



Introduction by  
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I have great pleasure in introducing this official FIRST report on Tunisia to mark the 2012 Chatham House Prize. We offer our congratulations to President Moncef Marzouki of the Republic of Tunisia and Sheikh Rachid Ghannouchi, this year's joint winners. The Chatham House Prize is an annual award presented to the statesmen and stateswomen who have made a significant contribution to enhancing international relations.

They both receive the Prize for their successful roles in Tunisia's process of democratic transition. Together they have contributed to Tunisia's leadership in promoting democracy as part of the so-called "Arab Spring" in the Middle East and North Africa. It is no accident that the first flowering of the Arab Spring should have occurred in Tunisia.

President Marzouki is a former President of the Tunisian League of Human Rights and a renowned political and human rights activist. Following a period of exile in France he returned to Tunisia in 2011 to lead the party of opposition which he founded in 2001. Despite the secular nature of his party he joined the coalition government – Tunisia's first popularly elected coalition and was elected President on 12th December 2011. He holds the distinction of being the first democratically elected Arab President, a human rights activist of long standing and a leader with a demonstrable ability to work in a spirit of compromise across political and ideological divides.

Sheikh Ghannouchi has been widely applauded for his leadership in advocating compatibility between Islam, democracy and modernity – a concept that he has promoted through a programme of political tolerance and compromise. He believes that success in addressing the challenges of democratic transition requires more than majority rule and depends on consensus and coalition building.

Both leaders have significantly contributed to Tunisia's reputation as a model transition state where mutual respect and acceptance of the Islamist and secular way of life is the norm.

They have both defined Tunisia's international role as a leader of the "Arab Spring" and promoted democratisation.

President Marzouki has highlighted Tunisia's three spheres of connectivity: The Maghreb sphere with Arabic and Muslim ramifications, the African and Mediterranean sphere and its European extension. Sheikh Ghannouchi believes that "the Tunisian experience has been a success and victory for the Arab world." Both leaders also underline the importance of the Maghreb reconstruction: "It represents a huge market of 100 million consumers with significant business and investment opportunities," according to Sheikh Ghannouchi.

In international relations Tunisia has followed a moderate and non-aligned course while playing an active role in supporting the Middle East Peace Process. The United Kingdom has committed £110 million over four years to support political and economic reforms in the Middle East and North Africa. £1.15 million was spent on political reform projects in Tunisia during 2011-2012 and a further £2.4 million is allocated for 2012-13. In 2011, UK exports of goods amounted to £146 million and UK import of goods totalled £228 million. Year on year exports have risen 95 per cent in 2012. Energy is an important investment sector – BG Group is the largest foreign investor in the country, having invested some US\$3 billion. There are now some thirty UK investors operating in Tunisia in a wide range of sectors including energy, electronics, textiles, ICT and healthcare. Tourism is also an expanding sector.

I remember with happiness several visits to Tunisia during my time as a Foreign Office Minister. We at FIRST are delighted to have been asked to produce this official publication to mark the Chatham House Prize 2012 and warmly congratulate the winners, President Moncef Marzouki and Sheikh Ghannouchi. We also thank Dr Robin Niblett and his colleagues at Chatham House for their help in the preparation of this report.