A Role to Play for Interest Groups in EU Foreign and Security Policy: The Case of Migration Focused EU - Libya Policies

Tunisia's Deadlocked Situation: President Saied Takes the Authoritarian Exit

The Rapid Response for Facilitating Ukrainian Refugees' Orientation and Labour Market Integration in Flanders

Book Review: The Dictator's Learning Curve

Beyond the Horizon International Strategic Studies Group (BtH) is an independent next-generation think & do tank in Belgium. BtH aims to promote glocal (global & local) peace and security by its strong in-house capacity and extensive network of partners throughout the world.

Disclaimer and Other Legal Information

Photo Credits : By the courtesy of Sea-Eye e. V.

Please cite as: Surname, Name (Writer) (2022), "Article name", Horizon Insights – 2022/1, Brussels.
For more information visit www.behorizon.org

Contents

Foreword

Dear Reader,

We are happy to be with you in this first issue of 2022. We again had to make hard choices in selecting the articles to make it to the journal. Most notably, the Russian invasion of Ukraine and its repercussions on the global geopolitical landscape are hard to escape. Yet, our preference to keep important issues alongside the war in Ukraine pushed us to make a selection, that you will judge on its soundness while going through the journal.

As became tradition, this issue also brings deep insight into three different issues of our select. The first article, is in fact a reminder or more precisely a policy brief that evaluates influence of interest groups on EU's policy making vis-à-vis the crisis in Libya. To give a big picture, the author depicts scope of EU policies in historical order while juxtaposing interest group mediation. Then he enumerates the areas interest groups could be used to make the EU a more active player or at least mediator in the conflict and thus acting more proactively to shape the security and governance landscape to best of its interest. He concludes the article with an array of policy recommendations.

The second article is the fruit of years of research and project implementation in integration. 4,3 million Ukrainian refugees that flowed to Europe in only 6 weeks after the invasion started constitute the biggest mass flow to the old continent after WW2. Drawing attention to the fact that 90% of them are women and children, the authors argue their integration will be a big challenge for the regional and local authorities. They focus on facilitating and accelerating early-stage integration (orientation) and labour market integration. Based on two different models including tools developed and tested in EU and Flemish government funded project settings, they offer policy implementation solutions and recommendations to the Flemish and other European regional and local authorities.

The third and the last article reflects the power takeover in Tunisia. Presenting the two scenarios awaiting the country, the author shares his bleak outlook for the future for Tunisia based on President Saied's performance since takeover. Accordingly, President Saied steers Tunisia towards authoritarianism. Still, he warns the politics of Tunisia have always had the potential to surprise policymakers and observers alike. The article, in entirety, is in fact testimony to the fact that no good intention can be brought to fruition by use of unjustified methods.

Finally, we have a book review on William J. Dobson's book « The Dictator's Learning Curve, Inside the Global Battle for Democracy». The author offers insight from the lives of those who fight against dictators as well as the tactics that these regimes use in their efforts to stay in power. Accordingly, today's dictators cannot directly use the tactics of their predecessors. Still, they learn from their experiences and adapt to the modernity with more "more subtle forms of coercion". Dobson's work comes at such a time that we can test more easily his arguments by comparison with another dictator's moves to solidify popular support for the unjust, illegal and atrocious invasion of Ukraine.

Sincerely yours,
Beyond the Horizon ISSG

A Role to Play for Interest Groups in EU Foreign and Security Policy: The Case of Migration Focused EU - Libya Policies

Policy Brief

by Erman Atak

Executive Summary

Following the fall of Gaddafi, Libya has fallen apart, and this vast and resource-rich country with around 1,800 km coastline to the southern side of the central Mediterranean has become a failed state. The crisis stemming from Libya has significant impact on the EU: Not only for irregular migration but also due to its security, economic and geopolitical importance to EU. Despite this multifaceted significance, EU Libya policies have been focusing on the migration dimension of the crisis and making use of non-functioning Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions as the primary policy tool. That is why the EU missed the opportunity to solve the crisis from an early age and has been sidelined with the escalating conflict. In the absence of EU, rival international actors took over the Libya dossier and started to shape the developments per their interests. If the EU does not take lessons from previous mistakes, it will soon lose its influence over Libya, which might turn out to be quite detrimental for its interests. As this is a multifaceted and multi-dimensional web of relations, the policy paper at hand focuses explicitly on the "migration" dimension and makes inferences based on this narrower scope.

Interest Groups (IGs) are prominent actors in the migration dimension of the Libya crisis. This policy paper depicts that there are at least 738 IGs concerned with European or global level migration & asylum policies, and they have had hundreds of interactions with members of the EU Commission and Parliament. IGs have been spending money, energy and other resources to influence the EU policies in this field. However, up to now, just like EU Libya policies, their efforts on migration-related problems stemming from Libya has failed. Following a comprehensive description of the current status of migration dimension of EU Libya policies together with the role of various IGs, this policy brief examines the causes of (in)effectiveness of IGs' efforts in influencing EU policies. It argues that public salience, internal security concerns of the member states and highly politicised nature of the migration issue makes it difficult for IGs to be influence. Irregular migration is not a matter on its own; it is a consequence of a causal link. In solving the issue, the EU needs a multifaceted approach, which considers IGs an integral partner and utilises IGs soft power, knowledge and expertise to increase the EU's leverage.

The policy paper at hand recommends EU and IGs to develop a partnership model which requires coordination and assistance in Libya matters, without damaging the neutral interlocutor position of the IGs. This new model foresees IG support in handling IDPs, refugees/irregular migrants, training and monitoring of the Libyan officials, or in reporting about the humanitarian aspects. Requires EU to utilise IGs in addressing the sources of grievances between local ethnic, tribal and religious groups, or facilitating the truth-seeking ventures and repairing the relations between rival groups. IGs can support EU policies by providing mentorship to sovereign economic, financial, auditing institutions or misfunctioning judiciary, public health or education institutions. EU should benefit from IGs in the prevention of radicalisation/extremism, as well.

For the sake of preventing the emergence of several and conflicting member state Libya policies, EU supranational bodies should lead to the process vis á vis overall EU interests. To save IGs from the complex power-sharing structure, European External Action Service should undertake the one single coordinator role with IGs. EU officials should encourage or —if need be— stipulate Libyan authorities to cooperate with IGs in their operations for Libya. EU may consider using military CSDP operations or EU battlegroup to protect the peace process from spoilers or destructive foreign meddling or defend the governing institutions from the impact of various militia groups and enforce the arms embargo. EU should also activate a competent

sanctions policy against the spoilers of the process. Another crucial task for the EU will be the construction of a unified and reliable security apparatus. IGs can build the support that the EU requires on the ground. EU requirements overlap with IGs interests; they both need to construct a thriving society, inclusive politics, and good governance, which will make Libya a hard-to-find neighbour/ally to the EU.

1. Introduction

The crisis in Libya is still unfolding. Since the fall of Moammar Gadhafi in 2011, Libya failed to make the transition to lasting peace and stability. Internal conflicts and destructive external interferences wiped out a ruling government authority over vast Libyan territory and coastline. Libya, once a final destination, now became a transit country for thousands of irregular migrants and asylum seekers, coming from Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia aspiring to reach Europe. From the EU perspective, among other contemporary conflicts/crises, Libya has a special significance. Owing to its geographical proximity and political, economic, military or security links to the EU, developments in Libya impact Europe. The country is home to the most commonly used migration routes and embarkation points for EU-aspiring irregular migration flows. Rich hydrocarbon or solar reserves of such a near neighbour have the potential to alleviate European from dependency on Russian reserves. Libya's 1.8 million km2 land is a buffer to a space stretching between sub-Saharan Africa, Sahel and Europe. Its more than 1700 km coastline on the southern side of the Mediterranean is a part of the rising geostrategic competition and power politics in the region. When left to the influence of rival international actors, Libya's sea/airports might be used to project force or extend rival Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD[1]) coverage over Europe, which constitutes a significant contemporary security threat. Therefore, having a democratic, economically stable and friendly government in Libya is consequential for the EU.

However, EU policymakers, mostly, look at this multi-dimensional crisis from unilateral migration blinkers, which results in unfit policies. As a consequence of these ineffective policies, the EU has lost its leverage to influence the developments in Libya. Russia and Turkey have filled that gap and started to exploit the crisis in Libya per their national interests. If the EU does not take lessons from its previous mistakes, it will soon lose influence over Libya, which might turn out to be quite detrimental for EU interests. Although there is a multifaceted and multi-dimensional web of relations that play a role, the policy paper at hand focuses explicitly on the "migration" dimension and makes inferences based on this narrower scope. It is true that "migration" per se is not much noteworthy for ending the crisis itself. However, it is an issue that has become a source of dissent, contention and competition among different member states and IGs. Discussions around irregular migration, stemming from Libya, has been threatening the solidarity and damaging the reputation of the EU, particularly since 2015. [2]

The migration aspect of the crisis is highly politicised and attracts quite many Interest Groups (IGs). [3] IGs have been investing much resource to influence EU policies in this field. Many professional consultancy and law firms, companies & groups, trade unions, business associations, non-governmental organisations/platforms/networks, think tanks, research/academic institutions, and organisations representing religious communities, local, regional, municipal authorities are lobbying to influence EU Libya policies by their area of interests.[4] However, up to now, just like EU Libya policies, the efforts of IGs —a potent and dynamic soft power tool that EU's opponents don't have— to solve the migration-related problems stemming from Libya has failed. It is a pity that despite all the spent EU and IG resources, the problem is still there. The literature argues that public sector needs IGs when they are not able to produce the necessary resources themselves[5]. In the current settings, the EU's capabilities to influence the developments in Libya are quite limited and in need of resources that IGs can mobilise. The resources that IGs can deliver are not limited to financial; those can include conveying legitimacy, triggering public support and providing information, knowledge or expertise, as well. VII. These groups have vital know-how, strong local connections and sometimes direct presence on the field where EU officials do not posess. Redesigning the efforts of both actors in a joint approach can trigger a breakthrough. This policy paper intends to analyse [6] the migration dimension of EU Libya policies together with the role of various IGs and provide policy recommendations to solve the crisis in a comprehensive approach.

2. What the EU did regarding the crisis in Libya

Over the years, the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions have been the primary tool leveraged by the EU to address the migration crisis.[7] As an integral part of Common Foreign and Security Policy, CSDP defines the EU political and military structures, operations and missions abroad. In the Libya case, the EU has drawn on civilian or military CSDP operations as crisis management and foreign policy tools. 'Operation Sophia', 'Operation Irini' and 'EU Border Assistance Mission in Libya (EUBAM)' have been the three CSDP missions employed by EU, up to now. EUBAM is the first CSDP mission to tackle the migration crisis stemming from Libya. Unlike the other two military CSDP missions, EUBAM is a civilian border assistance mission. Reflecting the EU's sensitivity against migration, it aims to increase border protection capabilities at Libya's land, sea and air borders.

The number of migrants stemming from Libya peaked in 2015. This was, at the same time, the deadliest year for migrants/refugees with 2892 estimated death[8] in the Central Mediterranean. With the insistence of the new EU foreign policy chief, Federica Mogherini, a military CSDP operation, EUNAVFOR-Med' Operation Sophia' was launched in May 2015. The Council Decision described the task of the operation as: *"contributing to the disruption of the business model of human smuggling and trafficking networks in the Southern Central Mediterranean (EUNAVFOR MED), achieved by undertaking systematic efforts to identify, capture and dispose of vessels and assets used or suspected of being used by smugglers or traffickers[9]"* The success of this mission was dependent on being able to conduct operations inside Libyan territorial waters and Libyan territory, where human smugglers[10] were active. Operating in Libyan territory was contingent on the consent of either Libyan authorities or UN Security Council (UNSC). Pursuant to consultations with both sides, key EU decision-makers concluded neither Libyan authorities nor the UNSC would give the necessary consent[11][12].

Still, the EU insisted on initiating a CSDP mission. Following the first year of the operation, it was evident that only by operating at the high seas, Operation Sophia would not be able to achieve its task of disrupting the business model of the migrant smugglers. Supportive to this conclusion, the official' six-monthly reports' of Sophia Operational Headquarters showed even though some of the smugglers were arrested, and their vessels were destroyed, migrant smugglers adapted to changing conditions and maintained their business. According to these reports, Operation Sophia's actions forced the smugglers to make use of less sea-worthy rubber boats (dinghies) and leaving the control of the dinghies to the migrants in the boats for the sake of saving their men from getting arrested[13] ; which entails a more dangerous journey for the migrants. According to data from UN agencies,[14] a significant amount of people still set off on this dangerous journey. Despite these facts, instead of terminating the mission, the EU insisted on keeping this military mission up by amending its mandate, until being changed with another military CSDP mission in 2020.

Similarly, in the first months of his term, to address the widening crisis in Libya, the successor of Mogherini, Joseph Borrell, resorted to another military CSDP mission. The primary task of the Operation Irini, which was established in March 2020[15] (Council 2020), is is enforcement of the Libya arms embargo. Disruption of the business model of human smuggling and trafficking has been added as a secondary task. Comparable to its predecessor, it seems impossible for Irini to achieve its tasks. Many EU member states refrain from participating in the mission, due to their migration-related concerns. Currently, Irini operates with only one ship[16] which is given by the host nation, Italy. On the other hand, arms still pour into Libya not only from the Mediterranean but also from air and land routes, especially for the eastern Libya factions. Thus, Operation Irini is discerned as a biased mission against western Libya factions, which weakens the EU's stance as an impartial reliable actor. Further, it hurts the EU's cohesion on Libya matters; Therefore, Irini can be argued to be far from both enforcing UN arms embargo and disrupting the business model of the migrant smugglers.

Despite its multifaceted nature, the EU foreign policymakers have focused on stemming the migration, insisted on CSDPs, and refrained from assuming a considerable responsibility to build peace and stability in Libya. EU policies, which contributed to the deterioration of the crisis with the possibility of turning into a regional crisis, have not been capable of solving the problem of migration.

3. Interest Group interactions with EU officials

According to the EU Transparency Register, there are 738 IGs concerned with European or global level migration & asylum policies. As Libya related migration is a foreign policy topic, IGs with a regional or local level migration interest are not included in this number. As seen on the Chart-1, the biggest group interested in EU migration policies is NGOs, followed by think tanks, companies and trade associations in order. IG activities at the member state capitals are not a part of this study. Member state governments and parliaments exercise different approaches in the registration of their interactions with IGs and collection of all that data requires independent research.

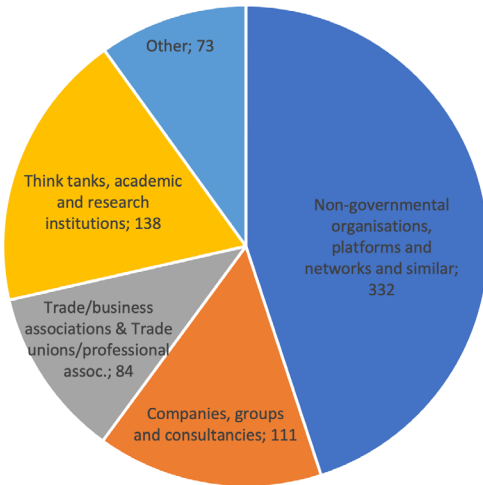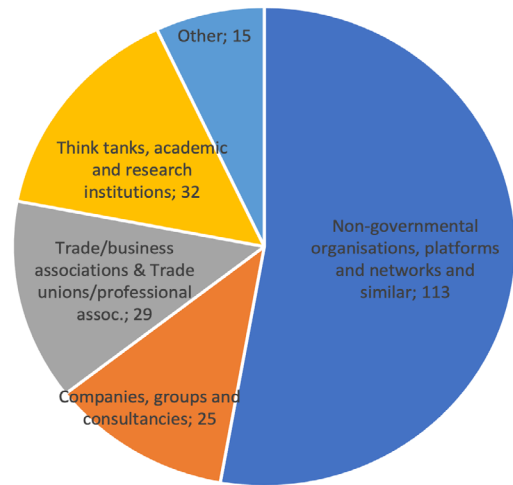Chart 1: Groups with an Interest in Migration

- Non-governmental organisations, platforms and networks and similar; 332
- Companies, groups and consultancies; 111
- Trade/business associations & Trade unions/professional assoc.; 84
- Think tanks, academic and research institutions; 138
- Other; 73

Chart 2: Commission - Interest Representatives Meetings

- Non-governmental organisations, platforms and networks and similar; 113
- Companies, groups and consultancies; 25
- Trade/business associations & Trade unions/professional assoc.; 29
- Think tanks, academic and research institutions; 32
- Other; 15

The number of meetings between IG representatives and EU officials is another important indicator of the role of lobby groups in EU migration-related policymaking. IGs had 140[17] meetings with Commissioners, cabinet members or director-generals (DGs) of Junker Commission (2014-2019). Since the Von der Leyen Commission took over the office in 2019, already there have been 74 meetings[18]. Distribution of these meetings among IGs is seen on the Chart-2. The data of the EU Transparency Register (TR) goes downward till 2014 and contains almost 12,000 registered IGs. There are, however, some limitations of this register: It involves the meetings only with Commissioners, their cabinet members and DGs, the rest of the interactions between IG and EU officials are not registered. Additionally, registration to TR is not mandatory and informal meetings outside EU institutions are not covered. Nevertheless, TR is reliable and the most comprehensive data resource on the activities of EU IGs.

Interviewed EU officials fall into both groups those who are obliged and not obliged to register their meetings with IGs. According to EU officials, their meetings with IGs is essential for doing their work in a better way.

> **"As a political organisation, we want to understand their arguments, gain a better situational awareness and prepare response accordingly. Additionally, to assess our policies, we need their constructive proposals."** (Interview 13) **"Their positions are reflected in our background information. We take into account what those other actors say to shape the environment and also to learn who are active in the environment that we will conduct an operation. We also use their input to have a better situational awareness and to be able to address the issues related to the operation. (Interview 14)

Another indicator is IG meetings with Members of the European Parliament (MEPs). While Rapporteurs, Shadow Rapporteurs and Committee Chairs are obliged to publish their meetings with interests' representatives, other MEPs do that only voluntarily. EU project Integrity Watch[19] has been extracting the IG meetings data from the website of the European Parliament. According to the data extracted by Integrity Watch, since 2019, IG representatives met with MEPs al least 85 times to discuss EU migration policies (see Chart-3). Un-

fortunately, members of the Council of the EU are not obliged to publish their meetings with IG representatives, and there is no standard registry to record their interactions with IGs.

In addition to official or unofficial in-person, online or phone meetings, IGs communicate their positions to EU officials through publications, media campaigns, direct or open letters and activities. The answers of the IG representatives to the interview questions underpin the intensity of their efforts in lobbying EU officials to influence the migration dimension of EU Libya policy:

> **"We are also in coordination with EEAS…With the cabinet of Mogherini we interact a lot on Libya"** (Interview 19) **"We take those observations, findings and recommendations to Brussels to convince them to do things differently…**via our classic sort of public communications methods: press releases, op-eds, policy papers and reports, also direct meetings with commission.**"** (Interview 18) **"We have a regular dialogue with the European External Action Service on the CSDP operations."** (Interview 8)

Chart-3: MEP Interest Representatives Meetings

Member; 65

Committie Chair; 1
Shaddow Rapporteur; 4

Rapporteur; 15
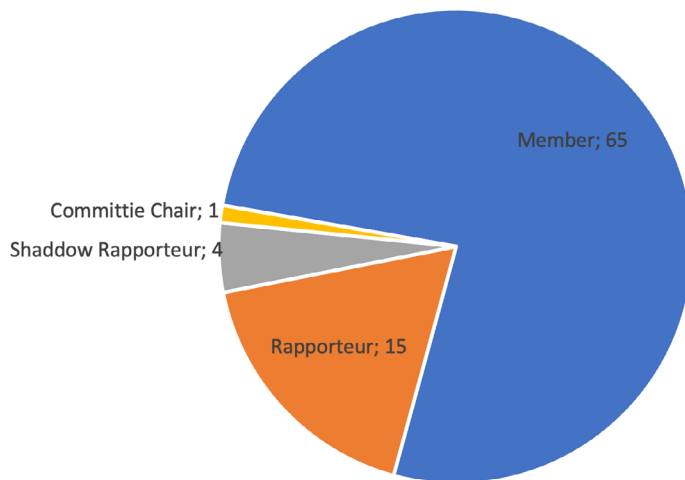
According to data at hand, it is evident that IGs registered to EU TR have no difficulty to access EU policymakers to lobby their migration and Libya related positions to EU officials. This, however, brings us to the question of influence: To what extend IGs influenced the migration dimension of EU Libya policymaking? This policy paper predicates its assessments upon the perceptions of IG representatives on their influence.

4. Influence: The perception of interest groups representatives

Interviews with IGs reveal that migration dimension of the Libya crisis concerns the IGs from different perspectives. In general, NGOs focus on humanitarian, militarisation and externalisation of borders point of view; shipping industry focuses on getting over the impacts of irregular migration on their commercial operations, think tanks wapproach the subject from EU cohesion point of view; companies and consultancies are reluctant to share their interests. EU CSDP Operation Sophia is seen as an integral part of interactions between EU officials and IGs. *"Operation Sophia cannot really be disentangled from the Libyan discussion. Most of the organisation were linking Operation Sophia with the realities from the ground in Libya and the work we could do to support and evacuate migrants and so forth."* (Interview 23) Representatives from humanitarian NGOs and shipping industry are the two most outspoken groups of interest about migration matters.

Together with peaking number of drowned migrants in the Mediterranean, these groups increased their efforts to influence EU policies. *"The tragedy of two shipwrecks killed over a thousand people in April 2015 was a moment when the setting up of the operation might have to some extend demonstrated that governments were hearing to the message that they were received from civil society."* (Interview 12) As seen in this state-

ment, some NGO representatives perceive the establishment of a military CSDP - Operation Sophia linked to their efforts for urging the EU to do something to prevent migrants from drowning in the Mediterranean. A similar perception goes for the representatives of the shipping industry, as well. *"We know that our position is reflected during the decision-making discussions by several member States."* (Interview 22) *"We were calling for governments to fulfil their search and rescue obligations under international law. We were not asking specifically for a military operation, but so the idea for the military operation came from within Europe"* (Interview 20) Think tank representatives consider themselves influential as well. They are, however, cautious about asserting that the EU takes decisions as a result of their lobbying efforts. *"It is always a lot of different things coming together… it is very difficult to say how your idea has ultimately come out in a policy mix. It is like if you make a soup, right, and you put it in many ingredients into the soup, but when the soup goes into the mixer, the ingredients all become merged."* (Interview 8)

For the NGOs, another important point of attention was the training of the Libyan Coastguards (LCG). NGOs were complaining about the EU training support to LCG, because of the human rights violations of the latter against the refugees/migrants. The main argument of the NGOs was that the EU should ensure the humanitarian conduct of the parties that receive funding and training from the EU. The mandate of the operation was amended, in June 2016, and inter-alia **"Capacity building and training of Libyan Coast Guard and Navy"** was added to Operation Sophia mandate. In the period following this amendment, operational capabilities and area of responsibility of the LCG at sea grew. Accordingly, the number of refugees/migrants intercepted and returned to Libya considerably increased. Human rights violations of LCG, however, were a significant problem. NGOs lobbied EU authorities to urge them for not collaborating with LCG in their human rights violations. Interviewed NGO representatives believe that as a result of their lobby efforts, the EU decided to amend Operation Sophia's mandate.

> **"When monitoring of the LCG was included in the mandate, it reflected the recommendations in that direction we had shared with decision-makers at different levels. And with us many other NGOs. (Interview 12) "We were involved with EU officials with EU Commission, EEAS, as well as with a number Home Affairs teams/advisors of EU MSs in Brussels, as well as their migration people in the capitals. Within the EU Commission, our main interlocutors were DG Home and EEAS. Most of the discussions either hosted by EEAS or took place around the teams from EEAS."** (Interview 24) **"Together with other NGOs we were lobbying for monitoring the unhumanitarian conduct of LCG"** (Interview 19) **"And, we were following up on the activities and behavioural conduct of LCG members, who have undergone the training...** (on monitoring subject) I recall meetings with Commission officials including representatives from EEAS."** (Interview 18)

One year after the inclusion of training of LCG Sophia's mandate, in July 2017, Council of the EU decided to add a supporting task to monitor the capacity building and training of LCG to be established in close coordination with other relevant stakeholders[20]. Based on this Council Decision, in October 2017, Operation Sophia began to monitor LCG through collecting information from LCG operations room, remotely monitoring, go-pro camera systems and periodic meetings [21](EUNAVFOR-Med 2016). This was a significant change in the position of the EU. Just one year after her decision of capacity building and training of LCG, EU was required to amend its decision and incorporated the monitoring of the conducts of the LCG. NGOs were, however, not completely satisfied with the implementation of the monitoring of LCG. They think that monitoring of LCG ultimately turned in to another eyeservice, rather than an actual mechanism to prevent wrongdoings of LCG.

> **"This does not mean that we are satisfied with how the monitoring has been conducted"** (Interview 12) **"It is certainly our view that while they instituted some kind of monitoring, it seems to be focused on activities/metrics, as opposed to monitoring the conduct. We were pushing for an independent monitoring mechanism."** (Interview 18) **"They have no presence on the ground, so they cannot monitor anything. So that is the pressure that we were putting."** (Interview 19)

The lack of humanitarian perspective and insufficient SAR capacity in EU migration policy was always a lobbying subject for IGs. Eventually, when the CSDP operations set out without naval assets as of March 2019, owing to the disagreements among EU member states over disembarkation of saved migrants, the (semi) ap-

proval of all IGs turned into a disappointment. One year later, in March 2020, Operation Sophia was entirely abolished. Interviewed NGO and shipping industry representatives state that they lobbied a lot to change the EU decision and bring the ships back on the sea.

> **"**We have criticised the decision to remove vessels from Sophia.**"** (Interview 12) **"**If the mission is to continue, it should continue with the vessels back on the water. We lamented the decision that was forced by Italy to remove the naval assets.**"** (Interview 18) **"**(Since the suspension of ships) We ask for the deployments of Naval assets, we think that is crucial.**"** (Interview 22)

IGs did not succeed to have naval assets back to the off the coast of Libya again. Operation Irini replaced Sophia from March 2020 onwards. However, the dominant anti-migration sentiment does not change. For the sake of preventing the Operation Irini vessels from participating in SAR missions, its area of operation was drawn to a location in the central Mediterranean, away from potential migration routes and SAR incidents. NGOs have defined the EU's involvement in capacity building of the LCG as the externalisation of EU migration policy and criticise migrants being pulled back to unsafe Libya. *"We have criticised the Sophia, including the Cooperation with Libyan Coastguard to its mandate, as an instrument to externalising the border control to the Libyans."* (Interview 12) Similarly, IGs have been criticising the denial of NGO boats from member state ports. NGOs have been lobbying for the allocation of a disembarkation location to the NGO SAR boats at one of the nearest EU member states. *"Because we believe that the current focus leads to criminalising NGOs. Recently, NGO boats rescuing migrants are denied from ports and criminalised in their SAR work."* (Interview 4)

Overall, the self-perception of the IGs regarding their success in lobbying is fluctuating. While the government ships were on sea IGs perceive themselves, to some extent, successful. However, since the ships have been taken away from the sea, the perception has changed to a total failure. Interviewees agree that despite their top gear, they are not able to change EU migration policies.

> "Sophia is doing the opposite of what we would like it to do." (Interview 12) "Overall, we have all failed to shape EU migration policies more humanely." (Interview 19) "I wish I could be more optimistic about making it sound like; we made a huge difference but, no... No, we did not have the impact we wanted to have" (Interview 18) "No (our lobbying was not successful), they decided to discontinue the operation. And they attack the NGOs that were providing SAR. So absolutely not." (Interview 3) "Unfortunately not." (Interview 5) "But I cannot say that it impacted the EU decisions made." (Interview 4)

5. Analyses of the current impact of IGs on EU migration/Libya policy

It appears that the influence of IGs in the migration dimension of EU-Libya policies remains quite limited. Member states consider the migration subject closely related to their security, and thus they are unwilling to leave the decision in this topic to supranational EU bodies. Most of the time, the decisions on migration policies are cooked in member state capitals. The intensity of lobby efforts over EU supranational institutions does have minimal influence over the decisions of individual capitals: As in the example of Hungary, member states bring their priorities forward in security-related topics. Hungarian decision-makers, which usually have little sway in EU policies, have not changed their hard-line anti-migration stance despite intense pressure from EU institutions and other member states.

Discussions around the migration stemming from Libya is highly politicised. Therefore, migration-related decisions have a direct impact on the level of public support and voting rates of national politicians. As argued by Dur, public salience of an issue impacts the level of IGs influence.[22] Since the public is highly attentive to migration, policymakers prefer to act by the popular political climate, rather than listening to the recommendations of IGs. The prevailing political climate may be quite volatile. Terror attacks in EU cities, unemployment rates or economic recession may cause dramatic changes in the public opinion towards migration. As has happened in Italy; the country that was once a coordinator of naval ships in the Mediterranean adopted a precisely opposite position on EU migration policy afterwards. Exploiting the general dissatisfaction of Italians from EU migration policies, a far-right sentiment, under the leadership of Italian politician Matteo

Salvini —served as Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister from 1 June 2018 to 5 September 2019— has dominated the Italian government. Even though Salvini has left the office and government has reshuffled, due to the public salience of migration, subsequent Italian politicians have not dared to change to a more migration friendly policy. The popular political climate is expansionary. Many other member states experience a rise in similar anti-migration sentiments among their voters. Thus, despite intense efforts of the IGs, they refrain from more tolerant migration strategies.

When the member states have different opinions, it is challenging for EU institutions to reach an agreement and make a decision. One should not overemphasise the importance of the meetings between IGs and EU officials in achieving impact because most essential decisions are taken at the political level. At the political level, influencing public opinion, building frames and narratives may produce more impact. On the other hand, changing the overall dynamics of EU foreign and security policy is not in the hands of EU officials. EU officials emphasise that in interviews: *"(Our meetings with IGs) has not changed any decisions. Because they are targeting the wrong audience: Decisions are taken by the member states."* (Interview 13) However, it should be noted that IGs and their interlocutors inside EU institutions are not powerless on decision-making regarding the migration and military operation. The role played by NGOs in the process of incorporating the monitoring of LCG to the mandate of Operation Sophia is an example of their impact on EU decisions. EU is not present in Libya, but NGOs are, or business groups have connections inside the country. These groups follow the developments and internal dynamics of the country through their people on the field. Thus, they have valuable first-hand knowledge. They use this knowledge for lobbying and influencing EU policies according to their interests. Based on the data collected from these NGO, business or other stakeholder representatives, EU officials prepare mission reports, policy proposals, strategic reviews, course of actions and decision proposals. *"We hear what they say to understand the environment fully. We use that information in our strategic reviews. Strategic reviews are precise and accurate understanding of the operational environment. We listen to them, be aware of their concerns and prepare our proposals to member states. All we do is to define and ensure that everybody understands what is happening. Following the expressed concerns and to set the scene for decision-makers."* (Interview 14) That is to say that, the perception of pure intergovernmentalism in decisions regarding the EU foreign policy does not reflect the whole truth.

6. Why CSDP?

Remarkably, CSDP missions have been chosen as a primary tool to address the migration dimension of Libya Crisis. There are many reasons for that. First of all, they exist to demonstrate the EU's cohesion and cooperation. Without considering its ability to achieve designated tasks, CSPDs are used as a stage to showcase the harmony among EU member states. Additionally, launching a military CSDP for a matter indicative of the level of importance that the EU attaches to that specific matter. When the numbers of drowned migrants increase, a military CSDP shows that the EU attributes so much importance that set the EU soldiers to motion to stop the human sufferings in the Mediterranean.

At the same time, EU policymakers are very much concerned about the rising anti-migration sentiment. Thus, their decisions must satisfy the public expectations, commonly foreseeing their leaders hold their borders fortified. A military operation on the EU maritime borders aims to address such kind of expectations as well. Thereby, a CSDP satisfies both anti and pro-migration sentiment in the EU.

In this context, CSDPs were balanced migration policies for the crisis in Libya. In this balance, IGs, willing to have government SAR ships on the Mediterranean, consented to the naval ships deployed to fight against migrant smugglers. IGs were aware of the fact that the EU did not initiate this operation for saving people from distress boats, however, were supportive of this policy. *"Even though SAR is not the primary mandate of the mission, it did save tens of thousands of lives… We support the continuation of Sophia in the forms of greater SAR capacity."* (Interview 18) The main reason for IG support was the presence of naval assets on the sea, which will oblige government ships to conduct SAR operations under international law. In other words, IGs realised their weakness in the eye of the popular political climate and have contented with what they have. However, since 2018/2019, the balance has come unhinged and dominant anti-migration sentiment has surpassed IGs' expectations.

Additionally, it is worth taking a closer look at if disrupting the business model of the smugglers would solve the migration problem or human tragedy in the Mediterranean or the crisis in Libya. As long as the root causes are present, there will be people ready to spend all their assets to escape from their homelands. This is a vast market, and there will always be someone to fill the gap and facilitate the escape of those desperate people. Thus, it is not practically possible to destroy the business of people smugglers. Consequently, it is fair to say that military CSDP missions off the coast of Libya have neither served the desired end states written in respective Council decisions nor achieve a sustainable Libya policy which would lead to a conflict-free neighbour. CSDPs that EU appealed, indeed, are politically a correct move and eased the pressure on the policymakers. They are, however, not a correct move to solve the actual migration problem deriving from Libya.

7. Discussion of Policy Options

Libya has the potential of being a new Dubai on the southern side of the Mediterranean. Good relations with stable, prosperous and democratic Libya will be a powerful ally for the EU in dealing with the root causes of the migration problem, political problems threatening EU's cohesion, conventional and unconventional security threats from the eastern Mediterranean and MENA region or in connecting EU to eastern and southern markets. Therefore, it is definitely worth all the efforts for solving the issues that Libya is facing today. Dealing with irregular migration is essential for the EU, but it is not a problem on its own. It is a consequence. Closing the EU sea borders with military measures, and letting Libya go off in a terrible mess will not save the EU either. As seen in the current political context, despite all the efforts irregular migration is still an issue that has become a source of contention among different member states and IGs, which is threatening the cohesion and harming the eminence of the EU. To solve that problem, the EU needs to address the causes of the problem with a more comprehensive strategy, which requires an influential EU presence on the ground.

Libya needs an honest, impartial and competent peace broker, who will assist in the reconciliation and reconstruction processes, for which IGs and EU institutions can join their powers. Social, humanitarian and economic perspectives play a role in solving the crisis in Libya, to which IGs can add an unmatched value and fill EUs shortcomings. IGs can help EU policies to infiltrate into Libya. Following the revolution in 2011, the US, NATO and EU left the construction of the new order to Libyans. However, almost 40 years of Ghaddafi rule destroyed Libyan institutions and civil society, the absence of which contributed to the current messy stalemate in the country. In the absence of a healthy civil society in Libya, European IGs can effectively fill that gap; support and sponsor local civil society to develop capabilities and play their expected roles. As depicted in the previous sections, many IGs from various fields have been actively seeking to influence EU policies in this field. Derived from the first-hand knowledge of their agents stationed inside Libya or Mediterranean, these IGs have a tremendous amount of expertise on Libya, untangling social, political or economic disputes and the migration subject matters. IGs can revive the civil society in Libya, which would increase the legitimacy of the peace-building efforts undertaken by the EU. As argued by Fraihat[23] and Nilsson[24], Libyan civil society —empowered by European NGOs— can play an essential role in the inclusion of all local perspectives and actors to the negotiation process, which would lead to a durable peace. Libya is a country where local identity and regional belonging have a significant impact on governance. Ethnic, tribal and religious groups are the sub-elements of local identity. In most of the cases, these local groups have their armed militias. When combined with historical grievances formed by large internal disturbances, such a strong local identity becomes a source of persistent enmity among rival local groups or cities. At the macro-level EU can play the role of peace broker, but at the local level, EU needs IGs to play a crucial role as a peace broker. For a country-wide reconciliation, local groups need to reconcile first.

Local-level disagreements are one of the reasons for the failure of dozens of peace processes/agreements. Additionally, in the post-Ghaddafi era, such kind of local enmity produced hundreds of thousands of Internally Displaced People[25] (IDPs)[26]. Since 2014, polarisation has intensified like none before, with arbitrary detentions, torture/ill-treatment and other atrocities against rival groups. Foreign government actors are having difficulties in penetrating local dynamics and dissolving these problems. Owing to their neutral position

and well-accepted expertise, the efforts of NGO agents may get more local acceptance. Using their neutral position, IGs can infiltrate local relations and catalyse peace process like oil in between the gears. They can engage with local actors, collect and distribute the necessary information, and stimulate rational deed.

At the humanitarian end, IGs can collaborate with Libyan institutions and train their staff employed in infamous migrant detention centres, Libya Coastguards and other migration-related government bodies. IGs can be instrumental in monitoring the humanitarian conduct of Libyan officials. An impartial international group of experts can best do efficient monitoring and reporting. IGs have the required resources for training, monitoring and reporting missions. EU officials can find political and economic tools to encourage Libyan authorities to cooperate with IGs on humanitarian matters. Besides, with their agents in the field, IGs can help EU in mapping the operating environment of the human smugglers, human, oil and arms traffickers or other illicit activities, which would spoil the transition process of Libya to maintain their business.

Similarly, IGs expertise and impartial and reliable interlocutor role can be put into service in reforming Libyan institutions. IGs can assist in empowering Libya's sovereign institutions, which play a crucial role in Libya's economic governance, management of rich hydrocarbon resources, government auditing bodies or investment authorities. Assistance on institutional reform election support involves political bodies as well. IGs can be beneficial in empowering democratic transition, supporting local and general elections, the formation of new political parties and enabling other democratic institutions. IGs can assist Libya's transformation in almost all other institutional areas. With the encouragement of the EU, collaboration with IGs may transform into an altogether mentorship to other key Libya institutions, i.e., judiciary, education, health and agriculture.

IG guidance in the transition process would prevent the people and institutions against the influence of the radical and extremist ideologies. Historically the majority of Libyans are distanced from extremism, however, as seen in 2015-2016 ISIS dominance in Sirte region, such kind of radical currents are highly resourceful in filling the power gaps in the Muslim countries. IGs can support EU policies in preventing the diffusion of terrorist groups into Libya and Libyans by addressing the well-known root causes, such as lack of education and connection with the outer world or high unemployment rates.

Libya has Africa's largest proved high-quality oil reserves, and fifth-largest gas reserves, although, unending turmoil in the country hinders the large-scale exploration programs[27]. Additionally, Libya's huge desert areas with high solar radiation are waiting for more research, exploration and investment. Libya's resources would ease both Libya's and EU's energy problems. EU has been struggling to differentiate oil and gas providers to decrease her dependency on Russian hydrocarbons and seeking opportunities to increase renewable energy capacity. In coordination with EU, IGs can assist Libya in transforming this potential into a win-win scenario for all parties — Libya, Libyans, EU, IGs and EU citizens. IGs specialised in energy, finance and economy with their business network, infrastructure and technology can guide and partner with Libyan institutions in sustainably benefiting from their potential and prevent this richness turn into a resource curse. IGs with economic and financial expertise can support Central Bank of Libya (CBL), Libya Investment Agency (LIA) and Libya Audit Bureau (LAB) in the technical areas. These are the three critical institutions for a fair wealth share in Libya. Various militia groups are benefiting from the conflict economy. IGs can assist EU actions in this field by conducting impartial efficiency analyses and providing improvement reports according to the outcomes of their analyses. Economic recovery prepossesses breaking militia power by increasing employment, education/training opportunities for the young generation mostly recruited by armed militia groups, who currently have not many alternative options. Generating alternatives, eventually, makes being a member of armed militia groups less appealing.

8. Recommendations

Libya matters far greater than intercepting refugee/migration flows. In solving the issue, the EU needs a multifaceted approach, which considers IGs an integral partner. EU institutions should collaborate with IGs and employ their expertise in developing a sustainable Libya policy. However, to employ IGs as a soft power to facilitate EU policies, the EU needs to hear IGs expertise and incorporate them to the decision-making mechanism as well. New partnership model should structure the coordination and assistance relations between EU and IGs, without damaging the neutral interlocutor position of the IGs.

The new partnership model with the EU will extend the reach of the IGs; thus, they should re-define their contributions to Libya, considering the expectations from IGs as described in the previous section. IGs should be ready to support IDPs, handling of refugees/irregular migrants, training and monitoring of the Libyan officials, and reporting about their humanitarian conduct. IGs should sharpen their mediating abilities to be used in dealing with local enmities and initiating the national reconciliation process. IGs should be ready to facilitate activities in addressing the source of grievances between local ethnic, tribal and religious groups, or catalyse the truth-seeking ventures to repair the relations between rival groups. Likewise, IGs should be ready to provide mentorship to sovereign economic, financial, auditing institutions or misfunctioning judiciary, public health or education institutions. IGs should also focus on the prevention of radicalisation and diffusion of extremist ideologies among the Libyan population.

The activities of so many IGs working on same or different aspects of the crisis may exhibit a scattered behaviour, which requires the EU to assume the coordination and orchestration of IG efforts. European External Action Service can be a single point of contact and coordination body. Single point of contact will simplify the complexities originating from the power-sharing nature of the EU. On the other hand, EU officials should encourage or —if need be— stipulate Libyan authorities to cooperate with IGs in training their staff on humanitarian issues and allowing IG representatives to monitor their operations both inside Libya and on the coastguard ships in the Mediterranean.

For the sake of preventing the emergence of several and conflicting member state Libya policies, the leaders of the EU supranational bodies, head of EU Council, Commission and Foreign Policy (HR/VP) should take the lead of the process vis á vis overall EU interests. EU member states, which are most affected from the crisis in Libya, e.g., Italy, France, Malta, Hungary or Austria, should stop following their conflicting Libya agendas, and supporting rival factions inside Libya. EU military power (military operations or EU Battlegroup) should focus on preventing destructive foreign meddling, the flow of foreign fighters and enforcing the arms embargo. Synchronously, EU should start constructing a unified and reliable security apparatus, making use of its neutral interlocutor position and competent sanctions against the spoilers of the process.

9. Conclusion

The turmoil in Libya is going from bad to worse. EU policies regarding this crisis stuck to its migration dimension. A significant majority of the discussions turn around the CSDP operation. Focus on migration restricts scope of the EU's vision on the crisis and hinders a comprehensive policy to solve the problems in Libya effectively. If the EU continues making the same mistakes, the crisis in Libya will be more detrimental to EU cohesion and interests. Suppose the EU and IGs decide to combine and coordinate their powers. This new setting will bring about a panacea, which can solve the problem and satisfy the migration sensitive general public, IGs and policymakers. IGs can add a significant value to such a comprehensive approach. IGs can build the support that the EU requires on the ground. EU requirements overlap with IGs interests; they both need to construct a thriving society, inclusive politics, and good governance, which will make Libya a hard-to-find neighbour/ally to the EU.

Acknowledgements

Annex: List of Interviews

Interview 1:   Trade and business associations, September 2019, phone interview

Interview 2:   Thinktank, October 2019, Skype interview

Interview 3:   Non-Governmental Organisation, October 2019, Skype interview

Interview 4:   Non-Governmental Organisation, September 2019, Skype interview

Interview 5:   Non-Governmental Organisation, September 2019, Brussels

Interview 6:   Non-Governmental Organisation, October 2019, Skype

Interview 7:   Professional consultancies, October 2019, Phone Interview

Interview 8:   Thinktank, and October 2019, Skype interview

Interview 9:   Non-Governmental Organisation, October 2019, Skype Interview

Interview 10:   Non-Governmental Organisation, September 2019, Brussels

Interview 11:   Company, November 2019, Phone Interview

Interview 12:   Non-Governmental Organisation, December 2019, Skype Interview

Interview 13   EU Official from EEAS, December 2019, Brussels

Interview 14   EU Official from EEAS, December 2019, Brussels

Interview 15   EU Official from EEAS, December 2019, Brussels

Interview 16   EU Official from EU Commission, December 2019, Brussels

Interview 17   EU Official from EEAS/EUMS, December 2019, Brussels

Interview 18   Non-Governmental Organisation, January 2020, Skype interview

Interview 19   Non-Governmental Organisation, January 2020, Skype interview

Interview 20:   Trade and business associations, February 2020, Skype interview

Interview 21:   EU Official, February 2020, Written answer to the questionnaire

Interview 22:   Trade and business associations, March 2020, Skype interview

Interview 23:   EU Official, April 2020, Skype interview

Interview 24   Non-Governmental Organisation, February 2020, Skype interview

Endnotes

1 A2AD is a popular military strategy making use of short- and long-range capabilities and actions to prevent opposing forces entering into or limiting the freedom of action within an operational area.

2 The number of refugees/migrant coming to Europe from the Mediterranean peaked in 2015.

3   With interest groups, this paper refers to non-state organisations, trying to influence EU policymaking but not working towards a governing position Benedetta Voltolini, Lobbying in Eu Foreign Policy-Making: The Case of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict (Routledge, 2015), Jan Beyers, Rainer Eising, and William Maloney, 'Researching Interest Group Politics in Europe and Elsewhere: Much We Study, Little We Know?', West European Politics, 31/6 (2008), 1103-28.

4   Main IG interest areas are as follows: Migration/asylum, borders and security or humanitarian aid and civil protection, foreign affairs and security, neighbourhood policy, maritime affairs, energy, trade, economy, banking and financial services, business/industry, international co-operation/development, justice, rule of law, education/training, public health, youth and food safety.

5   Dür, Andreas (2008), ‹Interest Groups in the European Union: How Powerful Are They?›, West European Politics, 31 (6), 1212-30.

6   In order to increase the accuracy of the findings and deduce reliable results, the research has relied on mixed methods as the methodology that include semi-structured qualitative interviews with representatives of those IGs and EU officials alongside literature review and desk research. The interviews have been conducted between September 2019 and April 2020 as part of NWO-Hestia project (VidW. 1154.18.O37 7633) linked to Dr Giselle Bosse's Aspasia project.

7   Frontex operations are not considered, due to fact that they are conducted in the vicinity of EU territorial waters with a limited scope.

8   <https://missingmigrants.iom.int/over-3770-migrants-have-died-trying-cross-mediterranean-europe-2015> accessed 27 August 2020.

9   <https://www.operationsophia.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Council-Decision-CFSP-2015778-of-18-May-2015.pdf> accessed 18 July 2020.

10   It should be noted that migrant smugglers are not the same with human traffickers. While human traffickers exploiting women, men or children for the purpose of forced labour or using use as sexual commodity, migrants smugglers are the service providers to the migrants in illegal crossing of the borders Theodore Baird, 'Defining Human Smuggling in Migration Research: An Appraisal and Critique', Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies Research Paper No. RSCAS, 30 (2016).

11   Lynch, Coloum (2014), 'Libya to Europe: Please Don't Come to Our Rescue', (Foreign Policy).

12   Palm, Trineke Petra (2017), 'UN-authorization and the EU as security actor', Normative Power and Military Means: The evolving character of the EU's international power.

13   EUNAVFOR-Med (2016), 'Eunavfor Med Operation Sophia Six Monthly Report, Reporting Period: 1 January - 31 October 2016', (Politico).

14   UNODC. (2018). Global Study on Smuggling of Migrants. Retrieved from https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and- analysis/glosom/GLOSOM_2018_Europe_web_small.pdf

15   Council (2020), 'COUNCIL DECISION (CFSP) of 31 March 2020 on a European Union military operation in the Mediterranean (EUNAVFOR MED IRINI)'.

16   <https://www.operationirini.eu/media_category/assets/?deployment=any&tax=media_category&categories=&nation=&search_archive=filter> accessed 23 September 2020.

17   Source: <https://www.integritywatch.eu> Integrity Watch project is co-funded by the European Commission and the Open Society Initiative for Europe (OSIFE), with a contribution by the King Baudouin Foundation (KBF).

18   As of September 2020

19   https://www.integritywatch.eu/about.php?section=4

20   <https://www.operationsophia.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/EU-Council-Decision-13852017.pdf> accessed 21 September 2020.

21   EUNAVFOR-Med (n 16).

22   Dur (n 5)

23   (2016), Unfinished Revolutions: Yemen, Libya, and Tunisia After the Arab Spring (New Haven: Yale University Press).

24   (2012), 'Anchoring the Peace: Civil Society Actors in Peace Accords and Durable Peace', International Interactions, 38 (2), 243-66.

25   According to IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix, Libya IDP and Returnee Report (March - April 2020) there are more than 400 thousand IDP s inside Libya, however, not all of them became IDP in the post-Ghaddafi era.

26   The immense majority of those people travelling towards the EU are not Libyans, therefore supports to stop irregular migration have not much gravity in the eyes of Libyans and do not make a significant contribution to ending the crisis. Thus, from Libya point of view, IDPs have much more significance on ending the crisis.

27   US Energy Information Agency <https://www.eia.gov/international/analysis/country/LBY> accessed 06 October 2020.

Rapid Response for Facilitating Ukrainian Refugees' Orientation and Labour Market Integration in Flanders[1]

Policy Brief

by Fatih Yilmaz[2] and Samet Coban[3]

1. Background

Russian invasion of Ukraine has raised the alarm for the neighbouring countries and Europe forcing an unexpected large-scale refugee flow from Ukraine. This is a second mass flow to Europe after the 2015 Syrian refugee crisis in this century, and estimated to be the biggest after WW2.

According to the UNHCR, the number of refugees who entered European countries has already passed 4,3 million in only 6 weeks after the invasion started, 90% of whom are women and children. 12 million people have been affected from the conflict situation and 6,6 million have been internally displaced, and many more will be displaced as the conflict continues.

2. Response

2.1 European Rapid Response to the Ukrainian refugees

In response to the situation, the European Union has activated for the first time its Temporary Protection Directive to provide immediate, temporary protection to refugees, granting beneficiaries immediate access to education, housing and healthcare services as well as the right to work. The EU and member states have opened their borders to the displaced people fleeing from the war, showing great solidarity to address the needs of displaced people from Ukraine. The Commission outlined its operational guidelines for the very substantial support the EU is making available to help people fleeing war in Ukraine, as well as the EU countries receiving them.

The Commission also published Information for people fleeing the war in Ukraine to inform about their rights. The Immediate accommodation is being provided by the authorities or by the civil society. National administrations now face an enormous challenge to make such access a reality.

2.2 Initial Belgian Response to the Ukrainian Refugees

Taking the advantage of experienced institutions and a vibrant civil society, Belgium reacted quickly to the current situation. However a humanitarian crisis of this size has problems of its own. Officials estimate that Belgium will receive about 120.000 Ukrainian refugees throughout the war. Just to make a comparison and better understand the magnitude of the problem, according to the figures published by the Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (CGRA/CGVS), 25.971 persons submitted an application for international protection in Belgium from all over the world in 2021. And this corresponds to a 53,6% increase when compared to 2020 (16.910). Between 24 February 2022 (the date that the war broke out) and 5 April 2022 there were 28.590 people who received temporary protection from Ukraine alone. 90% of Ukrainian refugees are women and children. From the outset, Belgian authorities established a separate in-processing pipeline for the Ukrainian refugees. And when needed, they scaled up the capacity.

The most demanding task is to find an immediate shelter for these people, a responsibility shared between all layers of state and citizens. To this end;

- The Flemish government, together with the local authorities aims to realise 18.000 reception places by the end of March. Additionally, the government considers building 15 emergency villages (nooddorp) to meet the demand for 120.000 possible Ukrainian refugees. One of the emergency villages will be opened in Mechelen, one of the municipalities that implements project ORIENT8, with an initial capacity of 600 people which can be extended to 1000, if needed

- Flemish Parliament temporarily eased quality standards in the rental regime, allocated vacant social spaces suitable for collective housing (such as monasteries and hospitals) and tasked Flemish Social Housing Society (Vlaamse Maatschappij voor Sociaal Wonen - VMSW) for preparing mobile housing units,

- The Flemish Government provided €1.000 per reception location for cities and municipalities and another €400 per reception location from private individuals (more than 6.000 Flemish volunteered as host family candidates),
- A screening procedure developed for families who want to receive Ukrainian refugees.

In tandem with the main effort (housing), several other measures are being taken simultaneously;

- Flemish authorities provided preventive health measures for the refugees such as screening for/vaccination against tuberculosis, COVID-19, measles, mumps, rubella (MBR) and diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis,
- Give a Day, the largest volunteer job bank in Belgium, launched an online platform for people who want to help Ukrainians,
- 45% tax deduction provided for the donations higher than €40 for selected aid organisations (Consortium 12 12, in partnership with Flemish Red Cross) helping Ukrainian refugees.
- Automatic grant of a living allowance (leefloon) upon registration is being discussed at the federal level.

Measures related to social orientation;

- Civic Integration Agency (Agentschap Integratie en Inburgering) organised online info sessions in Ukrainian language about staying in Flanders,
- The Flemish Ministry of Education is considering opening schools in emergency villages, alongside current schools, in order both to teach them Dutch and to keep children continuing their education without interruption.

Measures related to labour market integration;

- Flemish Service for Employment and Vocational Training (VDAB) is responsible for integrating Ukrainian refugees to the labour market. It focuses on additional language training and mentoring for these people. It will filter and tag (#werkplekvrij) suitable jobs for Ukrainian refugees. As of 5 April 2022, 2589 positions are put on the VDAB portal,
- Although currently available jobs are generally temporary, they are still an option for the Ukrainian refugees.
- On the other hand, Minister Crevits said Ukrainian refugees will not solve the talent shortage on the Flemish labour market. They will mostly get temporary positions.

3. The Challenges for Orientation and Labour Market Integration of Ukrainian Refugees

The unprecedented and urgent occurrence of such a huge flow brings many challenges to the national, regional and local authorities. Although the 2014-15 Syrian refugee crisis was a big experience, the initial one month period indicated that Belgium and Flanders were not ready for handling the reception of such a big flow with almost no preparation period. Civil society organisations and volunteers tried to fill in the gap showing big solidarity in Flanders, Belgium.

3.1 Challenges for Orientation (early stage of integration)

Orientation to the new community is an important phase in early stages of integration. Orientation simply means "familiarisation with something". When it comes to social orientation, we refer to the introduction of the roles, rights and responsibilities that the newcomer could/should play and assume in the host community. Stabilising life by meeting the urgent needs, such as housing, healthcare, education, is mainly the initial goal of newcomers' orientation.

Current situation that Ukrainian refugees are experiencing pose particular challenges;

- Vast majority of the Ukrainian refugees (90 per cent) are women and children. Leaving behind husbands/partners and relatives in Ukraine at war and assuming the responsibility of the rest of the family bring additional burden to the women/mothers in an already very tense situation.

- To a certain degree, "fog of war" still exists in Ukraine. For the time being, nobody can predict the outcome of the war, when or how it will end. This uncertainty keeps newcomers constantly in limbo and they might refrain from accepting the situation that they are in which eventually precludes them from using their true potential in adapting to their new lives.
- Psychological situation and trauma caused by the war and the "road" is difficult to cope with.

- Language barrier is an important obstacle for every newcomer to overcome. But for the Ukrainian refugees, this is a particular challenge since Ukraine was not among the countries that **"export refugees"** until recently. Thus, Ukrainian was not among the languages that integration agencies and other stakeholders offer services.

- Ordinary refugees have some time to organise their **"trips"** and make some preparations for the life that awaits them. For Ukrainian newcomers almost everything happened all of a sudden.

3.2 Challenges for Labour Market Integration

Labour market integration of newcomers includes all efforts for the process of building a sustainable path towards employment, finding a job and getting integrated at the workplace in the host country.

Better and early orientation has a positive effect also on the labour market integration of newcomers. Stabilising the living conditions in the host country by meeting more urgent needs, such as housing, healthcare, education, is mostly a precondition for newcomers to get into the next step of integration which is the labour market.

Employment is a key dimension of integration. Many arrivals are joining families and friends in the EU countries, this means that networks can play an important role in supporting labour market integration. Employers are optimistic about the reception capacities of national labour markets, while private sector labour shortages may bring opportunities for quick access to employment for some. However, it is likely that many will face challenges in entering the labour market.

Based on the initial talks with the civil society organisations, practitioners and the Ukrainian refugees and considering All-in-one 4HER research **"Labour Market Integration Challenges of Highly Educated Refugees in Flanders"** (English version), the Ukrainian newcomers' challenges can be summarised as follows in addition to orientation challenges.

- Although the Ukrainian refugees are granted an automatic work permit in Belgium, the vagueness of the situation and the status of limited temporary protection can limit / effect newcomers' decisions and motivation on building a medium/long term plan in the host country.

- As many refugees find themselves in a similar situation, Ukrainian newcomers can have lack of information and guidance at their level in the host country about the labour market conditions and opportunities.

- Language barrier will be the main challenge for the newcomers with limited language skills. Although most of the generation younger than 35 has a level of English to be able to communicate, the older generation has a very limited percentage of those having language skills. Those with a level of English would have more chances to have fast-track employment considering the need for talents in several sectors.

- Recognition and translation of skills and qualifications is another challenge for newcomers. Considering the procedures and waiting lists, it will take at least months to complete the processes. This can bring skill mismatch problems and increase the chance of overqualified working for highly educated ones.

- The Belgian labour market has its own way and culture, and the newcomers need to adapt to the new environment. In this respect Ukrainian refugees would need support for orientation and guidance.

- Since most of the newcomers are women and children, the women with children have responsibilities of childcare and they would need childcare support for employment.

4. Models for facilitating orientation and labour market integration

In this policy brief we suggest two models for facilitating and accelerating (1) the initial orientation, and (2) the labour market integration of newly arrived Ukrainian refugees.

4.1 Early-stage integration of Ukrainian newcomers to Flemish society (ORIENT8 model)

Short explanation

Name	Orientate Newcomers by Smart Social Mentoring (ORIENT8) ⭐ Orient8
Aim	to improve the social orientation of newcomers, promote exchanges between newcomers and host societies and improve transnational cooperation and knowledge among practitioners.
Target group	ORIENT8's primary target group is newly arrived (less than 5 years) third-country nationals (TCN). Secondary target group is the members of the local communities who are expected to interact with newcomers. In the long-term, practitioners are among the beneficiaries who will make use of the mentoring program and tools.
Outputs	The main output of ORIENT8 is an "effective, efficient and durable" social mentoring program. Using initial guidelines for social mentoring programmes for newcomers we formalised a full-fledged mentoring programme covering all mentoring steps (recruitment, selection, matching, mentoring, closure) and tailored particularly to the needs of newcomers. To support the mentoring program we also develop a number of deliverables, inter alia; (1) Matching criteria, (2) Initial Guidelines for Social Mentoring Programmes for Newcomers, (3) Smart matching tool, (4) Welcome Application
Website	https://orient8.eu
Explanation	Orientate Newcomers by Smart Social Mentoring (ORIENT8) is a smart social mentoring program supported by smart digital tools and tailored activities. It pairs newly arrived third country nationals (Third Country Nationals - TCNs or newcomers) with the volunteer members of the local community in order to help them overcome daily life difficulties at the early stages of their integration process through a four to six month long voluntary mentoring relationship. Designed as an early-stage integration project, ORIENT8 aims to improve the social orientation of newcomers, promote exchanges between newcomers and host societies and improve transnational cooperation and knowledge among practitioners. ORIENT8 started in 2021 and will last 24 months. ORIENT8 has received funding from the European Union's Asylum Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF). Beyond the Horizon ISSG, KU Leuven, Stad Mechelen (Belgium), Municipality of Nikaia - Rentis (Athens/Greece), Sala Kommun (Sweden) are partnering in the project. To support the mentoring program we also develop a number of deliverables, inter alia; • Initial Guidelines for Social Mentoring Programmes for Newcomers: Initial Guidelines is for service providers who want to set up a social mentoring program aimed at foreign-language newcomers. We describe common practices and offer recommendations for each step of the mentoring process (recruitment, selection, matching, mentoring, closure). • Smart Matching Tool: Based on the matching criteria, a digital matching tool (using Artificial Intelligence) is being developed by BtH/Clarusway DE, and is currently being tested by implementing partners to register and assist the matching of mentors and newcomers. Smart Matching Tool (SMT) is a Machine Learning application. With the Smart Matching Tool, we aim to make the best possible match between mentors and mentees using all available data and the tacit knowledge that is inherently hidden in the data. • Welcome Application: One of the major deliverables of ORIENT8 project is a mobile welcome application that serves as a one-stop-shop to bring all useful information, links about public and places for the newcomers in the defined scope which will be accessed and used easier on mobile iOS and Android smartphones. Welcome Application aims to enhance newcomers' awareness about the new local environment. • An evaluation frame is also being developed for the programme.

What we offer

ORIENT8 might contribute to the orientation requirements of newly arrived Ukrainians to Europe. It provides practical deliverables for early-stage integration of newcomers to the host society, which are being tested in three different municipalities for the time being and be applicable to the current situation soon.

One of the best ways to get newcomers orientated to the host society can be through mentoring. What most countries did to handle the crisis is to provide accommodation to the Ukrainian refugees through volunteers. This relationship can be extended to voluntary mentoring with minimum effort provided that necessary tools are already in place. Currently, the applications that support social mentoring in ORIENT8 are in the testing/piloting phase. But by the end of 2022 they will hopefully be matured enough to serve the community.
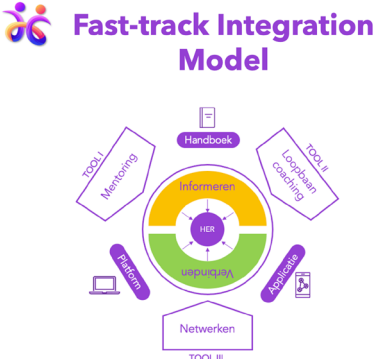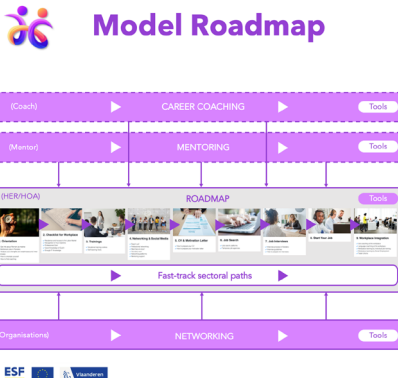
In line with the project plan, Welcome Application supports English and three other local languages (Dutch, Greek and Swedish). However, a number of volunteers/interns proofread machine translated content which will enable the Welcome Application run on Arabic, French, Spanish, Russian and Turkish. With volunteer support we may add Ukrainian to the portfolio as well. Alternatively, as a quick solution, we can use machine translated content without proofreading which provides varying degrees of translation accuracy depending on the trained models that are being used.

What we need

- Enhanced coordination among stakeholders, particularly among practitioners (municipalities, governmental organisations tasked with providing solutions to the crisis, mentoring organisations, NGOs working in the social profit sector and IT companies that have the potential to provide out of the box ideas) including initiatives and consortia working on integration, in order to find ways to tackle current crisis,

- Orchestration of efforts through policy and continuous consultation,

- More voluntary support both from individuals and organisations,

- Support for the projects that have the potential to provide solutions for scaling up,

- Make best use of the state of the art, including AI powered solutions.

4.2 Fast-track labour market Integration of highly educated Ukrainian newcomers (All-in-one4HER model)

Short explanation

Name	Fast-track integration of highly educated newcomers (refugees and non-natives) into the Flemish labour market
Aim	Improve and accelerate the labour market integration process of highly educated newcomers by informing and connecting
Target group	Refugees and newcomers with a higher education level (HER and HOA)
Outputs	A model for fast-track integration including: (1) digital platform, (2) mobile application, (3) handbook
Website	https://www.all-in-one4her.eu
Explanation	The ESF Flanders funded project **"All-in-one 4HER"** developed and piloted a model for accelerating the integration of highly educated newcomers into the labour market. This model can be used by newcomers themselves, but also by organisations involved in integration and employers. The project research finds that highly educated newcomers need more targeted and necessary information and guidance at their level in the early stages of their arrival to make their decision on how to use their background and competenties in the new host country. The model is based on (1) INFORMING newcomers (as soon as possible) in different languages (English, Dutch, Arabic) about the steps to be taken for integration based on a roadmap and available sector specific pathways and (2) CONNECTING them (at the right time) with other supporting actors by matching them with mentors, coaches and supporting organisations, and also making their profiles available for interested employers. The model uses a combination of three supporting tools to facilitate and accelerate this process, namely: (1) mentoring to work, (2) career coaching, (3) networking to work. Based on the newcomer's needs, one/more of these tools help the newcomers to build a sustainable path towards a job and find a job. The model is concretely operationalized in the form of a digital platform and a user-friendly application managed by an admin user. In figures the 'model concept' is presented with the elements and the 'accelerated integration model' is presented on a timeline.

What we offer

Ukrainian refugees with a higher education level constitute perfect fit for the target group of All-in-one 4HER model and outputs. This model can help inform Ukrainian refugees on the Belgian labour market and connect them with the supporting actors including coaches, mentors and other supporting organisations.

It can help them to build a sustainable path towards a job with necessary information and guidance through a combination of career coaching, mentoring and networking. It can match Ukrainian refugees with registered volunteer mentors and coaches. It can help them to have access to different studying and working opportunities, and make their profiles available for interested employers in Flanders. Some employers are already supporting the platform with their corporate social responsibility programmes, including volunteer mentoring and group/individual coaching.

As a follow up project, Supermentor (ESF Flanders) is developing a blended online training for volunteer mentors who are supporting jobseekers with a migrant background. Once finalised, the training can support mentors, coaches and organisations who will be supporting the integration of Ukrainian refugees.

The supporting mechanism starts with the registration of the refugee on the digital platform or application. As a second step, the registrants are contacted by the platform admin for an in-take session where the basic information and needs of the mentee is better understood. The next step is to match the refugee, based on the needs, with a volunteer mentor, coach, supporting organisation or directly with the employer. The supporting process can take 4-6 months for each refugee.

What we need

- Translation of the information on the digital platform to Ukrainian as an additional language
- Translation support for individual contact and support as necessary for refugees without English, Dutch language skills
- Mobilising more volunteer coaches and mentors in addition to the current registered ones
- Training of mentors and coaches (This can be supported by the Supermentor project)
- Getting more employers on the platform who want to hire newcomers

5. Recommendations

Although Flanders built an experience of refugee integration in the last decade, the integration of Ukrainian refugees will still be a big challenge for the regional and local authorities. In this policy brief we focus on facilitating and accelerating their early-stage integration (orientation) and labour market integration. Based on two different models including tools developed and tested in EU and Flemish government funded project settings, we offer policy implementation solutions and recommendations to the Flemish and other European regional and local authorities.

Orientation of Ukrainian refugees

- Mobilising volunteers, particularly via duo projects, proved successful in integration. Projects like ORIENT8 offer ready to use solution sets.
- Language competency is pivotal for successful integration. Therefore, making intensive Dutch courses (ideally from A0 to B2 in one year, in tandem with vocational training) available for highly educated Ukrainians is a must.
- Content developed for Ukrainian newcomers needs to be in their language alongside the local language (Dutch). This is crucial for the success of early-stage integration activities.
- Mobilising non-profit organisations that work in integration sector might ease the tasks that government agencies are currently dealing with.
- Mobilising Ukrainian diaspora, expediting mobilisation through corps diplomatique of Ukraine (also important for screening) to the maximum extent possible is a force multiplier.
- Special attention is required to the needs of children. Most demanding issue is their education. Reception education for non-Dutch speaking children (Onthaalonderwijs voor Anderstalige Kinderen - OKAN) can be reinforced by buddying particularly with the help of Ukrainian diaspora.

- PTSD / Mental health support at all phases of integration will be needed.

- Prepare the Flemish community through a targeted information campaign for the fact that a great deal of Ukrainians will not be able to return to their countries at least for a while.

Integration into the Flemish labour market

- All-in-one 4HER model can be used as a complementary tool for the integration of Ukrainian refugees into the labour market in addition to the support given by the government agencies. Volunteer support and the network of civil society organisations have a big potential to facilitate this process.

- The model can be used by local initiatives separately, by civil society organisations who have the capacity to mobilise volunteer mentors, coaches and get local employers into the network who would like to support refugees (including those having corporate social responsibility programmes).

- Translation of the information on the digital platform and the application to Ukrainian as an additional language will contribute to the platform. On the other hand, Ukrainian interpreting support for individual contact and support as necessary for refugees without English, Dutch language skills would be useful.

- Mobilising more volunteer coaches and mentors in addition to the current registered ones would be of great value. Then there would be a need for training these mentors and coaches for effective support. This can be organised as a part of Supermentor project (ESF), which aims to train volunteer mentors and mentoring programmes supporting jobseekers with migrant background for finding a job.

- Getting more employers who want to hire newcomers on the platform and in the network would be of great value as well. Corporate social responsibility policies of companies and employers can in this sense be helpful. This can bring more support from employers.

Acknowledgements

References

CGRA/CGVS (March 2022). Figures. Retrieved on 4 April 2022 from https://www.cgrs.be/en/figures

EUAA (2022). Rapid response by EU+ countries to address the needs of displaced people from Ukraine. Retrieved on 1 April 2022 from https://euaa.europa.eu/publications/rapid-response-eu-countries-address-needs-displaced-people-ukraine-0

European Commission (18 March 2022). Ukraine refugees: Operational guidelines to support Member States in applying the Temporary Protection Directive. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_22_1727

European Commission (8 March 2022). European solidarity with refugees and those fleeing war in Ukraine. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/com_2022_107_1_en_act_part1_v4.pdf

Hoffman, M. (18 March 2022). Getting Ukrainian refugees into work: The importance of early competence checks. ICMPD. Retrieved from https://www.icmpd.org/blog/2022/getting-ukrainian-refugees-into-work-the-importance-of-early-competence-checks

Knack (2022). Live Oorlog in Oekraïne. Retrieved on 5 april 2022 from https://www.knack.be/nieuws/wereld/oorlog-in-oekraine-vooruit-gang-in-gesprekken-rusland-gaat-aanvallen-rond-kiev-fundamenteel-terugschroeven/live-normal-1837557.html

Mouton, A. (24 March 2022). Vluchtelingen zullen krapte op arbeidsmarkt niet oplossen, Trends. Retrieved on 3 April 2022 from https://trends.knack.be/economie/beleid/vluchtelingen-zullen-krapte-op-arbeidsmarkt-niet-oplossen/article-longread-1849501.html

UNHCR (2022). Operational data portal: Ukraine refugee station. Retrieved on 6 April 2022 from https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine

Yilmaz, F. & Aktas, F. (2021). Labour Market Integration Challenges of Highly Educated Refugees in Flanders, Horizon Insights, 4(2), 1-10. https://doi.org/10.31175/hi.2021.02.01

Yilmaz, F., Van den Berckt, I. & De Winter, H. (2021). Versnelde Integratie van Hoogopgeleide Vluchtelingen (HER) en Anderstaligen (HOA) op de Vlaamse Arbeidsmarkt: Handboek voor integratie ondersteuners. Beyond the Horizon, Brussels.

Tunisia's Deadlocked Situation: President Saied Takes the Authoritarian Exit

by Mats Radeck[1]

1. Introduction

On the 25th of July 1957, Tunisia was stripped of its monarchical superstructure and became a republic. 64 years later, this day is still special to Tunisians. However, besides festivities and protests, it has recently gained a further meaningful dimension. Following popular unrest in the country and several political crises, Tunisian president Kais Saied announced in the evening of July 25, 2021, that he sacked prime minister Hichem Mechichi, froze the work of the parliament, and lifted the immunity of all parliamentarians. The three actors, namely president, parliament, and prime minister are, according to the constitution, supposed to share power. Yet, two of these were then taken out of the equation, and their competencies were combined under the executive oversight of the third, President Saied who has now been ruling by decree.[2] Paradoxically, this very constitution was also what enabled Saied to make his move in the first place. Using article 80, Saied evoked a state of emergency to fight an **"imminent danger"** to the state.[3] Amidst his claims to be combatting corruption and restoring good governance in Tunisia,[4] President Saied's opponents denounced the move as a coup to consolidate power in the hands of one strongman.[5]

Either way, the situation is a tough test for the young democracy that has only shortly seen the tenth year of the Arab Spring and the ousting of dictator Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali. Since then, the yet unconsolidated democracy has found itself in a state of liminality, closely monitored and analysed using a dichotic scale between democracy and authoritarianism.[6] This state of liminality is marked by severe crises which negatively impact good governance.[7] Therefore, the question of whether Tunisia is returning to autocratic rule suggests itself. However, without pro-found background knowledge, the answer to this question is easy to become victim to stereotypical assumptions about the country and the whole region. Analysing the matter from two different perspectives, this brief will therefore lay out two possible trajectories for Tunisia's ongoing political crisis. Firstly, Saied's move can be seen as a mark hinting at the return to authoritarianism. Secondly, the opposite assumption which regards the current state of exception as a vehicle toward functionality in governance can also be suggested. After analysing the two possibilities, the article concludes its findings, arguing that Tunisia is on the path toward one-man rule. It should be noted that the unexpected Jasmine revolution ten years ago has already shown that Tunisia is always capable of surprising policymakers and observers alike. In this case the only factor that can really tell the trajectory of North Africa's only democracy will be time.

2. Tunisia Marked by Crisis

When Tunisians took to the streets in early 2011, the country not only witnessed change in the presidential palace, but it also entered a state of liminality in its journey from authoritarianism to being a consolidated de-mocracy. In this very state, uncertainty over the political system and its democratic transition trumped political stability.[8] This uncertainty struck down in the form of at least two crises which in total added up to a system being deeply disappointing to the people living in it.

First, a political crisis led to political sluggishness including a parliamentary deadlock in which progress became hostage to a multidimensional rivalry between different political actors. The Tunisian constitution, set in 2014, has been a product of compromise to overcome the political trench wars after the revolution.[9] In subsequent years, however, the focus on compromise took bizarre forms which ironically weakened democracy instead of consolidating it. Successive technocratic and national unity governments failed to deliver peoples' demands, namely fight unemployment, countering regional inequalities and corruption, or improving the quality of public services.[10] Instead, Tunisian governments were recurring rickety power-sharing agreements that served compro-mise over competitiveness, and therefore catered deadlock instead of functionality.[11] An example of such is the first government formed after the 2014 election. Although support by Ennahda, a strong Islamist political party, was not needed, it was nevertheless included in a modernist government.[12] It is therefore being argued that, al-though fragmented, the political landscape of Tunisia (which included 20 parties in the last parliament) has not precipitated competitive choices for Tunisia's citizens but rather the reinforcement of political paralysis.[13]

This very paralysis has been further stirred up by the constitutional power-sharing agreement between the president, prime minister, and parliament which led to constant situations of power bargaining and conflict.[14] Fighting between Saied, prime minister Mechichi and the parliamentary coalition led by Ennahda also preceded the evocation of Article 80.[15] Moreover, the legislature did not manage to set up a constitutional court, although this was six years overdue. The 2014 constitution had called on the legislature to nominate four out of twelve judges for the constitutional court. However, due to the political fragmentation, and President Saied's unwillingness to pass a bill reducing the number of votes necessary for respective elections, this court has never been set up.[16] This political havoc forestalled problems which now play out in a situation in which judiciary problem-solving would be decisive.

This prevailing political paralysis was no longer sustainable in a state in dire need of political reform. Unsurprisingly, in his electoral campaign in 2019, Saied has always spoken out in favour of respective systemic change as well.[17]

Secondly, the stagnant economy of Tunisia failed to serve its citizens and respective prospects were not looking good either. The theme of instability that marks Tunisian politics also branded the country's economy. Successive governments were unable to create a stable environment for economic flourishing. Reasons such as stagnation, unemployment, high inflation,[18] solvency, or low GDP made the country turn towards the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank for financial help in return for tough austerity measures and reform programs for public institutions. This deep embarrassment disclosed the government's inability in economic policy.[19] With the main political actors being unable to improve economic conditions, grievances arose in a tense social climate. Protestors called upon the state to overcome the imposed neoliberal developments of increased austerity and privatization, and rather channel economic benefits to the people.[20]

The economic situation turned even worse when Covid struck. In 2021, Tunisia experienced the worst Covid spike in Africa causing its health system to collapse. Furthermore, deficiencies in its vaccination strategy and its Covid handling, in general, were laid bare which have long been sparking discontent.[21] GDP contracted by almost 10% in 2020, tagging unemployment along on its way down. Furthermore, an 80% decline in passenger arrivals hit the tourism-dependent industry of Tunisia hard as well.[22] This prevailing economic crisis which deteriorated through Covid, therefore contributed to the context that is necessary to understand the current political crisis in Tunisia.

In this very context, a tense situation marked by contentious politics gained ground. Desrues and Gobe conceptualise this situation in Tunisia as a protest democracy. In a state of liminality between discarded authoritarianism and immature democracy, protest becomes an expression of discontent with, but also of political immobilism and the economic crisis itself.[23] A series of such protests and public discontent is also what caused President Saied to evoke article 80 of the constitution in an attempt to overcome the political stickiness of this liminality.

3. President Kais Saied Intervenes

Following months of political deadlock and popular protests in which the people brought their discontent about the political and economic situation, as well as about the state's Covid handling to the streets,[24] President Kais Saied announced that he will evoke emergency rule under article 80 of the constitution with the help of the army.[25] This brought the months-long controversies between the President, the Prime Minister, and the Parliament to a climax as both Prime Minister Mechichi and the work of the parliament were dismissed and frozen.[26] With no existing constitutional court, the situation is juridically deadlocked.[27]

According to Saied's opponents, spearheaded by Ennahda, the Islamist party with the biggest share of parliament seats, the president did not have the powers to make his move under the constitution. Respectively, they denounce his actions as a coup warning for renewed authoritarianism.[28] Contrary to his critics, Saied's supporters argue that article 80 of the constitution gave him the power to make his move as the country was threatened by an "imminent danger to statehood, national security, and the country's independence" reflected in the situation of crises.[29] In this regard, Saied aimed to overcome the state of liminality in which Tunisia rests by taking matters into his own hand and establishing good governance. Both arguments suggest paths for Tunisia to get out of its paralysed state of liminality, and both seem plausible.

4. Possible Trajectories for Tunisia

Kais Saied's move to evoke article 80 of the constitution carries at least two contradicting meanings for the future of Tunisia. First, the developments could be a sign of the country's return to authoritarianism. Secondly, the developments could eventually terminate in Tunisia becoming a presidential democracy established by the active exercise of power by the president. For both, arguments can be made, hence both are in theory viable.

4.1. Tunisia's Return to Authoritarianism?

Several reasons can be pleaded to support the hypothesis that Saied works on consolidating a system of one-man rule in Tunisia. First, Saied overstretched the powers that even an extensive reading of article 80 had granted him. He extended the suspension of parliament indefinitely, although the constitution would only allow him to freeze the institution's work for one month.[30] Furthermore, evidence also rejects the claim that the parliament has been confined following the procedures of the constitution. The speaker of parliament Rached Ghannouchi, for instance, claims that he has not been consulted beforehand, although this would have been necessary according to the constitution.[31]

Second, Saied has been gradually minimalizing outside interference in his rule. The president has recently announced to forbid external funding of the work of NGOs within Tunisia. Although it has been argued that this move shall decrease foreign interference,[32] it could also be understood as an attack on civil society.

Third, it seems as if Saied consolidated his rule by surrounding himself with allies. The newly appointed prime minister Najla Bouden and her government are all close, as well as inferior to the president.[33] According to regime theory, elite consolidation is key to authoritarian persistence which hints at the country's development towards authoritarianism.

Fourth, the military has been on Saied's side since it helped the president to suspend the parliament and prime minister.[34] The prominent debate on authoritarian resilience, which regards the Middle East as a stronghold of autocratic rule and a difficult environment for democracies, highlights the role of the army as an imperative pillar of support for authoritarian consolidation.[35]

Fifth, comparisons with Egypt can be drawn where President Al-Sisi used a situation of instability to elevate himself to power and dethroned the Muslim Brotherhood with the help of the army in 2013. The situation mirrored in Tunisia, with Islamist party Ennahda being stripped of its powers and a president that seemingly disregards power-sharing agreements in a state of crises, can trigger anxieties about the future of the country.[36]

Accordingly, Kais Saied can be seen as a 'trickster politician' that has been managing to surf the wave of instability in a crisis-driven liminal space to consolidate his powers and drag the country back into authoritarianism.[37]

4.2. Tunisia's Development into a Presidential Democracy?

On the contrary, several reasons can be pleaded to support the prospect of Tunisia becoming a presidential democracy and thus soon experiencing a fundamental systemic change in its political system. First, President Saied has always been transparent with his ambitions to change the political system of the country. Even before he evoked emergency law under article 80 of the constitution, he has spoken out in favour of a presidential, but a participatory system, as well as a referendum on a new constitution. Saied's decisions were neither surprising nor do they seem to be indefinite. Preceding his move, he had already made his considerations clear to react to the political stalemate with appropriate laws.[38] Reasons for the change that he strives for are the political deadlock, rampant corruption, as well as the fragmented political party landscape which was regarded by many as rather divisive than unifying.[39]

Second, civil society is on the president's side. Right after the political crisis started, Saied met with representatives of various social groups to ensure societal backing of his endeavour. Several of these, such as the powerful UGTT trade union, granted him such.[40] Considering that civil society played a massive role in the recent democratisation process of the country,[41] support of authoritarianism seems implausible.[42]

Third, the situation in Tunisia is incomparable to that in any other country and the narrative of a return to authoritarianism rather originates from stereotypical views on the region. Tunisia is not Egypt, Ennahda is not the Muslim Brotherhood and Kais Saied is not Abdel Fatah Al-Sisi. Although this narrative is often being reproduced, and of course supported by the political situations in Middle Eastern countries and the proximity between Egypt and Tunisia, it still paints an incomplete picture. While Al-Sisi is a military field marshal, Saied is a constitutional law professor. While the Egyptian army helped Al-Sisi to coup his predecessor, the Tunisian army is small and has historically been uninvolved in politics.[43] The discourse of rampant and resilient authoritarianism in the Middle East, which is often being served by Western analysts, is, in the light of this argument, too short-sighted and dangerously simplifying the case of Tunisia's political crisis.[44]

Respectively, Saied's move can also be seen as a well-intentioned attempt to fix something wrong and overcome the immobilism of the current political system. Accordingly, his tough line of action is necessary as it marks the only possibility to move beyond the situational stalemate and bring good governance and democratic functioning to Tunisia.[45] The perceived consolidation of his rule is therefore a temporary vehicle to rescue the country from the sticky state of liminality and thus move past stagnation and away from even more severe crises.[46] A presidential democracy in which power-sharing does not lead to deadlock would be the logical outcome and the one that President Saied has spoken out for.[47] Up to now, Saied has not been declaring dictatorial ambitions but rather introduced a plan for new elections, a referendum on a new constitution, and the end of his rule in December 2022.[48] Regarding the situation from this perspective thus makes it seem as if Saied's actions are the means to a greater democratic end.

5. Deducing the Likely Scenario: Tunisia is on Track Towards Authoritarianism

As expatiated on, there are at least two viable scenarios for the future of Tunisia. Arguments for the likelihood of either of them can be made. However, a more thorough analysis discloses Tunisia's likely trajectory. Saied claimed to overcome the political and economic crises, as well as the impacts of Covid. However, respective developments after Saied's move in July 2021 provide valuable clues for a rather negative outlook for the country. Thus, an evaluation of Tunisia's situation since Saied's power grab, both politically and economically, hints at the country steering back towards authoritarianism. Furthermore, the roadmap for Tunisia's future that the President has laid out gives room for concern.

First, President Saied has cracked down on free speech and, on the opposition, and attacked the democratic division of powers in the country. When the parliament held a virtual meeting in March of 2022, President Saied grew furious. He accused members of parliament to be planning a coup and called on the minister of justice to launch a prosecution on conspiration against state security. Shortly after, 121 members of parliament were invited for questioning by an anti-terrorism unit.[49] Furthermore, Saied officially dissolved the parliament and not just froze its work in reaction to the incident. A clearly unconstitutional decision. Neither is the President allowed to dissolve the parliament in a state of emergency,[50] nor can he decide to do that without a motion of no confidence passed by the parliament itself.[51] Moreover, with presidential decree 11 of 2022, the president has also dissolved the High Judicial Council, an institution in charge of overseeing judicial independence and independence of the judges in the country.[52] Saied, therefore, exploits his presidential power and counter-terrorism measures to crack down on the legislature, as well as on the judiciary, a procedure that violates the democratic division of powers in Tunisia.

Additionally, free speech has been suffering since Saied claimed power. Besides closing oppositional news outlets,[53] critics of Saied have been prosecuted and silenced in civilian, as well as military courts using charges like "insulting the president" or "defaming the army." An example of such a case includes social media commentator Selim Jebali who has been sentenced to six months in prison for calling Saied a "dog" and a "coup maker" on his private Facebook page. The targeting of critics also includes members of parliament who, after being lifted off their immunity, now fear repression.[54] Saied is being seen to lead a campaign of arrests and suppression that also alarms journalists.[55] Such disproportionate coercive measures hint rather toward authoritarian tactics than to further democratisation.

Lastly, the political opposition is divided and not acting decisively against Saied. This political crisis within the opposition has also reached the Ennahda party, Saied's biggest foe. Responding to deficient action by the party's leadership against what Ennahda calls a coup, more than 100 prominent officials have resigned from the party.[56] In the political sphere, Saied has therefore created a situation marked by a weakened opposition, coercive measures to control free speech, as well as a nearly complete disintegration of the democratic division of powers. The developments since July 2021 therefore clearly read like a recipe for authoritarianism.

Second, although cited as reason for his power grab, the economic situation has not perceptibly improved since July 2021. Although GDP is expected to rise again with the Covid crisis fading, other indicators still paint a negative outlook. Besides rising inflation that counters spending, dwindling exports, a high debt level of about 100% of GDP, a highly pompous public sector,[57] or a high unemployment rate between 14% and 18%,[58] the country is now also facing decreasing interest by foreign investors alarmed by the country's political uncertainty.[59] Although analysts like the OECD recognise the steps that have been made to deal with the Covid crisis, it calls, among other things, for deep structural reforms, as well as political certainty to surmount the economic crisis.[60] Something that Saied has not yet delivered on.

To overcome its massive debt problem, the Tunisian government has instead announced its plans to again borrow from the International Monetary Fund. Such a deal will include painful austerity measures that could steer up social tensions.[61] Furthermore, the government plans to introduce further taxes to counter financial shortcomings in the state's budget,[62] a decision that will hit ordinary people hard in a situation of an economic crisis that also includes widespread poverty. The problems of the people became even more severe considering the Ukrainian war. As Tunisia's food system is heavily dependent on imports, rising prices on the world markets for necessities such as grain led to price hikes and food shortages.[63] This situation could well intensify in the future and cause a more serious food crisis, as well as increasing social tensions. Consequently, the uncertain and ambiguous political situation that Saied has created since July 2021 is also amplified and reinforced by enduring economic hurt. It seems as if President Saied is not interested in improving the economic situation for his people, although this has been a reason cited for his move.

Third, the roadmap that President Saied has announced does not satisfy critics. It rather supports fears of Saied exploiting democratic tools to consolidate his power. Analysts have described how Saied has outmanoeuvred his political opponents, especially Prime Minister Mechichi, as well as the speaker of parliament Ghannouchi, right from the beginning.[64] The roadmap that Saied has announced In December 2021 includes a societal dialogue preceding a referendum on a new constitution in July, as well as renewed parliamentary elections in December of 2022. However, critics have pointed to the untransparent nature of the approach,[65] as well as to the fact that there will be no division of powers in place to check on the new constitution in July.[66] In this critical light, the roadmap can be regarded as an elaborated plan to consolidate power while legitimising authoritarian rule through seemingly democratic procedures. It must be expected that Saied's rhetoric is deceptive and that his actual moves cater a consolidation of his powers.

Although there are at least two plausible trajectories for Tunisia after President Saied had frozen the parliament's work and dismissed the Prime Minister in July 2021, a great number of clues hint at the country steering back in the direction of its authoritarian past. Saied's decision to rule by decree has not yet led to economic improvements,[67] nor has it brought political stability. The interwoven political and economic crisis which motivated Saied to invoke the state of emergency under article 80 has arguably even worsened. Besides, Saied's apparent schedule to return to good governance is dubious. The developments of Tunisia's crisis, therefore, paint a picture in which the president does not aim to restore functionality in governance, but rather aims at consolidating one-man rule by dissolving democratic institutions and cracking down on opposition and critics. Currently, Kais Saied is still enjoying widespread popular support. However, protests pick up. Especially in the educated segments of society, the tides are turning. After all, Saied's popularity will be measured by his responses on the crises.[68]

6. Conclusion

The current political situation in Tunisia is tense and insecure. Following a months-long political deadlock, fighting between political actors, and disappointment over the government's delivery on economic challenges and its handling of the Covid-19 pandemic, President Kais Saied introduced emergency law under article 80 of the constitution, making him eligible to rule by decree. Since then, he has been on a crackdown mission targeting his political opponents, as well as the legislature and judiciary. While Saied has been justifying his undertaking with the fight against corruption and the aim of returning social peace and saving the state,[69] his opponents, spearheaded by the democratic Islamist party Ennahda, have been denouncing it as a coup. Both standpoints have been accompanied by protests which stir up social tensions.

Consequently, the future of Tunisia's political system seems unclear. However, based on available data, analysis, and literature, two scenarios appear most plausible. First, Saied's recent moves are the beginning of a return to the state of authoritarianism that the country has only recently shaken off when it ousted dictator Ben Ali in the Arab Spring. Secondly, Saied's recent moves are ambitious attempts to manually restore functionality in governance in Tunisia and overcome the political deadlock and crises by installing a presidential democracy. Both these scenarios are to a certain extent reasonable.
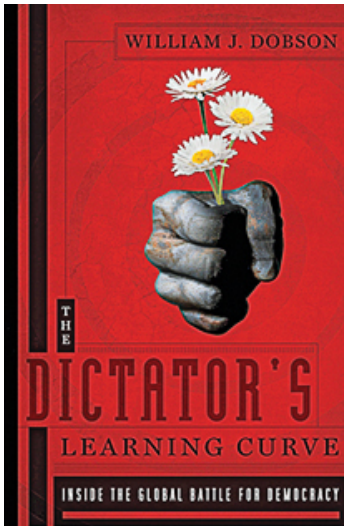
However, Saied has not delivered on solving the crises situations with which he justified his power grab making the authoritarian scenario more credible. Economic struggle and political uncertainty still brand mark Tunisia. Furthermore, the country is gradually narrowing the space for political criticism, considering the deteriorating state of the division of powers or the ailing right to free speech. Moreover, Saied has brought a plan forward that includes a constitutional referendum on July 25, 2022, as well as a renewed parliamentary election at the end of 2022.[70] Although, this latter point holds potential to indicate democratic ambitions of the president, these plans are, nonetheless, denounced by the opposition as tactics to legitimise one-man rule. Considering these developments, it becomes clear that President Saied currently steers Tunisia towards the authoritarian exit of the country's deadlocked situation. However, the politics of Tunisia have always been surprising to policymakers and observers alike. Even though the situation is alarming, at the latest the Arab Spring has shown that the only factor that can really tell the country's future is time.

Endnotes

1 Mats Radeck is a student in International Studies at Leiden University and a research intern at Beyond the Horizon ISSG.

2 Claire, Parker, "Tunisia's president fires prime minister, dismissed government, freezes parliament," The Washington Post, July 26, 2021. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/07/25/tunisia-saied-mechichi-parliament/; "Parlament nennt Auflösung durch tunesischen Präsidenten unzulässig," Zeit Online, March 31, 2022, https://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2022-03/tunesien-ka-s-sa-ed-parlament?utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.ecosia.org%2F. - translated by Mats Radeck.

3 Ouiem, Chettaoui, "Tunisia: Western Pundits or "Hot-Take" Arsonists," Jadaliyya, August 1, 2021. https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/43160.

4 Elizia Volkmann, "President Saierd's campaign of arrests raises troubling questions about Tunisia's trajectory," Middle East institute, January 20, 2022, https://www.mei.edu/publications/president-saieds-campaign-arrests-raises-troubling-questions-about-tunisias-trajectory.

5 Tarek Amara and Angus Mcdowall, "Tunisian democracy in turmoil after president sacks government," Reuters, July 27, 2021, https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/tunisian-democracy-crisis-after-president-ousts-government-2021-07-26/.

6 Fadil Aliriza, "Tunisia's Kais Saied becomes and ordinary politician," Middle East Institute, January 14, 2022, https://www.mei.edu/publications/tunisias-kais-saied-becomes-ordinary-politician.

7 Thierry Desrues, and Eric Gobe, "'We Don't Want to Be Governed Like This Anymore': Protest Democracy as an Expression of a Crisis of Governmentality in Post-Revolution Tunisia," British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies, 2021, 1–6, https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2021.1996333.

8 Nate Grubman and Aytug Sasmaz, "The Collapse of Tunisia's Party System and the Rise of Kais Saied," Middle Eastern Research and Information Project, August 17, 2021, https://merip.org/2021/08/the-collapse-of-tunisias-party-system-and-the-rise-of-kais-saied/.

9 "Tunisian lawyers, politicians split on constitutional crisis," Reuters, July 26, 2021, https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/tunisian-lawyers-politicians-split-constitutional-crisis-2021-07-26/.

10 Grubman and Sasmaz, "The Collapse of Tunisia's Party System and the Rise of Kais Saied."

11 Daniel Brumberg, and Maryam Ben Salem, "Tunisia's Endless Transition?" Journal of Democracy 31, no. 2 (2020): 110–12. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2020.0025.

12 Ibid, 112–14.

13 Grubman and Sasmaz, "The Collapse of Tunisia's Party System and the Rise of Kais Saied."

14 "Tunisian lawyers, politicians split on constitutional crisis."

15 Parker, "Tunisia's president fires prime minister, dismissed government, freezes parliament."

16 Chettaoui, "Tunisia: Western Pundits or "Hot-Take" Arsonists."

17 "Tunisian lawyers, politicians split on constitutional crisis."

18 Grubman and Sasmaz, "The Collapse of Tunisia's Party System and the Rise of Kais Saied."

19 Boudhrioua, Oussama, "The Roots of Tunisia's Current Political Crisis," Fikra Forum, July 30, 2021, https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/roots-tunisias-current-political-crisis.

20 Aliriza, "Tunisia's Kais Saied becomes and ordinary politician."

21 Tarek Amara, and Angus Mcdowall, "Tunisian democracy in turmoil after president sacks government," Reuters, July 27, 2021, https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/tunisian-democracy-crisis-after-president-ousts-government-2021-07-26/; Grubman and Sasmaz, "The Collapse of Tunisia's Party System and the Rise of Kais Saied,"; Boudhrioua, "The Roots of Tunisia's Current Political Crisis."

22 The World Bank Staff, "Tunisia's Economic Update – April 2021," The World Bank, April 2, 2021, https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/tunisia/publication/economic-update-april-2021.

23 Desrues, and Gobe, "'We Don't Want to Be Governed Like This Anymore': Protest Democracy as an Expression of a Crisis of Governmentality in Post-Revolution Tunisia," 1–6.

24 Amara, and Angus Mcdowall, "Tunisian democracy in turmoil after president sacks government."

25 Ibid.

26 Boudhrioua, "The Roots of Tunisia's Current Political Crisis."

27 "Tunisian lawyers, politicians split on constitutional crisis."

28 Amara, and Mcdowall, "Tunisian democracy in turmoil after president sacks government."

29 Ouiem, "Tunisia: Western Pundits or "Hot-Take" Arsonists."

30 DW Staff, "Tunisia: President extends suspension of parliament," Deutsche Welle, August 24, 2021, https://www.dw.com/en/tunisia-president-extends-suspension-of-parliament/a-58962926.

31 "Tunisian lawyers, politicians split on constitutional crisis."

32 "Tunisia's Saied will bar foreign funding for civil society," Swissinfo.ch, February 24, 2022, https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/tunisia-s-saied-will-bar-foreign-funding-for-civil-society/47377674.

33 Rössler, "Tunesien hat wieder eine Regierung."

34 Parker, "Tunisia's president fires prime minister, dismissed government, freezes parliament."

35 Adam Hanieh. "Beyond Authoritarianism: Rethinking Egypt's 'Long Revolution'." Development and Change 47, no. 5 (2016): 1171. https://doi.org/10.1111/dech.12253.

36 Chettaoui, Ouiem. "Tunisia: Western Pundits or "Hot-Take" Arsonists."

37 Walter Armbrust, "Trickster Defeats the Revolution: Egypt as the Vanguard of the New Authoritarianism," Middle East Critique 26, no. 3 (2017): 221–26, https://doi.org/10.1080/19436149.2017.1335834.

38 Boudhrioua, Oussama, "The Roots of Tunisia's Current Political Crisis."

39 Grubman and Sasmaz, "The Collapse of Tunisia's Party System and the Rise of Kais Saied."

40 Agence France-Presse, "Tunisia unions call for president to form new government," The Guardian, August 4, 2021, accessed March 19, 2022, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/aug/04/tunisia-unions-call-for-president-to-form-new-government.

41 Zuzana Hudáková, "Civil Society in Tunisia: From Islands of Resistance to Tides of Political Change," The Journal of North African Studies 26, no. 3 (2021): 498–526, https://doi.org/10.1080/13629387.2019.1702532.

42   Chettaoui, "Tunisia: Western Pundits or "Hot-Take" Arsonists."

43   Brumberg and Salem. "Tunisia's Endless Transition?" 112-114.

44   Chettaoui, "Tunisia: Western Pundits or "Hot-Take" Arsonists."

45   Desrues, and Gobe. ""We Don't Want to Be Governed Like This Anymore': Protest Democracy as an Expression of a Crisis of Governmentality in Post-Revolution Tunisia," 17-18; Brumberg, and Salem, "Tunisia's Endless Transition?" 111.

46   Brumberg, and Salem, "Tunisia's Endless Transition?" 122-123.

47   Grubman and Sasmaz, "The Collapse of Tunisia's Party System and the Rise of Kais Saied."

48   Rössler, "Präsident Saied nimmt die Justiz ins Visier." – translated by Mats Radeck

49   Alessandra Bajec, "Saied accused of taking Tunisia back towards one-man rule," Aljazeera, April 4, 2022, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/4/4/tunisias-president-sets-about-remaking-political-system.

50   ICJ Staff, "Tunisia: Investigating Parliamentarians for conspiracy against the State a new low for President Saied," International Commission of Jurists, April 1, 2022, https://www.icj.org/tunisia-investigating-parliamentarians-for-conspiracy-against-the-state-a-new-low-for-president-saied/.

51   Bajec, "Saied accused of taking Tunisia back towards one-man rule."

52   ICJ Staff, "Tunisia: Revoke Presidential Decree 11," International Commission of Jurists, February 14, 2022, https://www.icj.org/tunisia-revoke-presidential-decree-11/.#.

53   Vivian Yee, "Pressure Mounts on Tunisia's President to Salvage the Economy," The New York Times, January 3, 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/03/world/middleeast/tunisia-economy-kais-saied.html?smid=fb-share&fbclid=IwAR2Pg-SxeDwWlQIno0Lau3nNe9yluv-jCnw3v7FuGaSt6h_JuNmHHhAvNdwY.

54   HRW Staff, "Tunisia: Courts Ramp up Speech Prosecutions," Human Rights Watch, December 23, 2021, https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/12/23/tunisia-courts-ramp-speech-prosecutions#.

55   Hans Christian, Rössler, "Tunesien hat wieder eine Regierung," Frankfurter Allgemeine, October 11, 2021, https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/ausland/tunesien-regierung-wurde-nach-langem-stillstand-gebildet-17580012.html. – translated by Mats Radeck; Volkmann, "President Saierd's campaign of arrests raises troubling questions about Tunisia's trajectory."; Aliriza, "Tunisia's Kais Saied becomes and ordinary politician."

56   Tarek Amara, "More than 100 officials from Tunisia's Ennahda Party resign amid Crisis," Reuters, September 25, 2021, https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/more-than-100-officials-tunisias-islamist-ennahda-party-resign-amid-crisis-2021-09-25/.

57   Federica Saini Fasanotti, "Tunisia's one-man show," Geopolitical Intelligence Service AG, March 21, 2022, https://www.gisreportsonline.com/r/tunisia-coup-saied/.

58   Staff, "Tunisia Economic Outlook," Focus Economics, accessed April 4, 2022, https://www.focus-economics.com/countries/tunisia; Staff, "Tunisia Unemployment Rate," Trading Economics, accessed April 4, 2021, https://tradingeconomics.com/tunisia/unemployment-rate.

59   Yee, "Pressure Mounts on Tunisia's President to Salvage the Economy."

60   OECD, "OECD Economic Surveys: Tunisia 2022," OECD Publishing (April 2022): 11-15, https://doi.org/10.1787/7f9459cf-en.

61   Ibid.

62   Ibid.

63   Delpuech Aida, "Tunisia: 'Food crisis inevitable' as Ramadan begins," Middle East Eye, April 4, 2022, https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/tunisia-ramadan-food-crisis-inevitable.

64   MEO Staff, "Behind Tunisian president's move to seize reins of power," Middle East Observer, August 11, 2021, https://www.middleeastobserver.org/2021/08/11/%d9%8bbehind-tunisian-presidents-move-to-seize-reins-of-power/.

65   Yee, "Pressure Mounts on Tunisia's President to Salvage the Economy."

66   Bajec, "Saied accused of taking Tunisia back towards one-man rule."

67   Zaid Al-Ali, "Tunisia's president just gave himself unprecedented powers. He says he'll rule by decree," The Washington Post, September 24. 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2021/09/24/tunisias-president-just-gave-himself-unprecedented-powers-he-says-hell-rule-by-decree/.

68   Bajec, "Saied accused of taking Tunisia back towards one-man rule."

69   Parker, "Tunisia's president fires prime minister, dismissed government, freezes parliament."

70   Reuters, "Tunisia's" president calls constitutional referendum followed by elections in 2022," The Guardian, December 14, 2021, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/dec/14/tunisias-president-calls-constitutional-referendum-followed-by-elections-in-2022.

Book Review: The Dictator's Learning Curve, Inside the Global Battle for Democracy

Ibrahim Genc[1]

William J. Dobson's (2012) book takes on a somewhat different task to provide us with insights from dictatorships. While the works of political scientists on this subject, such as Levitsky & Ziblatt's How Democracies Die (2019), or John Keane's The New Despotism (2020), explain how such regimes remain in power, this book offers insights from the lives of those who fight against dictators as well as the tactics that these regimes use in their efforts to stay in power.

In line with the recent literature, "Today's dictator's," he writes, "understood that in a globalised world the more brutal forms of intimidation -mass arrests, firing squads, and violent crackdowns- are best replaced with more subtle forms of coercion" (p.5). However, also, he points out to the fact that there is still hope in the following: "my optimism grew as I sat down to meet with the people who had committed themselves to fight for these freedoms" (p.293).

In the book, he relies on primary data -interviews with activists, advocates, and the people who help these regimes – that he collected from China, Egypt, Malaysia, Russia, and Venezuela. From his interviews and observations, it is clear that both dictators and those who fight against them learn and benefit from their predecessors and their counterparts. For instance, Putin, who witnessed the Soviet Union's collapse closely as a KGB officer in East Germany, learned a great deal about how once a powerful regime might collapse. He implemented these lessons as he ascended to power. Many years later, he said, "He who does not regret the break-up of the Soviet Union has no heart; he who wants to revive it in its previous forms has no head" (p.15). The author then argues that leaders like Putin must be more creative than ever to stay in power in today's world. They feel anxious, which leads them to grow even more anxious when dealing with their citizens. Perhaps the best word to describe their state of mood is skittish.

On the other side of the spectrum- those who fight against oppressors- the author demonstrates that they sometimes fear, but they never lose hope. They always act with a sense of purpose. They know that their enemies are always at risk of losing. This is perhaps most obvious in - a human rights lawyer from China- Pu Zhiqiang's words "The ideology and the legitimacy of the party have already disappeared. It is naked interests. The slogans do not work anymore. They need to buy people; they need to pay them for them to do anything" (p.58). As these oppressive regimes seem to learn and from one another and adopt (Morgenbesser 2020), so do people who work to topple them. For instance, those who helped topple Milosevic in Serbia helped the Orange Revolution organisers in Ukraine. As new 21st century dictators grow more sophisticated, their rivals also constantly evolve and learn to develop the best ways to end such leaders' unjust rule.

The author's conversations with both sides indicate no guarantee for even the most brutal regimes that they will remain in power. Nor, for people who are fighting against such regimes, will be successful. However, this book reminds us that governing people in the 21st century is becoming more complicated than ever as tools available to dissidents are becoming less expensive and more accessible to everyone. Cognizant of these risks, leaders of countries like Russia, China are updating their learning curve day by day. Nonetheless, as no dictatorship has managed to survive in humankind's history, the new regimes that now seem to be taking the world by storm will surely come to an end. It does not mean, however, that it is just a matter of time before these governments collapse. Instead, it should be a motivation for our collective fight against autocrats.

---

[1] Ibrahim Genc is a PhD candidate in the school of government and international relations at Griffith University. He is also a research editor at Democratic Decay and Renewal (Dem-Dec).

References

Dobson, W.J. 2012. The dictator's learning curve: Inside the global battle for democracy. Random House.

Keane, J. 2020. The New Despotism. Harvard University Press.

Levitsky, S. and D. Ziblatt. 2018. How Democracies Die. New York: Broadway Books.

Morgenbesser, L. 2020. 'The menu of autocratic innovation.' Democratization: 1-20.