

Jelisaveta BLAGOJEVIC 

Centre for Library, Documentation and Archive  
of the Parliament of Montenegro – Parliamentary Institute  
[elizabetab@t-com.me](mailto:elizabetab@t-com.me)

## TUNISIAN MILITARY AND REGIME CHANGE

### ABSTRACT

This paper has several research objectives. They are related to the description of the position of the military in the non-democratic regime in Tunisia, as well as to the clarification of its role in the overthrow of the regime, that is, to the identification of the causal factors that determine the military role during uprisings. The purpose of this paper is to show that the support of the military or its neutral position during such uprisings represents necessary condition for success of transition from a non-democratic regime. Applying two-level model of analyses based on the strategic approach to transition, we concluded that the nature of civil-military relations in the previous regime and the nature of protest determine the role of the military in the uprisings. In other words, the character of the previous non-democratic regime and the initiators of transition settle the model and the results of transition, and its consolidation.

**Keywords:** non-democratic regime, uprisings, military, democratic transition, Tunisia

The so-called 'Jasmine Revolution' that is, the protests against *Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's* regime in Tunisia, took place between 18 December 2010 and 14 January 2011, and led to its collapse. The revolution has gained long-term international impact and importance, marked the beginning of the Arab Uprisings and set the standards for similar movements in other Arab countries. In order to understand why the protests in Tunisia led to the regime change, this paper is focused on the analysis of the military's role in these processes with regard to other actors of the transition. There are several research questions: what was the military's role during the revolution, what are the determination factors and how did it influence the transition outcome?

The theoretical framework of the paper is based on the strategic approach to the examination of transition process that highlights the importance of the role and decisions of actors for the determination of the transition model and the transition results. This approach reflects the connection between the strategic actions of the military and the course and results of the transition, regardless of the structural conditions and the features of society.<sup>1</sup> In line with this theoretical framework, the following two main hypotheses are set:

1. The position of the military in the previous non-democratic regime determines its role during political, that is, regime change;
2. The role of the military in the transition process significantly determines the course and the results of the transition.

In accordance with this hypothetical framework, there has been developed a two level model of analysis of the Tunisian military that is focused on the examination of the role and position of the military in both the pre-transition and transition period. In order to identify the key factors that determine the position of military in the transition process it is necessary to examine the role of military in the previous regime, that is, its connection with the regime and a society. Also, the transition results are determined by the role of military in this process. The aim of this paper is to examine these claims through the analysis of the role and the position of the Tunisian military in the non-democratic regime and the regime change. Thus, the first part of the paper is dedicated to the development of the theoretical two-level model of analysis and the second one on the two-level analysis of the Tunisian military. Also, it should be noted that this article is synthetic in its character. The questions asked and the hypotheses posed suggest an extensive range of issues.

## STRATEGIC APPROACH TO TRANSITION

The strategic approach to the examination of the democratization process emphasizes the importance of the actors, that is, their decisions, choices and strategies for the model and results of transition, as well as the consolidation of a new order. In this context,

---

<sup>1</sup> P. Maldini, "Relevantnost tranzicijskoga modela u postkomunističkom kontekst", *Društvena istraživanja: časopis za opća društvena pitanja*, vol. 16, no. 4-5 (2007), p. 781.

the research focus is on the character of the leadership structure of the previous regime, the character of the democratization initiators and their role in this process.

In line with the degree of change that actors want to apply, there are three political strategies: maintenance of non-democratic regime, implementation of moderate reforms, and democratic breakthrough. On the basis of the selected strategy, the actors are divided into: the regime's hardliners – *moderate* that favor the implementation of moderate reforms to a certain extent, and *radical* that support the maintenance of a non-democratic system; the regime's reformists – *moderate* who stand up for the implementation of a moderate reform with preserving a non-democratic system, and *radical* who advocate for the implementation of moderate reforms with a possibility to give support to a democratic breakthrough; and the opposition – *moderate* that endorses democratic breakthrough through implementation of a moderate reform, and *radical* that calls for overthrowing of the regime.<sup>2</sup>

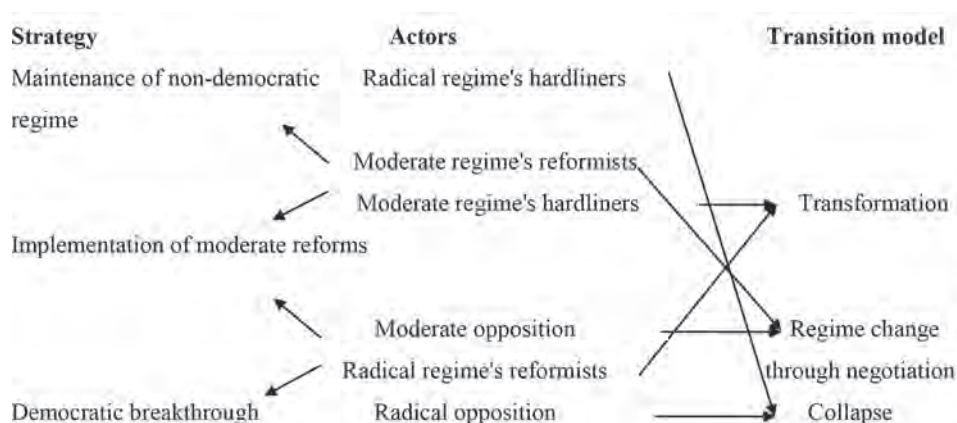
In accordance with the structure of political actors, their roles and political strategies in the process of political change, transitologists<sup>3</sup> singled out the following models of transition by peaceful means: transformation (transaction/reform), collapse (termination/breakdown) and regime change through negotiation (liberation). *Transformation* occurs when regime's reformists try to convince moderate hardliners to accept limited reforms, threatening with the democratic breakthrough strategy. *Collapse* comes when radical (united) opposition, through some form of 'democratic revolution', compels regime's hardliners to handover the power. Finally, the *regime change through negotiation* is the result of joint activities of moderate regime's reformists and moderate opposition (Figure 1).

The military as an institution that has a monopoly *over* the use of *force*, essentially determines the possibility of regime change, that is, its preservation or fall. The role of the military in this process depends on the ratio between hardliners and reformists within the government, as well as on the ratio of moderates to radicals in the opposition. In other words, it depends on the selected strategy and the transition model. In the case of a *transformation* where the regime initiates a change or a *transition through negotiation* that includes consensus between government and opposition, the transition results should be determined by non-military factors, unless the military, directly or indirectly, holds the reins of power. Regarding the *collapse*, radical opposition must overpower the government, that is, the regime's hardliners. The opposition can consist of various groups: students, intellectuals, leaders of former political parties, larger segments of the middle class: officials, professionals, entrepreneurs, church leaders, members of trade unions etc. Also, it can be supported by various regional and global external powers and countries such as the United States of America. In addition, the military may play one of the following three roles in this process: promotional, obstructive or hybrid.

<sup>2</sup> S. Darmanović, *Demokratske tranzicije i konsolidacije u južnoj i istočnoj Evropi* [Democratic Transitions and Consolidations in Southern and Eastern Europe], PhD diss., Pravni fakultet, Univerzitet Crne Gore, Podgorica 2002, p. 71.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.; J.J. Linz, A.C. Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe*, Baltimore 1996; S.P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, Oklahoma 1992.

Figure 1. Relations between strategies, actor choices and transition models



Source: Author.

The military as a *promotional factor* of transition contributes to the regime's fall and then withdraws to its barracks without any political ambitions. On the other hand, as an *obstructive factor*, the military disables regime change and becomes an obstacle in the overall transition process. The *hybrid role* of the military represents a combination of promotional and problematic elements, that is, the military can contribute to the regime's fall, and then become problematic – as a politicized transition actor. The role of the military in this process is determined by external and internal factors: history and tradition of the military and its individual units, nature of wider political system, political culture and regime's values. Also, in this context, very important is the position and the organization of the military within the previous non-democratic regime.

Within the personalized authoritarian regime, recruitment and promotion in the military service are not based on the qualities, skills and references of candidates, but rather on their loyalty to dictator. The authoritarian leader tends to create its own guard from the part of the military that acts rather as an armed gang than as a professional military formation. In this way, the part of the military loses its position and privileges, which causes its dissatisfaction. On the other hand, this forms a good base of support to regime's opposition.

Hannah Arendt<sup>4</sup> stated that *generally speaking, we may say that no revolution is even possible where the authority of the body politic is truly intact, which means, under modern conditions, where the armed forces can be trusted to obey the civil authorities*. As one observer of Arab changes noticed: *Armies are the key to unlocking a revolution's potential*.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> H. Arendt, *On Revolution*, New York 2006, p. 47.

<sup>5</sup> S. Joshi, *Arab Spring: Nature of Armies Decisive in Revolutions*, British Broadcasting Corporation-Middle East, 28 June 2011, at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-13941523>, 15 December 2020.

During Arab Uprisings, the military was taking different roles, from Bahrain where it violently opposed the protests, through Yemen and Libya where it broke up into pro and anti-protest units, to Egypt where it decided to give support to the protesters. The role of the military in the Tunisian uprisings is still controversial and represents a point of debate. There is some evidence that General Rachid Ammar stayed loyal to Ali until the end of his rule, while others have argued that Ammar refused to obey Ali's order to shoot at the protesters. In order to explain the position of the military in this process, various factors were identified and explained in the following paper section.

## TWO-LEVEL MODEL OF ANALYSIS

On the basis of the strategic approach to the explanation of transition process, two-level model of analysis has been developed that focuses on the examination of the role and the position of the military in pre-transition and transition period. The pre-transition level of analysis includes six sublevels of civil-military relations in the previous regime: institutional, economic, social, cultural, educational and international. The transition level of analysis is dedicated to the moment of uprisings, that is, to the nature, character and extent of the protest as an explanatory factor of the military's position during transition.

These two levels are separated but, at the same time, interlaced taking into account that developments at one level affect developments at the next one. The nature of civil-military relationship in the previous regime and the nature of the protests determine the role of the military in transition (Figure 2).

### First Level – The Position of the Military in the Previous Regime

There are six dimensions of analysis of the military's position in the previous regime, that is, independent variables that determine the role of the military in transition process.

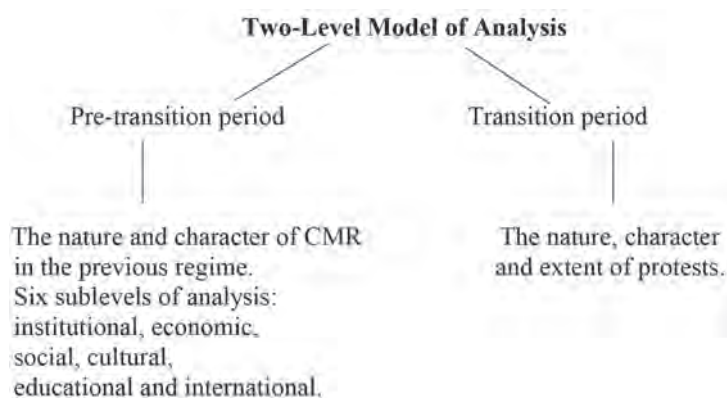
The institutional dimension implies an institutional or patrimonial character of the military, the involvement of the military in the administrative apparatus, a legal framework of a military action and a relationship between the military and parallel security services. According to Meijer,<sup>6</sup> the institutionalized military that is bounded by law, that has a corporate identity independent of the state and is based on meritocracy, will probably withdraw from politics. It will particularly be the case if the security services have a privileged position compared to the military.

On the other hand, the patrimonial military is integrated into the regime and is characterized by cronyism, corruption, patronage and abuse of power. Consequently, if the survival of the military as an institution depends on the survival of the regime, it is

<sup>6</sup> R.T. Meijer, *The Role of the Military in Political Transition, Egypt: A Case Study*, Master's Thesis 2014, pp. 25-26, at <https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/handle/1887/31895>, 15 December 2020.

more likely that the military will support the regime (Kårtveit & Gabrielsen).<sup>7</sup> In that context, with regard to the transition model, Stepan<sup>8</sup> defined ten following prerogatives: constitutionally sanctioned the independent role of the military in the political system; the relationship of the military with the head of the executive branch; the role of military in coordination of defense sector; participation of active-duty military officers in the cabinet; the role of the military in the legislative branch of government; the relationship of the military with the intelligence agencies; the relationship of the military with the police; the role of the military in military promotion; participation of the military in the management of state enterprises and the role of the military in legal system.

Figure 2. Two-level model of analysis



Source: Author.

The economic dimension is reflected by the economic position of the military. *The percentage of the state budget allocated to the military expenditure (that is, percentage of GDP) indicates the position of the military in relation to other state institutions, as well as to other countries. Additionally, the involvement of the military in the management of state enterprises represents evidence of its economic, but also political power.*

The social dimension means relationship between the military, society and regime. The decisions and actions of these actors determine the functioning of the entire political system. These interrelations depend on the degree of the legitimacy of the regime (that is, its perception as [non] legitimate by soldiers, generals, public; the [non] participation of soldiers in violation of human rights etc.<sup>9</sup>).

<sup>7</sup> B. Kårtveit, M.G. Jumbert, "Civil-Military Relations in the Middle East: A Literature Review", *Working Paper*, Chr. Michelsen Institute Bergen, no. 5 (2014).

<sup>8</sup> A.C. Stepan, *Rethinking Military Politics: Brazil and the Southern Cone*, Princeton 1988, pp. 94-97.

<sup>9</sup> P. Droz-Vincent, "The Military Amidst Uprisings and Transitions in the Arab World", in F.A. Gerges (ed.), *The New Middle East, Protest and Revolution in the Arab World*, New York 2014, pp. 180-209.

The cultural dimension, *inter alia*, includes the ethnic, national, tribal or religious structure of the military. The decision of members of the military to support the hated regime, or the protesters, or to stay neutral, depends on the extent to which the structure of the military reflects the ethnic, tribal or/and religious divisions in society, as well as whether it is under the domination of specific groups or it is representative of the cultural diversity of the entire population.<sup>10</sup>

The educational dimension is, *among others*, related to the model and the content of the education of the military, as well as to the model and the content of the military trainings.

Finally, the international dimension refers to the intervention of external forces to save the regime or to provide support to the protesters. It also includes foreign trainings of soldiers, foreign financial assistance regarding military equipment, etc.<sup>11</sup>

## Second Level – The Moment of Uprisings

Apart from the institutional, economic, social, cultural, educational and international status of the military in the previous regime, in order to appropriately understand its role in transition, it is necessary to focus on the moment of uprisings. The balance of power between the regime and the protests is a crucial factor in the decision of the military to give support to one side. If the protests have broad support (that is, include large numbers of people, former political leaders, students, intellectuals, business leaders etc.), it is more likely that the military will either give support to the protesters, or stay neutral. On the other hand, if the protests do not include important actors of the society and if the extent of the protests is not great, it is very likely that the military will stay loyal to the regime.

The extent of the protest is also important for establishing a new order, preventing promotion of leaders from the previous regime, as well as enabling organization of the next presidential and parliamentary elections.

## Empirical Indicators

The following paper presents the indicators of the extent of the protests, as well as the indicators of the military position in the previous regime through institutional, economic, cultural, social, educational and international sublevel of analysis.

The indicators of the extent of the protests are the location of the regions of the country that are covered by the protests, the number of the protesters, the character and the socio-economic status of the protesters, and the political, religious, ethnical and tribal affiliation of the protesters. The empirical indicators of the military position in the previous regime are presented in the table below (Table 1).

<sup>10</sup> B. Kårtveit, M.G. Jumbert, "Civil-military..."

<sup>11</sup> F. Gaub, "Arab Armies: Agents of Change? Before and After 2011", *Chaillot Papers*, EU Institute for Security Studies, no. 131 (2014), pp. 25-28.



Table 1. Empirical Indicators of the Military Position in the Previous Regime

Sublevel of analysis	Indicators
Institutional	Clear legal framework: Competencies and role of all relevant institutions stipulated by Constitution and laws.
Economic	Data related to military expenditure as a percentage of GDP.
Social	The degree of the involvement in the state-building, external defense, human rights violation etc.
Cultural	Percentage of ethnic, tribal, national or similar group members in the military structure.
Educational	Professional academies, rules of recruitment.
International	Type and scope of foreign assistance, foreign trainings of soldiers, international intervention to support regime or protests.

Source: Author.

## TWO-LEVEL ANALYSIS OF THE TUNISIAN MILITARY

The self-immolation of 26-year-old street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi on December 17, 2010 in the Tunisian town of Sidi Bouzid triggered the long accumulated popular dissatisfaction with corruption and nepotism of Ben Ali's rule. Smartphones and online social media networks, such as Facebook and Twitter, facilitated sharing information about the clashes between the police and the protesters, as well as about the locations of the protests. In that way, ICT tools made a significant contribution to the spread of the revolt. In a nationally televised speech on 13 January, Ali announced the lowering of prices on bread, milk, sugar, oil and other basic food items, and also promised that he would not seek a new term in office in 2014. However, it was 'too little and too late' for the protesters. Ali lost support of the military and the security forces, and was forced to *flee to Saudi Arabia* along with his family.<sup>12</sup>

In order to explain the role of the military in the uprisings, this chapter is divided into two parts. The first part is committed to the analysis of the nature of the civil-military relations in the previous regimes, and the second one to the analysis of the moment of the uprisings.

### The Position of the Military in the Previous Regime

The modern professional military of Tunisia was formed in the first half of the nineteenth century during the rule of Ahmed Bey. This was the result of Ahmed's management of military policy that included sending officers in France to study, the

<sup>12</sup> A. Chrisafis, I. Black, "Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali Forced to Flee Tunisia as Protesters Claim Victory", *The Guardian*, 2011, at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/jan/14/tunisian-president-flees-country-protests>, 15 December 2020.



establishment of military academies, as well as the modernization of military equipment, resources and infrastructure. In addition, Bay increased the total number of armed forces to 27,000 troops.<sup>13</sup>

During the French colonial rule, the military became part of the French colonial *Armée d'Afrique* in 1881. In this form, the Tunisian military participated in the First and Second World War, as well as in other French military operations. The only armed forces that were allowed under French rule was the *Beylical Guard*.<sup>14</sup> Taking into account that Tunisia did not jettison French rule through armed struggle, the military in postcolonial Tunisia could not assume the position of the *midwife of independence*.<sup>15</sup>

The socio-cultural composition of the military, like that of the whole society, was homogeneous. In the mid-1960s, more than 95% of the population were Sunni Arabs.<sup>16</sup>

The first president of independent Tunisia, Habib Bourguiba, was not a military figure. He did not take power with the help of the military, and his rule was not based on the military support. The military establishment and its personnel were under the control of civilian authorities. That was the result of French heritage and a set of legal and institutional measures. It reflected the aspirations of the president for total political isolation and marginalization of the military. In a speech in 1956, Bourguiba said that *members of the military are not free to have political opinions like other citizens*.<sup>17</sup> Accordingly, the next year he banned each form of political activity and political association of members of the military, including their membership in the ruling party, access to the political institutions, as well as the right to vote in elections.

In accordance with the Constitution of 1956, Bourguiba, as the president of the country, was also the supreme commander of the armed forces.<sup>18</sup> He significantly limited the size and the budget of the military. Also, the maintenance of the internal order was entrusted to the powerful security apparatus under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Interior. Compared to other countries in the region, Tunisia had the lowest percentage of military expenditures: maximum 2% of GDP.<sup>19</sup> The protection of national security against possible external threats, especially from neighboring Algeria and Morocco, was relied on good relations with the West, particularly France.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>13</sup> F. Gaub, "Arab Armies...", p. 25.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> C. Alexander, "Tunisia", in M. Gąsiorowski (ed.), *The Government and Politics of the Middle East and North Africa*, Boulder 2014, pp. 475-499.

<sup>16</sup> J.G. Hurewitz, *Middle East Politics: The Military Dimension*, New York 1969, p. 398.

<sup>17</sup> M.J. Willis, *Politics and Power in the Maghreb: Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco from Independence to the Arab Spring*, London 2012, p. 86.

<sup>18</sup> *Constitution of June 1, 1959 as Amended to the Constitutional Act*, no. 2008-52 of July 28, 2008, at <http://corpus.learningpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Tunisia-Constitution-2008-English.pdf>, 15 December 2020.

<sup>19</sup> J.G. Hurewitz, *Middle East Politics...*, p. 414.

<sup>20</sup> M.J. Willis, *Politics and Power...*, p. 87.

The decision to form a professional military in line with the French model of civil-military relations was determined by the external and internal factors. Externally, Bourguiba was influenced by events in the neighboring Arab countries, where the military had often intervened in political process and had representatives at important political and civilian positions. On the domestic front, the military attempted two coups against Bourguiba: in 1957 by supporters of Salah Ben Youssef and 1962 by young 'Youssefist', former members of the Beylical Guard and the Islamists, supported by Algeria.<sup>21</sup>

His successor, *Zine El Abidine Ben Ali* was a former general, but he minimized the political influence of the military. From 1991 to 2011, Ben Ali reduced the number of the military personnel and the military budget, impeded military promotion and introduced forced retirement for the most competent officers. In 2010, Tunisia had 27,000 active Army members, 4,800 Navy members and 4,000 Air Force members.<sup>22</sup> The military budget amounted to 1.4% of GDP.<sup>23</sup> In comparison with other countries of the Arab Uprisings, Tunisia had the smallest military with the lowest spending.

On the other hand, Ali significantly invested in the development and maintenance of the privileged security units under the authority of the Ministry of Interior. The security forces performed all the 'dirty jobs' of the regime. Thus, the social prestige and the position of the military were not compromised.<sup>24</sup>

The role of the military was reduced to the defense of the country, participation in UN peacekeeping missions and engagement in natural disasters response. After General el-Kateb retired in 1991, Ali did not appoint a new chief of staff of the army, and instead he personally made all decisions related to the military. The recruitment of the top military officials was based on loyalty, personal connection and regional affiliation. In other words, 40% of the members of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces were from the Sahel region that represents 24% of total Tunisian population. Rachid Ammar, the chief of staff of the army from 2002 to 2013, was also from Sahel. This favoritism and nepotism significantly contributed to the marginalization and dissatisfaction of the officer corps.

The cooperation with colleagues from the United States contributed to the building of military ethos, organizational norms and internal autonomy of the military as an institution. Over 4,600 troops passed the trainings in American educational institutions, which represents 13% of the total military force.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>22</sup> A.H. Cordesman, A.A. Burke, A. Nerguizian, *The North Africa Military Balance: Force Developments & Regional Challenges*, Center for Strategic & International Studies 2010, pp. 49-50, at [http://csis.org/files/publication/101203\\_North\\_African\\_Military\\_Balance\\_final.pdf](http://csis.org/files/publication/101203_North_African_Military_Balance_final.pdf), 15 December 2020.

<sup>23</sup> R. Brooks, "Abandoned at the Palace: Why the Tunisian Military Defected from the Ben Ali Regime in January 2011", *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 36, no. 2 (2013), p. 210.

<sup>24</sup> S. Grewal, *A Quiet Revolution: The Tunisian Military after Ben Ali*, Carnegie Middle East Center 2016, p. 4.

<sup>25</sup> F. Gaub, "Arab Armies...", p. 28.

Table 2. The professional background of ambassadors (A), ministers (M) and governors (G) under Ali

Decade	1987-90			1991-2000			2001-10			Total		
Position	A	M	G	A	M	G	A	M	G	A	M	G
Military officers	3/61	2/73	1/20	3/71	1/74	2/64	0/52	0/108	0/52	6/184	3/255	3/136
Police officers	1/61	0/73	0/20	0/71	2/74	1/64	2/52	0/108	0/52	3/184	2/255	1/136
Civilians	57/61	71/73	19/20	68/71	71/74	61/64	50/52	108/108	52/52	175/184	250/255	132/136

Source: H. Bou Nassif, "A Military Besieged: The Armed Forces, the Police, and the Party in Bin Ali's Tunisia, 1987-2011", *International Journal of Middle Studies*, vol. 47, no. 1 (2015), pp. 78-79.

Taking into account that the Tunisian military, unlike in other Arab countries, did not participate in nation-building and economic development programs, the majority of the military was not affected by corruption and cronyism. Consequentially, along with the political marginalization and isolation, the professionalism and technical expertise of the military increased. The military managed to build a corporate identity independent of the state, based on a strong sense of belonging, unity and coherence.

The Constitution sanctioned the independent role of the military in the political system, the head of the executive branch was *de jure* and *de facto* commander of the military, soldiers did not have positions in the Cabinet, coordination of the defense sector was *de jure* and *de facto* in the hands of the executive, active-duty military officers did not have positions in the management of state enterprises, active-duty soldiers did not have command over the units of the police, intelligence agencies were not under the control of military commanders, and the decisions regarding the promotion within the military were made by the executive branch. However, the Parliament did not have a role in this process, since in the Bourguiba-Ali regime all power was concentrated in the hands of the president.

### The Moment of Uprisings

The analyses of the Jasmine Revolution have indicated the nature and character of its unprecedented pressure from below as a causal factor in the *collapse* of the *Ben Ali* government.<sup>26</sup> However, a small number of papers have focused on the examination of the significance and consequences of the military's role in these changes<sup>27</sup>. Moreover, these

<sup>26</sup> A. Jdey, "A History of Tunisia, January 14, 2011: The End of a Dictator and the Beginning of Democratic Construction", *Boundary 2 Duke University Press Journals*, vol. 39, no. 1 (2012), pp. 69-86; G. Joffé, "The Arab Spring in North Africa: Origins and Prospects", *The Journal of North African Studies*, vol. 16, no. 4 (2011), pp. 507-532; E. Bellin, "Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Lessons from the Arab Spring", *Comparative Politics*, vol. 44, no. 2 (2012), pp. 127-149.

<sup>27</sup> F. Gaub, "Arab Armies..."; R. Brooks, "Abandoned at the Palace..."; S. Grewal, *A Quiet Revolution...*; H. Bou Nassif, "A Military Besiege..."; L. Way, "Comparing the Arab Revolts: The Lessons of 1989",

papers have given different interpretations of the role of the military in the uprisings, especially related to the issue of General Rachid Ammar's refusal to shoot at the protesters.

In line with this issue, we divided the abovementioned papers into two groups: the first group attempting to explain the causal factors of the military's decision to disobey Ben Ali's order, and the second one arguing that the military did not make this decision.

The first group is divided, in line with its subject and aim, into three subgroups. The first subgroup of papers has pointed out the need for more detailed examination of this issue<sup>28</sup>. The second subgroup has posited that the nature of the civil-military relationship is the key explanatory factor of the position of the Tunisian *military* during the uprisings and their *disobedience* to *Ben Ali's* order. Lutterback<sup>29</sup> and Barany<sup>30</sup> have emphasized the key role of the military in the collapse of the authoritarian regime, through the nature of the civil-military relationship during Bourguiba-Ben Ali's rule. According to Barany, the decision of the military to disobey Ben Ali's order was the consequence of the military's marginalization in the previous regime, particularly compared to the position of the security forces. The military did not have enough financial resources, its size was too small and it was focused on the defense of the external borders. In this context, Gause<sup>31</sup> has identified two key factors of the analysis of the military's role in the riots: the social composition of the regime and the military, as well as the level of institutionalization and professionalism of the military. The third, more recent, subgroup of papers has provided a more detailed analysis, due to the fact that these papers were prepared over a longer period of time. Apart from the description of the civil-military relations in the previous regimes, Brooks<sup>32</sup> has indicated the importance of the nature of the protests for the military's decision to disobey Ben Ali's order to shoot at the protesters. Similarly, Signé and Smid,<sup>33</sup> through the game theory and the historical-institutional analysis of the civil-military relations, have sought to explain why the military supported the protesters in 2011, but not during the 2008 protests. Gaub<sup>34</sup> has pointed

---

*Journal of Democracy*, vol. 22, no. 4 (2011), pp. 17-27; Z. Barany, "Comparing the Arab Revolts: The Role of the Military", *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 22, no. 4 (2011), pp. 24-35; G. Gause, "Why Middle East Studies Missed the Arab Spring, The Myth of Authoritarian Stability", *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 90, no. 4 (2011), pp. 81-90; D. Lutterbeck, "Arab Uprisings and Armed Forces: Between Openness and Resistance", *SSR Paper, Centre for Security, Development and the Rule of Law*, no. 2 (2011), at [www.dcaf.ch/content/download/.../ssr\\_paper2.pdf](http://www.dcaf.ch/content/download/.../ssr_paper2.pdf), 22 December 2020; L. Signé, R. Smida, "The Army's Decision to Repress: A Turning Point in Tunisia's Regime Change", *Working Paper, Stanford University, Center on Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law*, vol. 151 (2014), pp. 1-31; A. Pachon, "Loyalty and Defection: Misunderstanding Civil-Military Relations in Tunisia During the 'Arab Spring'", *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 37, no. 4 (2014), pp. 508-531.

<sup>28</sup> L. Way, "Comparing the..."

<sup>29</sup> D. Lutterbeck, "Arab Uprisings..."

<sup>30</sup> Z. Barany, "Comparing the..."

<sup>31</sup> G. Gause, "Why Middle East..."

<sup>32</sup> R. Brooks, "Abandoned at the Palace..."

<sup>33</sup> L. Signé, R. Smida, "The Army's Decision..."

<sup>34</sup> F. Gaub, "Arab Armies..."

out the importance of the level of institutionalization and coherence of the military in terms of its decision to support the protesters.

On the other hand, Pachon, Bou Nassif and Grewal<sup>35</sup> have showed evidences that Ali never explicitly asked the military to shoot at the protesters, and that Ammar remained loyal to Ben Ali until the end.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, Ammar, in line with Ben Ali's order, took over the operations of the Interior Ministry on January 14, 2011.<sup>37</sup> According to Pachon,<sup>38</sup> the military remained loyal to the regime and defection occurred within the Police and the National Guard. Bou Nassif<sup>39</sup> has indicated that Ammar himself denied that Ali had ordered the armed forces to shoot at the protesters.

According to Farhat,<sup>40</sup> on 7 January 2011, the young Tunisian activist Yassine Ayari spread a rumor that Rachid Ammar had refused to obey Ben Ali's order to shoot at the protesters. After that, many media outlets reported Ayari's news. The papers of Barany, Bellin,<sup>41</sup> Brooks and Lutterbeck that have attempted to identify the causal factors of the military defection in Tunisia, were based on earlier news reports.<sup>42</sup> However, new information argued that Ali did not order the armed forces to open fire on the protesters. Also, there were no clashes between the internal security forces loyal to Ben Ali, on the one side, and the military that wanted to protect the protesters on the other. The only order that General Ammar refused to obey was related to protection of the houses of members of the Trabelsi family because it was ordered by Seriati, inferior in rank to Ammar.<sup>43</sup> General Rachid stated that he would not allow its units to open fire unless otherwise commanded.<sup>44</sup>

In addition, Ammar did not obey the order to suppress the members of the Anti-Terrorist Brigade that held twenty-eight members of the Trabelsi family at Carthage Airport because he wanted to avoid armed conflict.<sup>45</sup> These events were interpreted

<sup>35</sup> S. Grewal, *A Quiet Revolution...*; H. Bou Nassif, "A Military Besiege..."; A. Pachon, "Loyalty and Defection..."

<sup>36</sup> S. Grewal, *A Quiet Revolution...*, p. 5.

<sup>37</sup> S. Grewal, *Interview with a Former Minister of Defence*, Tunis 2015.

<sup>38</sup> A. Pachon, "Loyalty and Defection..."

<sup>39</sup> H. Bou Nassif, "A Military Besiege...", p. 77.

<sup>40</sup> On July 17, Ayari admitted that he invented this rumor in order to force the army to defect from Ben Ali. M. Farhat, "Yassine Ayari: 'L'armée n'a jamais reçu l'ordre de tirer'" [Yassine Ayari: 'The army never received the order to fire'], *Slate Afrique*, 20 July 2011, at <http://www.slateafrique.com/15009/yassine-ayari-revolution-tunisie-blogueur-rachid-ammarammee>, 15 December 2020.

<sup>41</sup> Z. Barany, "Comparing the..."; E. Bellin, "Reconsidering the..."

<sup>42</sup> A. Pachon, "Loyalty and Defection...", p. 515.

<sup>43</sup> P. Puchot, "14 Janvier 2011 à Tunis: Le Jour Où Ben Ali Est Tombé", *Mediapart*, 10 November 2011, at [www.mediapart.fr/journal/international/071111/14-janvier-2011-tunis-le-jour-ou-ben-ali-est-tombe](http://www.mediapart.fr/journal/international/071111/14-janvier-2011-tunis-le-jour-ou-ben-ali-est-tombe), 15 December 2020.

<sup>44</sup> A. Barrouhi, "Tunisie: La Veritable Histoire Du 14 Janvier 2011", *Jeune Afrique*, 25 January 2012.

<sup>45</sup> P. Puchot, "14 Janvier 2011..."; A. Barrouhi, "Tunisie: La Veritable..."; Al Arabiya, "Al Arabiya Inquiry Reveals How Tunisia's Ben Ali Escaped to Saudi Arabia", *Al Arabiya News*, 13 January 2012, at <http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/01/>, 15 December 2020.

as the military's support to the protesters that enabled Ben Ali's fall. However, there is some evidences that from 10 to 14 January the military followed regime orders, including protection of public buildings.<sup>46</sup> After Ben Ali fled the country, Ammar announced that the military would protect the protesters. As a consequence of the rumors that Ammar refused to shoot at the protesters, he became very popular after Ben Ali's overthrow, and received the privileged position in the new regime. In that sense, General Mohamed Ali el-Bekri noted that: *the real minister of defense was Rachid Ammar*.<sup>47</sup>

This new insight on the position of the military in the Tunisian uprisings does not change its positive role in this process. In other words, it indicates that the military had not openly supported the protesters, but it had taken a neutral stance that enabled the realization of the protesters' goals.

The National Commission to Investigate Violence during the Riots in May 2012 reported that, between 17 December 2010 and 14 January 2011, 338 people died and 2,147 were injured. These casualties were primarily a consequence of police repression.<sup>48</sup> In contrast to the security apparatus, the military had a closer relationship with society because they shared the frustration caused by nepotism and corruption of the Ali regime. Most members of the military came from economically poor areas and the structure of the military reflected the ethnic homogeneity of society. Thus, the military was accepted as a part of the society, no as an external repressive factor.

The military built a strong internal cohesion and institutional resilience due to the fact that the civilian authorities did not interfere in the internal process of recruitment and promotion. The training programs existed at all levels and the standards of education were high. On the other hand, the military did not have an important economic position. There were no significant allocations from the state budget to the military, and it did not have a share in state enterprises.

The political and economic marginalization of the military indicates that its survival as an institution did not depend on the survival of the regime, particularly bearing in mind that Ali lost both internal and international legitimacy. Moreover, the diplomatic correspondence of the United States published by WikiLeaks<sup>49</sup> has highlighted the incompetence of Ben Ali's rule, as well as a high level of corruption.

<sup>46</sup> A. Barrouhi, "Tunisie: Que Mijotait Ali Seriati?", *Jeune Afrique*, 28 March 2011, at [www.jeuneafrique.com/Article/ARTJAJA2619p054-056.xml0/justice-securitetunisie-mohamed-ghannouchi-tunisie-que-mijotait-ali-seriati.html](http://www.jeuneafrique.com/Article/ARTJAJA2619p054-056.xml0/justice-securitetunisie-mohamed-ghannouchi-tunisie-que-mijotait-ali-seriati.html), 15 December 2020.

<sup>47</sup> S. Grewal, *Interview with Retired General Mohamed Ali el-Bekri*, Tunis 2015; S. Grewal, *A Quiet Revolution...*, p. 6.

<sup>48</sup> R. Rafin, "Tunisia's National Fact-Finding Commission on Abuses Final Report", *iLawyer*, 13 June 2012, at <http://ilawyerblog.com/tunisias-national-fact-finding-commission-on-abuses-final-report/>, 15 December 2020.

<sup>49</sup> U.S. Embassy, *Tunisia: Corruption in Tunisia: What's Yours Is Mine*, [diplomatic cable], Transmitted 23 June 2008, WikiLeaks reference identifier 08TUNIS679, Stockholm, Sweden, 7 December 2010, at <https://www.library.cornell.edu/colldev/mideast/WikiLeaksTunis.html>, 15 December 2020.



During the first days of the protests, the military was a passive player who was observing the regime's oppression. Ali had believed that the security forces could stifle the protests until 12 January, when he deployed the military in the capital to protect critical infrastructure. It was the first time that the military was engaged in the capital,<sup>50</sup> taking into account that Ali wanted to keep the military away from the internal affairs.<sup>51</sup>

The protests were not geographically isolated and did not represent a particular class or sect. However, they were massive and included unemployed citizens from the inland, as well as the middle class from the large cities and the coastal areas. In addition, the balance of power between the protesters and the security forces on 13 January was in favor of the protesters that broke into the house of one of Ali's relatives in the coastal city of Hammamet.<sup>52</sup> The military shot at the protesters in 2008, but at that time the balance of power between the regime and the protesters was in favor of the regime.

If the military had decided to actively participate in suppressing the protesters, it likely would have led to much more bloody course of events. In this manner, the military initiated the end of Ali's regime and created an opportunity for the establishment of a new regime that would respect interests and needs of the citizens.

## CONCLUSION

The analysis of the civil-military relations in the non-democratic regime approved the research hypotheses in line with the defined theoretical framework. In other words, dictators' policy toward members of the armed forces came up as the causal factor of the military role in the uprisings.

The promotional role of the Tunisian military in transition is explained by the following features of the military in the Bourguiba-Ben Ali regime: the high level of institutionalization; the low level of involvement in the administrative apparatus; the appropriate legal framework; the privileged position of the parallel security services; the weak economic position; the homogenous structure of the military in religious, ethnic and tribal terms; the close ties of the military with society; the fact that the regime did not enjoy legitimacy in the eyes of the rank-and-file, general staff and public; the existence of professional military academies; the professional norms and values of the military; the foreign assistance and trainings. Consequently, the survival of the military did not depend on the survival of the regime. Additionally, the constellation of events at the moment of the uprisings, especially the size and the magnitude of the protests, affected the position of the military in this process.

---

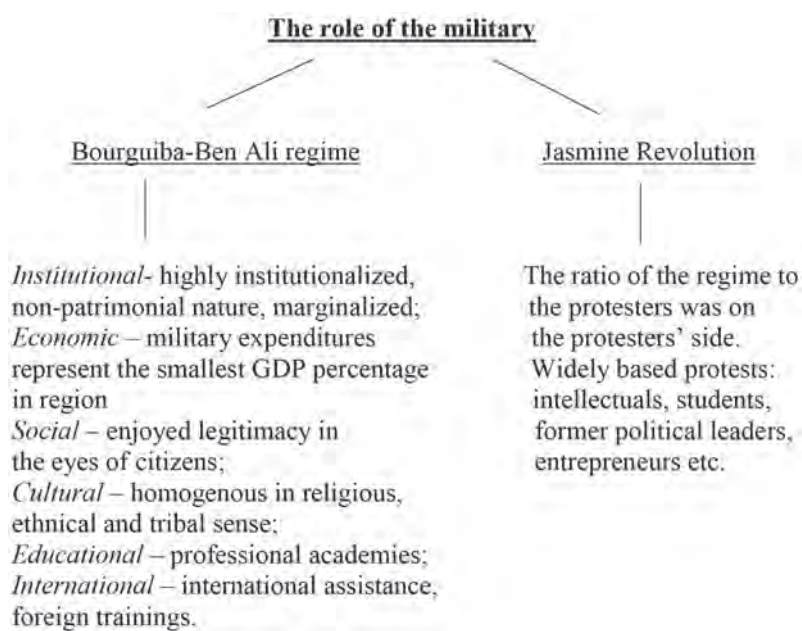
<sup>50</sup> R. Brooks, "Abandoned at the Palace...", p. 206.

<sup>51</sup> F. Gaub, "Arab Armies...", p. 28.

<sup>52</sup> R. Brooks, "Abandoned at the Palace...", p. 218.



Figure 3. Tunisian Case – The Role of the Military



The above analysis indicates that the position and the role of the military in the process of transition essentially determines the course and the results of transition. The fact that the military had not suppressed the protesters and that it had taken a neutral stance in the uprisings enabled the fall of the Ben Ali regime. The role of the military in the post-transition period is also very important in the context of the establishment and consolidation of a new regime. Tunisia has the largest democratic capacity of all Arab Uprisings' countries. It can be explained by the decision of the military to open political space for bureaucracy, political parties and civil society. This analysis provides a theoretical ground for further research related to the role of the military as a political factor, especially in the process of regime change. Apart from that, it represents the example of application of this theoretical framework to a specific case. Moreover, this article is dedicated to explaining the positive role of the military in transition, in contrast to the majority of the papers in the field of civil-military relations that focus on the analysis of the military as an obstructive factor, particularly in Latin America countries (Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, Paraguay, Bolivia).

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Al Arabiya, "Al Arabiya Inquiry Reveals How Tunisia's Ben Ali Escaped to Saudi Arabia", *Al Arabiya News*, 13 January 2012, at <http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/01/>.
- Alexander C., *Tunisia*, in M. Gąsiorowski (ed.), *The Government and Politics of the Middle East and North Africa*, Boulder 2014.
- Arendt H., *On Revolution*, New York 2006.
- Barany Z., "Comparing the Arab Revolts: The Role of the Military", *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 22, no. 4 (2011), pp. 24-35, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2011.0069>.
- Barrouhi A., "Tunisie: La Véritable Histoire Du 14 Janvier 2011", *Jeune Afrique*, 25 January 2012.
- Barrouhi A., "Tunisie: Que Mijotait Ali Seriati?", *Jeune Afrique*, 28 March 2011, at [www.jeuneafrique.com/Article/ARTJAJA2619p054-056.xml0/justice-securitetunisie-mohamed-ghannouchitunisie-que-mijotait-ali-seriati.html](http://www.jeuneafrique.com/Article/ARTJAJA2619p054-056.xml0/justice-securitetunisie-mohamed-ghannouchitunisie-que-mijotait-ali-seriati.html).
- Bellin E., "Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Lessons from the Arab Spring", *Comparative Politics*, vol. 44, no. 2 (2012), <https://doi.org/10.5129/001041512798838021>.
- Bou Nassif H., "A Military Besieged: The Armed Forces, the Police, and the Party in Bin Ali's Tunisia, 1987-2011", *International Journal of Middle Studies*, vol. 47, no. 1 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743814001457>.
- Brooks R., "Abandoned at the Palace: Why the Tunisian Military Defected from the Ben Ali Regime in January 2011", *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 36, no. 2 (2013), <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2012.742011>.
- Chrisafis A., Black I., "Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali Forced to Flee Tunisia as Protesters Claim Victory", *The Guardian*, 2011, at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/jan/14/tunisian-president-flees-country-protests>.
- Constitution of June 1, 1959 as Amended to the Constitutional Act*, no. 2008-52 of July 28, 2008, at <http://corpus.learningpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Tunisia-Constitution-2008-English.pdf>.
- Cordesman A.H., Burke A.A., Nerguizian A., *The North Africa Military Balance: Force Developments & Regional Challenges*, Center for Strategic & International Studies 2010, at [http://csis.org/files/publication/101203\\_North\\_African\\_Military\\_Balance\\_final.pdf](http://csis.org/files/publication/101203_North_African_Military_Balance_final.pdf).
- Darmanović S., *Demokratske tranzicije i konsolidacije u južnoj i istočnoj Evropi* [Democratic Transitions and Consolidations in Southern and Eastern Europe], PhD diss., Pravni fakultet, Univerzitet Crne Gore, Podgorica 2002.
- Droz-Vincent P., "The Military Amidst Uprisings and Transitions in the Arab World", in F.A. Gerges (ed.), *The New Middle East, Protest and Revolution in the Arab World*, New York 2014.
- Farhat M., "Yassine Ayari: 'L'armée n'a jamais reçu l'ordre de tirer'" [Yassine Ayari: 'The army never received the order to fire'], *Slate Afrique*, 20 July 2011, at <http://www.slateafrique.com/15009/yassine-ayari-revolution-tunisie-blogueur-rachid-ammarammee>.

- Gaub F., "Arab Armies: Agents of Change? Before and After 2011", *Chaillot Papers, EU Institute for Security Studies*, no. 131 (2014).
- Gause G., "Why Middle East Studies Missed the Arab Spring: The Myth of Authoritarian Stability", *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 90, no. 4 (2011).
- Grewal S., *A Quiet Revolution: The Tunisian Military after Ben Ali*, Carnegie Middle East Center 2016.
- Grewal S., *Interview with a Former Minister of Defence*, Tunis 2015.
- Grewal S., *Interview with Retired General Mohamed Ali el-Bekri*, Tunis 2015.
- Huntington S.P., *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, Oklahoma 1992.
- Hurewitz J.G., *Middle East Politics: The Military Dimension*, New York 1969.
- Jdey A., "A History of Tunisia, January 14, 2011: The End of a Dictator and the Beginning of Democratic Construction", *Boundary 2 Duke University Press Journals*, vol. 39, no. 1 (2012), <https://doi.org/10.1215/01903659-1506256>.
- Joffé G., "The Arab Spring in North Africa: Origins and Prospects", *The Journal of North African Studies*, vol. 16, no. 4 (2011), <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629387.2011.630881>.
- Joshi S., *Arab Spring: Nature of Armies Decisive in Revolutions*, British Broadcasting Corporation-Middle East, 28 June 2011, at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-13941523>.
- Kårtveit B., Jumbert M.G., "Civil-Military Relations in the Middle East: A Literature Review", *Working Paper, Chr. Michelsen Institute Bergen*, no. 5 (2014).
- Linz J.J., Stepan A.C., *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe*, Baltimore 1996.
- Lutterbeck D., "Arab Uprisings and Armed Forces: Between Openness and Resistance", *SSR Paper, Centre for Security, Development and the Rule of Law*, no. 2 (2011), <https://doi.org/10.5334/bbm>.
- Maldini P., "Relevantnost tranzicijskoga modela u postkomunističkom kontekst", *Društvena istraživanja: časopis za opća društvena pitanja*, vol. 16, no. 4-5 (2007).
- Meijer R.T., *The Role of the Military in Political Transition, Egypt: A Case Study*, Master's Thesis 2014, at <https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/handle/1887/31895>.
- Pachon A., "Loyalty and Defection: Misunderstanding Civil-Military Relations in Tunisia During the 'Arab Spring'", *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 37, no. 4 (2014), <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2013.847825>.
- Puchot P., "14 Janvier 2011 à Tunis: Le Jour Où Ben Ali Est Tombé", *Mediapart*, 10 November 2011, at [www.mediapart.fr/journal/international/071111/14-janvier-2011-tunis-le-jour-ou-ben-ali-est-tombe](http://www.mediapart.fr/journal/international/071111/14-janvier-2011-tunis-le-jour-ou-ben-ali-est-tombe).
- Rafin R., "Tunisia's National Fact-Finding Commission on Abuses Final Report", *iLawyer*, 13 June 2012, at <http://ilawyerblog.com/tunisia-national-fact-finding-commission-on-abuses-final-report/>.
- Signé L., Smida R., "The Army's Decision to Repress: A Turning Point in Tunisia's Regime Change", *Working Paper, Stanford University, Center on Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law*, vol. 151 (2014).

- Stepan A.C., *Rethinking Military Politics: Brazil and the Southern Cone*, Princeton 1988, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780691219639>.
- U.S. Embassy, *Tunisia: Corruption in Tunisia: What's yours is mine*, [diplomatic cable], Transmitted 23 June 2008, WikiLeaks reference identifier 08TUNIS679, Stockholm, Sweden, 7 December 2010, at <https://www.library.cornell.edu/colldev/mideast/WikiLeaksTunis.html>.
- Way L., "Comparing the Arab Revolts: The Lessons of 1989", *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 22, no. 4 (2011), <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2011.0068>.
- Willis M.J., *Politics and Power in the Maghreb: Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco from Independence to the Arab Spring*, London 2012.

---

**Jelisaveta BLAGOJEVIC** – holds a PhD degree in International Relations obtained from the Faculty of Political Science, University of Montenegro in July 2020. As a PhD researcher she spent one month at the Jagellonian University, six months at La Sapienza University of Roma (October 2014-May 2015) and six weeks as a fellow at the European Parliament – European Parliamentary Research Service (12 September-21 October 2016). Currently, she works as a Head of the Centre for Library, Documentation and Archive of the Parliament of Montenegro – Parliamentary Institute.