R12 The EU responsibility to support the Tunisian civil society

Proposer: écolo j, les jeunes ecologistes, PROTESTS, Juventud Verde, Swiss Young Greens (JVS/JGS)

Agenda item: 1. Resolutions

Motion text

In July 2021, the Tunisian president Kais Saied triggered Article 80 of the Tunisian constitution[1], a coup de force that led to the dismantling of the institutions resulting from the post-2011 transition of the Tunisian people's uprising against the regime of the former dictator of Tunisia, Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, also known as the Jasmine Revolution.

The actions undertaken by the Saied regime, such as freezing and then dissolving the Parliament, full powers by decree, ratification of a new constitution in 2022 with an extremely low participation rate and the legislative elections in December/January 2023 with an even lower participation rate, racist outbursts against Black Africans, persecution of political opponents and NGOs, draws up a record that leaves no room for doubt about the undeniable authoritarian and populist turn taken by the Saied regime in Tunisia.

Tunisia's new constitution, which entered into force in August 2022, removes many checks and balances from the 2014 constitution and firmly centralises power in the hands of the President, for example he now has the power to unilaterally appoint the Prime Minister and can no longer be impeached for serious violations of the constitution. As described by Amnesty International, “the adoption of the new constitution comes after a year marked by a regression on human rights protections in Tunisia”[2], leading to the weakening of human rights safeguards and the rule of law. In addition to the constitutional changes, the judicial system, until now independent from presidential power, is being further attacked and dismantled in order to ensure that the presidential control is maintained. In particular, with the support of the Ministry of Justice, which has been completely under the control of the presidential power since its reform[3], as well as the use of the military justice system[4], and the total impunity granted to the security forces and the Ministry of the Interior. All this in a context of dramatic socio-economic crisis and risk of default.

It is important to put in context the deterioration of the rule of law and individual freedoms in Tunisia with the state of its economic situation. The fragility of the Tunisian economy has been strongly impacted and weakened by the

two consecutive external shocks, the pandemic of COVID-19 and the outbreak of a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Widespread shortages of food and their rationing, shortages of medicines but also of fuel have been commonplace in recent months.

The Tunisian state is struggling to pay for its imports and is in the midst of negotiations with the IMF and the World Bank to receive $1.9 billion in financial support, while the political situation is moving towards a dictatorship that is repressing political opponents and minorities. The European Union, through the fascist Italy of Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and her Minister of Foreign Affairs, Antonio Tajani (former President of the European Parliament), is more concerned about the arrival of migrants in Europe via the Tunisian coast than anything else.

With Turkey, Morocco and Libya, Tunisia is one of the European Union partners supporting the externalisation of its borders in a “Fortress Europe” that is increasingly conciliatory with the anti-migration policies of the far-right. The number of victims and missing persons on the Tunisian coast from January to October 2022 is 544,241[5]. For many organisations, these shipwrecks are "consciously provoked" off the coast of Tunisia: While the European Union is steadily increasing its financial support to the Tunisian government in protecting and developing its coastline to avoid tragedies related to Mediterranean crossings, there is mounting evidence of the involvement of the Tunisian coast guard in dangerous manoeuvres that have cost the lives of many migrants. For the last decade, Italy has allocated 47 million euros to Tunisia to control their borders and migratory "flows", in parallel with a readmission agreement that allows Italy to expel Tunisian nationals at a rate of up to 4 charters per week. The EU has released 30 million euros from the Emergency Trust Fund for Africa to implement an "integrated surveillance" system for maritime borders[6].

It is important to denounce the reinforcement of hate speech by the Tunisian president himself towards Black African migrants/refugees and asylum seekers in the country which has intensified xenophobic and racist sentiment and acts of violence against these populations on the basis of conspiracy theories[7]. These words and acts of violence are also reused and integrated into the racist, xenophobic, anti-migrant and conspiracy theories of far-right movements and political parties in Europe... While far-right ideas are already at the heart of our institutions and gaining more and more power in our societies, this support from both sides of the Mediterranean is dangerous and threatens the safety of migrants and asylum seekers.

With this resolution FYEG:

- Condemns the violence, racism and systemic discrimination in Tunisia against the Black African populations present in the country.

- Supports the Tunisian civil society being targeted and controlled by a regime which is becoming more authoritarian, using the Ministries of Interior and of Justice (now fully subordinated to the President) as well as military institutions to shrink the democratic and human rights spaces in the country.

- Strongly denounces and is concerned about the resurgence of conspiracy and racist theories within European societies and the progression of fascist and far-right ideas and theories in the European Institutions.

- Calls on the European Union and its representatives to firmly and officially sanction the Tunisian president and his government for undermining the democratic values and processes established after the 2011 Revolution.

- Calls the European Union to immediately stop the externalisation of the EU border with Tunisia via the funding through European funds of the Saied regime to stop migration corridors.

- Reiterates the importance of the statements made in the resolution No Discrimination on Migration to develop an European humanitarian framework focusing on saving and welcoming refugees through safe corridors.

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6. Statewatch website: https://www.statewatch.org/media/3241/eu-council-pact-tunisia-action-plan-11392-21-rev2.pdf

7. 27/02/2023 - ACHPR: Press release on the Tunisian President's Statement on the situation of sub-Saharan migrants in Tunisia

   https://achpr.au.int/en/news/press-releases/2023-02-27/press-release-tunisian-presidents-statement-situation-sub-saha