguiba respected the historical elements of Tunisia and tried to create harmony within the different fractions of Tunisian society.<sup>1</sup> According to article of Eric Pace that published on New York Times, after achieving power in Tunisia, Habib Bourguiba was asked about the new political system in Tunisia, and he answered “The system? What system! I am the system!”<sup>2</sup>

### 3. Jasmine Revolution and Actuality of Turkish-Tunisian Relations

According to Tunisians, the country had problems during Habib Bourguiba period; however, they stated that Ben Ali period was worse than Habib Bourguiba period. Ben Ali applied more security measures than Habib Bourguiba. Under Ben Ali’s regime, unemployment kept increasing; however, state became the main job-providing sector. According to Tunisians, middle class had savings during the relatively successful economy under Habib Bourguiba, so that they kept spending their money during the years under Ben Ali regime. A lot of privatization took place, but majorly Ben Ali and his family gained the control of everything. Day by day, Tunisians started to question the economic conditions in the country. They started to talk about corruptions immediately when I mentioned Ben Ali. Many Tunisians stated that Ben Ali and his family *stole* the resources of Tunisia in their favor. Ben Ali’s second wife Leila Trabelsi and his son-in-laws started to control nearly every business branch in the country. Tunisian often called them as whole as ‘Trabelsies’. In late 2010 infamous WikiLeaks cable came to surface about the corruption in Tunisia in general, but more importantly about Ben Ali and ‘Trabelsies’. Robert Godec, then United States of America’s ambassador to Tunisia wrote followings about Trabelsies;

*“The problem is clear, Tunisia has been ruled by the same president for 22 years. He has no successor. And, while President Ben Ali deserves credit for continuing many of the progressive policies of President Bourguiba, he and his regime have lost touch with the Tunisian people. They tolerate no advice or criticism, whether domestic or international. Increasingly, they rely on the police for control and focus on preserving power. Corruption in the inner circle is growing. Even average Tunisians are now keenly aware of it, and the chorus of complaints is rising. Tunisians intensely dislike, even hate, first lady Leila Trabelsi and her family. In private, regime opponents mock her; even those close to the government express dismay at her reported behavior. Meanwhile, anger is growing at Tunisia’s high unemployment and regional inequities. As a consequence, the risks to the regime’s long-term stability are increasing. We have too much at stake. We have an interest in preventing al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb and other extremist groups from establishing a foothold. We have an interest in keeping the Tunisian military professional and neutral. We also have an interest in fostering greater political openness and respect for human rights. The opulence with which El Materi and Nesrine live and their behavior make clear why they and other members of Ben Ali’s family are disliked and even hated by some Tunisians. The excesses of the Ben Ali family are growing.”<sup>3</sup>*

The Trabelsies had sort of monopoly in some sectors. For instance, the only private radio situation back then was owned by the family. By latest part of the aforementioned statement of ambassador Robert Godec talked about the ultra-luxury life of Nesrine, daughter of Ben Ali, and Mohamed Sakher El Materi, Ben Ali’s son-in-law. The WikiLeaks came out in 2010; however, the ambassador’s report was written in 2009. By the time that WikiLeaks cable was read and heard by Tunisian people, they already knew all of this, but with confirmation from a foreign country officer just made it an international scandal. Under the regime of Ben Ali, his family and close friends had *successful* business deals. Tunisians stated that no one without strong connections to the Ben Ali

<sup>1</sup> Maktouf, Lotfi, Tunus’u Kurtarmak, İstanbul, Modus Kitap, 2013, p. 35.

<sup>2</sup> Pace, Eric. Habib Bourguiba, Independence Champion and President of Tunisia, Dies at 96, New York Times, 07 April 2000, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2000/04/07/world/habib-bourguiba-independence-champion-and-president-of-tunisia-dies-at-96.html>>

<sup>3</sup> Black, Ian. “WikiLeaks cables: Tunisia blocks site reporting 'hatred' of first lady”, The Guardian, 7 December 2010, <<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/dec/07/wikileaks-tunisia-first-lady>>.

family ever had part of countries' huge privatization steps. In his book, Lutfi Maktouf states that foreign companies, which had intention to enter the Tunisian market, could not do so without giving bribes to the Ben Ali's family.<sup>4</sup> As already known right after the uprisings in Tunisia, Ben Ali and his family members fled away from the country. Even though exact amount is a mystery, there are rumors that they took more than 50 million American Dollar with them. If we accept that number as accurate number, which is a small one, the level of corruption is more or less calculable.

Apart from corruptions and unemployment problem; political rights, civil liberties, and the quality of public services were bad and bureaucracy had too much space in the body of governance and nearly had unlimited power. Furthermore, corruption was very high that people of these countries accepted corruption as a *normal* thing of their everyday life. Nearly every Tunisian that I was in contact stated that it was only possible to get things done with bribery. As the corruption became a part of their life, Tunisians started to talk about it in their inner circles, as it was impossible to show any opposition against any problem. They stated that the government officials saw themselves as 'untouchables' and often created problems without any given reason. The government organs were so powerful that nothing could move without their permission. Eventually, the only way to overcome any certain problem is to give bribes, which means to feed the already corrupted system unwillingly. If the citizens went to court for any problems with their government, they would hit a brick of wall and would not have any certain results. Moreover, the judicial laws on these countries were unclear and often lead to unexplained detentions of person without indicating time limit.

Under aforementioned conditions, the first uprising, which was the beginning of a series of uprisings that changed the region, broke out in Tunisia in late December 2010. According to Tunisians that I talked, after the international economic crises of 2008, the unemployment rate increased dramatically, poverty and corruption became number one problem in the society. On December 17, 2010, a twenty-six years old street vendor, Mohammed Bouazizi set himself on fire in the city of Sidi Bouzid as a result of depression and violence by state officials. According to Tunisians, earlier on December 17 police seized his fruit and vegetable cart and humiliated him publicly. He tried to complain about police's attitude by going to the local municipality. However, no body listened to him and consequently he set him self-fire in order to get the attention of state officials. Right after his act, the protests started and by December 27, the manifestations arrived to Tunis, the capital of Tunisia. The first reaction of Ben Ali was to try to pacify the protestors. Tunisians stated that he promised new jobs on the state structure, early election and even to keep age limit for the presidency. By doing so, Ben Ali indicated that he would not become a lifetime president. Basically, all these promises and moves came from Ben Ali with intention to gain more time to control the situation. Ben Ali visited Mohamed Bouazizi at hospital in order to show his good will. Later in January 5, Mohammed Bouazizi died<sup>5</sup>.

In following days, manifestations and protests spread over nearly every city in Tunisia. More and more people gathered to show their anger against the Ben Ali regime. According to people participated the protests; there were no sole group of people on the streets. Workers, students, laic minded people, Islamists were on the streets next to each other. As the atmosphere gave them the opportunity to say their demands out loud, people enjoyed this newly learnt freedom of expression. They stated that from the beginning of the first protests, many slogans were used; many changed depending on the daily development and discourses of state officials. However, the famous one, 'Dégage' ('Get out' in French), was repeated by thousands of people in every protest until Ben Ali fled away from the country. As Tunisia is a country with Arab population, it was surprising to hear that people actually shouted in French, not in Arabic. The same slogan was in use back in summer of 2013. During my mobility time, I personally went to multiple protests, which were against Ennahda government this time, and slogan 'dégage' was shouted by the people and flyers were handed over to the participants in the manifestation area.

---

<sup>4</sup> Maktouf, op. cit., p.52.

<sup>5</sup> "Tunisia suicide protestor Mohammed Boauzizi dies", BCC, 5 January 2011, <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-12120228>>.

During the manifestations, protesters vented their rage on poverty and especially on corruption. These two were the main problems, which were the reasons behind other problems also. As manifestations continued, Ben Ali wanted to use military forces against the people in order to suppress the protestors, however; army officials refused to act and attack against protestors. Consequently, on 14 January 2011, Ben Ali fled away from Tunisia with his family members. As the rulers of Arab countries generally see the country as their *property*, nobody had imagined the flee of Ben Ali. This was the first time and a ruler of Arab country ran away from his country. After the flee of Ben Ali, who ruled the country for 23 years, Neo Destour Party's office in central Tunis was abandoned. Tunisians stated that like Party's other establishments, this building gone under to control of new state and probably it would be sold to in near future.

With the flee of Ben Ali, a new start took place in the history of Tunisia. Tunisian people started to enjoy for the first time freedom of speech, forming political parties and non-governmental organizations. The country was prepared for the first election, after long years of single-party regime control by single man. After the flee of Ben Ali, Tunisians accepted the 14 January 2011 as an historical day of their history. Consequently, the name of the main square in Avenue Habib Bourguibia was changed to 'Place 14 Janvier 2011'. Starting with 2012, Tunisians celebrate 14 January as the anniversary of *their* revolution. While the uprisings are already known as Arab Spring as whole, Tunisian Revolution has its own name: Jasmine Revolution. As the Jasmine flower is famous in Tunisia, the uprisings took its name from this flower.

When I asked Tunisians what they think about Turkey's position regarding the Jasmine Revolution, nearly all of them stated that then Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan showed his support from the day one of the uprisings. For that reason, Tunisians were appreciated, as they consider Turkish Prime Minister as powerful leader in the region.

On 23 October 2011, Tunisian went before the ballot box in order to form the constituent assembly, which would write a new constitution and secure the future of country. As a lot of political parties were established during post-Ben Ali era, majority of them participated in the elections for constituent assembly. However, only 51.7% of the total number of potential voter executed their right to vote<sup>6</sup>. It is possible to say that the percentage of participation is quite low, however; we must remember that Tunisians' lack of experience with real and free democracy. After living under nearly 55 years of oppression, their hesitance to go ballot box should be considered as normal. As a result of the elections of constituent assembly, Ennahda (it means Renaissance, awakening) won 89 seats in the 217-member parliament by 41% of valid votes<sup>7</sup>. Ennahda's victory surprised many people both inside and outside of Tunisia. According to Tunisians, some protests took place right after the declaration of election results, however; these protests did not last long at that time.

Under the Ennahda party, a new era started on Tunisian politics. However, the assassinations of two opposition leaders under the rule of Ennahda government, brought protests back to the streets. First, Chokri Belaïd, the leader of left leaning Democratic Patriots' Movement was assassinated on 6 February 2013 in front of his house<sup>8</sup>. Then opposition leader, Mohamed Brahmi was killed by gunshots after five months<sup>9</sup>. Many Tunisians accused Salafis on these assassinations. Additionally, they believed that Ennahda supported the Salafis, maybe not publicly but secretly.

During the field research, I had the chance to observe some of the manifestations and sit-ins in person. Bardo square was the main area for manifestations against Ennahda government. As stated earlier, after the Jasmine Revolution, the Salafi movements started to be more visible within society,

<sup>6</sup> "Final Results of Tunisian Elections Announced", TunisiaLive, 14 November 2011, <<http://www.tunisia-live.net/2011/11/14/tunisian-election-final-results-tables/>>.

<sup>7</sup> "Tunisia's Islamist Ennahda party wins historic poll", BBC, 27 October 2011, <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-15487647>>.

<sup>8</sup> "Chokri Belaïd, 1964-2013: Fierce opponent of Tunisia's Islamists", Ahramonline, 6 February 2013, <<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/64204/World/Region/Chokri-Belaïd,-Fierce-opponent-of-Tunisia-Islami.aspx>>

<sup>9</sup> "Tunisian politician Mohamed Brahmi assassinated", BBC, 25 July 2013, <<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-23452979>>.

and secular Tunisians always thought that Ennahda government supported the movement. Tunisians stated that Salafis often accept the black flag as their flag instead of Tunisian flag. During the beginning of March 2012, Salafis occupied one of the buildings of Manouba University and they tore down the Tunisian flag and raised Salafi flag<sup>10</sup>. Tunisians interpreted this act as Salafi's refusal of Tunisian identity. Consequently, as a result of identity clash between Salafis and secular Tunisians, the Tunisian flag became one of the symbols of manifestations. During the summer 2013, sit-ins were still going on in front of the Parliament of Tunisia. Many manifestations took place in the square of Bardo, as stated earlier. As the manifestations primarily against the Ennahda government, protestors carried out pictures of two assassinated politicians. As a reaction to rise of black Salafi flag, Tunisians who participated to manifestations choose the Tunisian flag as main symbol of expression. It was possible to see Tunisian flag in the billboards in roadside during the summer of 2013.

As stated earlier, Tunisians was eager to speak and share their thoughts, however; they feared to declare their names and professions to me. When I asked their permission to speak with them, first they asked multiple questions to understand my intention and my purpose. After answering their questions and declaring that I am from Turkey, they became less concerned. According to them, this fear was the result of Ennahda policies. While they admitted that after the Jasmine Revolution, they have relatively more freedom of speech, but they still do not feel safe enough to say what is on their mind, especially to a foreigner. They stated that when Ennahda refused to give up the power of governance, Tunisian society started to worry again about their future. Many of them accused Ennahda with having a *secret* agenda, even working on creation of purely Islamic state. While Ennahda stuck to the power more and more, Tunisians found the solution by hitting the streets again.

The young protestors stated that when the revolution started, youth took the first line during the uprisings. For the first time they said, they felt like being part of something, and achieving their short-term goals. However, nearly two and half years after the revolution, they did not have any idea for their future. Many of them stated that, they were looking for a way to immigrate another country. They expressed that with the revolution they achieved *something*, but day after day they started to lose their *hope* in the quest of democracy. They believed that they *won* against Ben Ali regime, however; Ennahda's insistence to stay in power gave them disappointment. Ultimately, Tunisian youth was already aware that no one, no party should not stay in power forever.

Another important subject on my discussions with Tunisians was the economy. Many of them stated that country's bad economic situation was the reason why Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire. After the revolution, nothing changed, they said. However, a middle-aged man, who refused to say his profession, said: "I am part of these people. I am here with them. My reasons are different maybe, but we all want something: a better country with better governance! Yes, the economy was very bad before, and yes it is still not good. But it is better than before I believe. The thing about economy is that the poor of Tunisia thought that with the revolution they would have money without a job! They expect that state should pay them for nothing! There is no country like this! So do not believe when they say economy is bad as before. It is bad, but better than before!" It is quite interesting to listen all these diverse opinions among the society. Often if I can I let people to speak between each other, and I only observed. However; after a while, they switch to the Arabic instead of English, so that I needed to interfere and ask another question. In Turkey, for researchers, taxi drivers are useful sources to understand the general situation. As taxi drivers generally talk with a lot of people in a single day, it is possible to have a summary of the agenda from them with the right question. Consequently, I asked the economic situation to multiple drivers while I was using taxis. One of them stated that he was gaining more before, because the economy was better under the Ben Ali regime, despite the lack of freedom. Hence, he stated, "We are free, but we are poor also. We pay the price of freedom by giving up money". It is possible to say that Tunisians have diverse opinions about the actual situation in the country. There are the *happy* ones with the Ennahda government and

---

<sup>10</sup> "Salafis tear down Tunisian flag: Ennahda blames University dean", Middle East Online, 08 March 2012, <<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=51101>>.



the long-time taking transition, however; there are the *angry* ones who fear that the country will be stuck in the loop between the revolution and a functioning democracy.

#### 4. Actuality of Turkish-Tunisian Relations

On the topic of Tunisian-Turkish relationship, it is possible to talk about increasing Turkish interest in Tunisia. However, it should be noted that until the Justice and Development Party governments, Turkish Foreign Policy did not pay that much attention to Middle-East North-Africa region. Turkish foreign policy was generally western oriented until then Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutoğlu applied a significant change to the foreign policy. He often stated that while Turkey is keeping Western oriented foreign policy; it should also pay more attention to the old-Ottoman territories. Hence, the new foreign policy concept started to be named as Neo-Ottomanizm in western intellectuals and scholars' world. Nevertheless, under the Justice and Development Party, the State of Turkey developed its relations with Tunisia. From the first day of revolution, Turkish officials showed their support to the transition in Tunisia. The Turkish Government and especially then Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan were very popular in Tunisia. Back in September 2011, then Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan paid a visit to the countries like Egypt and Tunisia, where the streets were occupied by people and revolutionary movements took place. Hundreds of Tunisians were at the airport in order to welcome him. Many of them carried both Tunisian and Turkish flags and waved banners with slogans in Arabic<sup>11</sup>. As Tunisian and Turkish people had historical relations, Tunisian people showed their admiration to Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in particular, and to Turkey in general. This example clearly indicates the popularity of Prime Minister Erdoğan in the region, at least in Tunisia.

In March 2012, then Turkish President Abdullah Gül visited Tunisia. He was the first president who visited the country after revolution. After his visit, then President Gül wrote on Twitter that Turkish-Tunisians relations have 400 years of background; he was referring to Ottoman Empire period of Tunisia. In the beginning of June 2013, then Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan visited Tunisia with more than hundred businessmen with him. Multiple agreements were signed between Tunisia and Turkey. Consequently, in addition to already existing proximity between societies, countries created a partnership, which contains increased co-operation between governments and businessmen.

At the end of the May and beginning of June 2013, the government of Turkey faced protests in major cities, especially in Istanbul. As then Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan visited Tunisia in June 2013 and my mobility time started in July 2013, talking with Tunisian people about Turkey and Turkish-Tunisian relationship was very interesting as the country recently hosted Turkish Prime Minister and Tunisian people paid more attention to the ongoing protests in Turkey. Accordingly, the interviews and conversations with local people became dual interviews, as they asked many questions about protests. Additionally, Turkish State News Agency (Anadolu Ajansı) opened its office in Tunisia in July 2013<sup>12</sup>. This is an evidence of Turkish government's interest in Tunisia.

On the topic of Tunisian-Turkish relationship, they see Turkey at the level where a country with majorly Muslim population should be. According to them, Turkey is a pivotal country among the countries, which have Muslim societies. They often refer Turkey as a 'success story'. As Turkish Government stood next to Tunisian people and supported the ideas of Tunisian Revolution, they expressed their sincere gratitude when they heard that I am a Turkish citizen. It is possible to say that Tunisian people consider Turkey as 'sister country' and feel close to it as both societies are Muslims. Even though Turkey has its own problems, Tunisian people see Turkish Government as a friend.

<sup>11</sup> "Erdoğan Tunus'ta sloganlarla karşılandı", Aljazeera Turk, 20 September 2011, <<http://www.aljazeera.com.tr/haber/erdogan-tunusta-sloganlarla-karsilandi>>

<sup>12</sup> "Anadolu Ajansı Tunus Bürosü Törenle Açıldı", Medyagündem, 01 July 2013, <<http://www.medyagundem.com/anadolu-ajansi-tunus-burosu-torenle-acildi/>>.

## 5. Conclusion

It was really surprising to see that so many young Tunisians had the knowledge of Turkish language. They were interested to learn more about Turkish language and culture. Even, some of them often asked questions regarding the scholarships opportunities of Turkey. It is possible to say that young Tunisians are looking a way to be able to live and work in Turkey. When I asked them why Turkey, they stated that, Turkey is a country that has everything. As Muslims they believe that they can work and live in Turkey without compromising anything both from their religious and national identity.

After giving the reflection of Tunisian people regarding to Turkish-Tunisian relations, if I go back to the question of ‘Can Turkey be a model for Tunisia’, it is possible to say that Tunisians are not looking any model to follow. Additionally, I believe that it is not possible to have a “copy-paste” democracy for any country. Even if we can ‘copy’ certain legal provisions or institutions of certain country, they will probably be rejected by other society when you ‘paste’ them over. As applying a copy-paste democracy cannot be considered as an option, the theory that suggests Turkey as a role model for Arab countries collapses. Nonetheless, Turkey still can provide insights for the Arab people and the newly elected/formed governments of these countries by telling them about her own transformational history. Thus, Turkey can serve as a source of inspiration for these countries with its success story. Its strong democratic credentials, increased economic relations with the Middle East, more people-to-people contacts, and cooperation between civil society organizations, and cooperation between national assemblies, may also provide efficient channels for these countries to understand the Turkish Experience.

To conclude, neither Tunisia nor other countries were affected by Arab uprisings need any role model in their journey to have democracy. Tunisia and other Arab countries should create their own systems, while studying historical background and components of the Turkish experience. Ultimately, it is possible to say that Turkey is capable of being a source of inspiration rather than a role model for Arab countries.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

AKTAŞ, MURAT (ed.), *Arap Baharı Ortadoğu’da Demokrasi Arayışı ve Türkiye Modeli*, Ankara, Nobel, 2012.

AL- AMINE, DHAFER, *Le printemps arabe: entre le mythe et la réalité*, Tunis, 2012.  
 “Anadolu Ajansı Tunus Bürosu Törenle Açıldı”, Medyagündem, 01 July 2013, <<http://www.medyagundem.com/anadolu-ajansi-tunus-buros-u-torenle-acildi/>>.

ANGRIS, MICHELE PENNER. *Party Building in the Modern Middle East*, Seattle, University of Washington Press, 2006.

AYHAN, VEYSEL, *Arap Baharı İsyenlar, Devrimler ve Değişim*, Bursa, MKM Yayıncılık, 2012.

BETTAËB, VIVIANE, *Dégage: La révolution tunisienne, 17 décembre 2010 – 14 janvier 2011*, Edition du Layeur, 2011.

BLACK, IAN. “WikiLeaks cables: Tunisia blocks site reporting 'hatred' of first lady”, The Guardian, 7 December 2010, <<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/dec/07/wikileaks-tunisia-first-lady>>.

CAGATAY, SONER, “Ankara’s Middle East Policy Post Arab Spring”, Policy Notes, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, No. 16, 2013.

“Chokri Belaid, 1964-2013: Fierce opponent of Tunisia's Islamists”, Ahramonline, 6 February 2013, <<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/64204/World/Region/Chokri-Belaid,--Fierce-opponent-of-Tunisias-Islami.aspx>>.

DAVUTOĞLU, AHMET. *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu*, İstanbul, Küre Yayınları, 2001.

DOĞANYILMAZ, DIDEM, “Turkey: Where East and West Meet”, in *International Relations and Islam, Diverse Perspectives*, edited by Nassef Manabilang Adiong, p. 39-58, Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013.

“Erdoğan Tunus'ta sloganlarla karşılandı”, Aljazeera Turk, 20 September 2011, <<http://www.aljazeera.com.tr/haber/erdogan-tunusta-sloganlarla-karsilandi>>.

FİLİU, JEAN-PIERRE, *The Arab Revolution: Then Lessons from the Democratic Uprising*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011

GELVIN, JAMES L. *The Arab Uprisings What Everyone Needs to Know*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012.

GRINA, FREDJ, *La révolution tunisienne un an déjà!*, Tunis, Maison d'édition, 2011.

“Final Results of Tunisian Elections Announced”, TunisiaLive, 14 November 2011, <<http://www.tunisia-live.net/2011/11/14/tunisian-election-final-results-tables/>>.

FRANCIS, GHILES, “A More Realistic Approach to Turkish Foreign Policy”, CIDOB, 2013, No. 208.

KRAÏEM, MUSTAPHA, *Aux origines de la révolution tunisienne*, Tunis, Mip Livre, 2011.

LUDGER, KUEHNHARDT. “The Arab Spring revisited: How the Arab Monarchies can survive”, World Security Network, 2012, <<http://www.worldsecuritynetwork.com/Broader-Middle-East-Africa-Democracy-Human-Rights-Peace-and-Conflict/Kuehnhardt-Prof.-Dr.-Ludger/The-Arab-Spring-revisited-How-the-Arab-Monarchies-can-survive>>.

MAKTOUF, LOTFI, *Tunus'u Kurtarmak*, İstanbul, Modus Kitap, 2013.

MA'UZ, MOSME, “The ‘Arab Spring’ and the New Geo-strategic Environment in the Middle East”. *Insight Turkey*, Vol.14 / No. 4 / 2012, pp. 13-23.

MBOUGUENG, VALENTIN, *Ben Ali et le modele tunisien*, Paris, Ed. De l'Orient, 1999.

*Meddeb, Abdelwahad, Printemps de Tunis: la métarmorphose de l'histoire*, Tunis, Cérès, 2011.

PARK, BILL, *Modern Turkey*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2012.

OKTAV, ÖZDEN ZEYNEP (ed.). *Turkey in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Quest for a New Foreign Policy*, Surrey, Asgata, 2011.

ÖNIS, ZIYA, “Turkey and the Arab Spring: Between Ethics and Self-Interest”. *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 14 / No. 3/ 2012, pp. 45-63.

Salafis tear down Tunisian flag: Ennahda blames University dean”, *Middle East Online*, 08 March 2012, <<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=51101>>.

SHARQIEH, IBRAHIM, “Tunisia’s Lessons for the Middle East”, *Foreign Affairs*, 2013, <<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/139938/ibrahim-sharqieh/tunisias-lessons-for-the-middle-east>>.

“Tunisia's Islamist Ennahda party wins historic poll”, *BBC*, 27 October 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-15487647>

“Tunisian politician Mohamed Brahmî assassinated”, *BBC*, 25 July 2013, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-23452979>

“Tunisia suicide protestor Mohammed Boauzizi dies”, *BCC*, 5 January 2011, <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-12120228>>.

YAVUZ, CELALETTİN AND SERDAR ERDURMAZ, *Arap Baharı ve Türkiye*, Ankara, Berikan, 2012.

ZENGİN, GÜRKAN, *Kavga Arap Baharı’nda Türk Dış Politikası 2010-2013*, İstanbul, İnkilap, 2013.