

## Presidential and Legislative Elections in Tunisia

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**T**he formation of the Tunisian government, headed by Habib Essid crowned the transitional period which Tunisia had passed through after the outbreak of the Jasmine Revolution and the overthrow of former President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali on the 14th of January, 2011. After the escape of Ben Ali, Tunisia entered a new transitional period in which the Tunisian people aspired to achieve freedom and social justice, while the political forces sought after taking hold of a prominent position in the Tunisian political system. Meanwhile, many issues concerning the future of the country emerged and need to be handled in order to achieve such hopes and aspirations. Despite the large number and complexity of these issues, the political disagreements took more attention instead. Therefore, the political forces varied in their dynamics of dealing with each other and in their interaction with the demands of the popular forces that passed through several periods until they developed and united their final demands. Afterwards, it has been agreed on the necessity to go back to the zero point, and launch a new period by a new constituent Assembly to which the people of Tunisia shall, through ballot, appoint the responsibility of building and legislating the future.

Later, after the Constituent Assembly elections, the Council carried out three main tasks, namely the constituent, the legislative, and the facilitative matters required for the second transitional period. First, the constituent tasks are represented in setting a new constitution which shall guarantee the rights as well as freedoms, define the relationship between Ruler and Subject and the nature of the political system, maintain the constitutional independence of Judiciary, Separate between powers, and establish the principles of 14 January Revolution. Second, the legislative task is represented in setting all the laws that the country needs during its second transitional period to organize the political, economic and social life and others. Third, the facilitating tasks are represented in the appointment of the interim President of the Republic, who formed the transitional government several times for the management of national affairs until the preparation of the new constitution

is complete.

Also, the political and partisan map in Tunisia, after the revolution, included many political powers and currents, salient of which is the political Islam current represented in Ennahda Party which is considered as the most organized party that had the most influence in directing the political system in Tunisia during the transitional period. This made the people think that the political system in Tunisia will incline towards the Islamic system, but actually it proved the opposite with the first legislative elections due to the special characteristics of the Tunisian community and its secular and leftist political powers, in addition to the regional context and its consequences.

Later, the Constituent Assembly did finish setting the new constitution for the country, and thus ending such transitional period which witnessed a lot of challenges and changes that altered the features of the political map since it paved the way for new players to emerge and marginalized others. This was embodied in the legislative and executive elections that took place in a local and regional environment full of political and economic changes and ended the transitional phase to start a new period with a new political system that includes a new constitution, a legislative council, an

elected president, and a new government.

#### First: Legislative Elections

The Legislative elections were held in Tunisia on 26 October last year, where a group of parties with different trends competed. The number of election lists reached about 1327 (1230 inside Tunisia and 97 outside the country). These lists were distributed among 33 constituencies (27 inside Tunisia and 6 outside the country). These were the second legislative elections after the revolution. While the first were the Constituent Assembly elections in 2011 in which Ennahda Movement adopted modernist and secular terms and visions that were strongly rejected by all other Islamic movements all through. This enabled Ennahda Movement to win 40% of the seats in the Constituent Assembly, to form the government and to participate in power as a main actor. While the legislative elections in 2014 resulted in the formation of a new political map in Tunisia due to a large number of internal and external factors which contributed to a great extent in reconstituting the political map of Tunis.

#### Election Results

Tunis Appeal Movement party won 86 seats from a total number of 217 seats in the People's Congress, followed by Ennahda Party with 69 seats, the Free Patriotic Union Party

with 16 seats, the Popular Front with 15 seats, and Tunis Horizons Party with 8 seats. The remaining 23 seats are distributed among the other parties and the independent lists.

Chairman of the Independent High Electoral Commission said that the number of participants in the legislative elections amounted to 3 mil-

lion, 579 thousand and 257 voters, which is equivalent to "more than 70%" of the total number of voters registered in voting regulations.

In addition, three influential parties will have a significant role in the political arena and in the game of alliances, namely the Free Patriotic Union, the Popular Front Party and the Tunis Horizons Party,

Percentage	The number of parliamentary seats	The party or coalition
39.6 %	86	Tunis Appeal
31.8 %	69	Ennahda
4 %		Free Patriotic Union
6.9 %	15	The Popular Front
3.7 %	8	Tunis Horizons
10.6 %	23	Other Parties and Alliances
4 %	4217	Total

These elections produced a new political map based on dual-polarization that seem ideological where the scene is mainly about two main blocs; one is conservative represented Ennahda Movement and the other was founded in 2012 in order to achieve balance with that block.

The results of these elections reshaped the political and partisan map in the country. This is represented in the rise of new political

parties, some of which were able to occupy the first rank such as Tunis Appeal Party while others succeeded in taking hold of advanced positions after they had been at the back lines during the Constituent Assembly elections, such as the Free Patriotic Union which occupied the third rank and the Popular Front, which occupied the fourth rank, and the same to the Democratic Current which retreated and the number of its members decreased as well. As

for the so-called intermediate parties, namely al-Mu'tamar or 'the Congress for the Republic (CPR)', Ettakatol or 'the Bloc' and the Republican Parties, they were defeated.

#### **Second: Presidential Elections**

The Tunisian presidential elections were held in two rounds. In the first round, 27 candidates, including one woman, were competing. Only 22 candidates were announced eligible to continue. The other five candidates preferred not to continue in the elections for various reasons. The most prominent candidates are Beji Caid Essebsi, Mohamed Moncef Marzouki (who took over the country during the transitional period), Hama Hammami (a left-wing militant and a staunch opponent of the rule of Bourguiba and Ben Ali, and then to the Government of Ennahda after the revolution), Slim Riahi (a politician and a businessman as well as the founder and the president of Free Patriotic Union party), and Kalthoum Kannou (the first and only female presidential candidate in Tunisia who worked as a judge during the era of Ben Ali). In the first round Beji Caid Essebsi obtained 39.49% of the vote while Marzouki obtained 33.43%. Consequently, they both entered a runoff through the second round on 21st of December, 2014 where the Independent High Electoral Commission

announced on Monday evening the winning of Beji Caid Essebsi in the Tunisian presidential elections by 55.68% of the vote (1,731,529 votes) compared to 44.32% of the vote for the benefit of Moncef Marzouki (1,378,513 votes) in accordance to the decree of the Independent High Electoral Commission issued on 29 December, 2014, highlighting that the gap between the results of the two candidates is 6 points deeper than that of the first round.

Most of the researchers think that a group of local and international reasons helped Essebsi to win over Marzouki.

#### **At the local level:**

¶ The country faced a severe economic crisis since the events of the revolution and the escape of Ben Ali on January 14, 2011. This, in return, escalated the crisis of unemployment and high prices that reached its utmost when Ennahda movement assumed power after obtaining the majority in the Constituent Assembly elections in 2011. Unfortunately, this resulted in a political crisis in addition to the economic crisis which already exists. Such political crisis divided the country into two parts. On one hand there is 'The Troika', an unofficial name for the alliance between the three parties Ennahda, Ettakatol, and CPR that ruled in Tunisia after the 2011. On the

other hand, there are most of the left-wing and liberal political parties. Therefore, Beji Caid Essebsi succeeded in making many of them join the Tunis Appeal Movement Party.

¶ The escalation of terrorist acts since the beginning of December 2012, after the terrorists have hidden in the Chaambi Mountains in the Kasserine governorate as well as in the Heights of Kef and Jendouba governorates on the borders with Algeria. This was followed by the political assassinations which deepened the political crisis facing 'the Troika' led by Ennahda, especially after the assassination of the leftist opposition Chokri Belaid in February 2013 and the national opposition leader Mohamed Brahmi in July 2013. Successfully, the opposition parties managed through various media to "stick" in the memory of the Tunisian people that 'the Troika' government and the President-elect by the Constituent Assembly, namely Marzouki are morally responsible for such acts. In addition they highlighted the language of struggle ruling the relation between Ennahda and the other powers rather than the language of participation, and its willingness to make a retreat from earlier commitments as it practically did with regards to the val-

ues of democracy, human rights and non-violence, the implications of the Personal Status Code, the equality between man and woman, and many others in the light of the split positions of its members on these issues, Concomitantly, Baji Caid Essebsi introduced himself and his party for Tunisians as an alternative to the Troika whose name is associated with terrorism. Since that moment, his popular base began had expanded bit by bit.

¶ The significant role of media in influencing the will of the Tunisian people and the attempts of rating Marzouki as the candidate of the "Strict" Salafis, besides the outbreak of clashes and exchange of accusations between Marzouki and many of the media.

¶ The support of some parties to Essebsi compared to Marzouki such as the Free Patriotic Union Party (liberal) led by the businessman Slim Riahi, the Popular Front (leftist coalition) led by Hama Hammami. Also, the explicit opposition of the Free Patriotic Union to Marzouki is considered as an implicit support to Essebsi. Moreover, Essebsi also obtained the support of the parties with constitutional reference (the former regime), such as the Constitutional Movement led by Hamed Karoui and the Constitu-

tional Initiative led by Kamal Morgan, besides the figures that appeared behind Essebsi at the conclusion of his electoral campaign. Furthermore, a large number of businessmen supported Beji Caid Essebsi in his electoral campaign as well as the Sufis.

**At the International Level**

¶ The bad situation that surrounds the Arab region, and the deteriorating security situation in neighboring countries, especially countries that witnessed revolutions such as Libya, Syria and Egypt, in addition to the tensions in Iraq and Yemen .

¶ The atmosphere of panic created by "Daash", also known as ISIS, all over the world and especially most of the Arab peoples who fear its incursion into their countries.

¶ The Gulf support to Essebsi, given that some Gulf countries are against the idea of the rule of the political Islam currents.

Consequently, Essebsi became the most appropriate candidate for the management of the country; however who is Essebsi?

The Tunisian President-elect Beji Caid Essebsi was born in Sidi Bou Said, a northern suburb of Tunis, the capital. Essebsi graduated from the Faculty of Law in Paris in 1950 and began his law practice in 1952. He held several important positions in Tunisia between 1963 and 1991

before being appointed Prime Minister for the post-revolution transitional government in 2011. Essebsi joined the New Constitutional Liberal Party when he was a student. After Tunisian independence in 1956, he served as an advisor to the first Tunisian president, Habib Bourguiba. He was later appointed regional director of the Ministry of the Interior, and in 1963 he was appointed head of the Administration of National Security. In 1965, Essebsi assumed the position of minister of the interior, and then minister of national defense during the period from 1969 to 1970. He was appointed as Tunisian Ambassador in Paris then in Bonn, Germany in 1987. In 1971, all his activities in the Constitutional Socialist Party were frozen for supporting the reformation of the regime before being expelled in 1974. In 1978 he joined the Movement of Socialist Democrats (MDS) led by Ahmed Mestiri. Concomitantly, Essebsi established a magazine in French called Democracy. On April 15, 1981 he came back to the government under Mohamed Mzali as Minister of Foreign Affairs, serving until September 1986. At that time he was well known for his significant diplomatic role in the Security Council Resolution condemning the Israeli raids on PLO headquarters in the area of Hammam-Plage, situated in the

southern suburb of the Tunisian capital. In 1989, he was elected as a member of the Tunisian Parliament. Later, he served as President of Parliament from 1990 to 1991. Following the resignation of former Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi, the temporary President Fouad Mubazaa appointed Essebsi as Tunisian Prime Minister on February 27, 2011. Mubazaa charged Essebsi with the mission of forming an interim government that would serve until the Constituent Assembly elections were held.

In June 2012, Essebsi announced the establishment of Tunis Appeal Movement which became, lately, at the top of the Tunisian political life. As regards his personal life, he is married and the father of four children.

### Third: The New Government

In accordance with the provisions of Article (89) of the new Tunisian constitution, "Tunis Appeal" Party was assigned to form the government, as the winning party that obtained parliamentary majority, however it did not obtain "absolute majority", namely 109 seats, which should qualify it to form the government alone. Therefore, the party shall have to enter into alliances with other parties represented in the parliament. In this respect, Tunis Appeal Party appointed Habib Essid to form the government. Accord-

ingly, Habib Essid formed a coalition government consisting of 26 ministers, of whom three only are female ministers. It, also, included Tunis Horizons Party, Free Patriotic Union, Ennahda Party, and Tunis Appeal Party which held 6 ministerial portfolios. This government received the endorsement of the new parliament since it obtained the votes of 166 deputies of total 204 who attended the session, while 30 deputies voted of no confidence and 8 deputies abstained from voting. In accordance with the Constitution, Essid government shall only need to obtain the "absolute majority" represented in 109 votes of a total of 217 deputies.

Essid does not belong to Tunis Appeal Party, but it seems that his choice came as a step to lessen the fears concerning the party dominance on power after the winning of Caid Essebsi. This is in addition to the compatibility with the other parties; being an independent politician who held many positions whether before or after the revolution, besides his experience in both the security and the economic fields.

Habib Essid was born in early June, 1949 in the coastal city of Sousse. He obtained a degree in economics in 1971 from the University of Tunis, then a postgraduate degree in agricultural economics from the American University of Minnesota

in 1974. He held various positions in the Tunisian Republic in 1982 with the administration and in the Tunisian rank of commander and in 1992 with government, both before and after the rank of officer. Moreover, he was the revolution. In 1993, Habib Essid appointed the Minister of the Interior was named cabinet director at the in the government of Beji Caid Ministry of Agriculture, remaining Essebsi, who took over this position in that post until 1997. He later appointed by interim President Fouad served as cabinet director at the Mebazaa (who was the President of the Ministry of the Interior from 1997 Parliament under Ben Ali) on February 27, 2011. Later, on December 13, 2011 the Interim President Marzouki appointed Hamadi Jebali, Secretary General of Ennahda Movement, to form a new government. In this respect, Habib Essid was named the national security adviser of Hamadi Jebali during the rule of Ennahda, which led the country after the Constituent Assembly elections in 2011.

Essid, also, chaired Tunisian state-owned companies, and he was awarded the Legion of Honor of the