The Arab Spring has Come to an End Right Where it Started

The so-called Arab Spring, which began with the string of revolutionary events in Tunisia has now officially ended. It ended last month with Tunisia getting swept by a wave of new demonstrations, with thousands of people taking to the streets both in the capital, and other cities of the country.

Local media sources, while covering those events, referred to them as the "stolen revolution".

Officially, the Tunisian revolution started in January of 2011, when President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, after staying in power for 23 consecutive years was forced to flee the country.

Seven years later and Tunisians are shouting those very same demands that rallied them when the revolution began: "Employment, freedom, dignity." It's no accident that employment occupies the principal place in those chants as the economic situation has been deteriorating for 7 years straight, with Tunisia's national debt increasing from 39.2% GDP in 2010 up to 60.6% in 2016. In that period Tunisian dinar lost 40% of its value against the US dollar.

Unemployment, as before, remains the scourge of the Tunisian economy, with well over 35% of youngsters being unable to find a job, while prices on basic consumer goods keep skyrocketing. Tunisians are getting increasingly frustrated with the fact that can not make their ends meet, no matter how hard they try, which forced protesters to take to the streets after the announcement of a new budget draft that allowed yet another increase in prices.
Those who participated in the rallies opposed "poverty and hunger" and protested against "thieves who stole the country."

At the head of the people's movement was a group called "What Are We Waiting For" According to the media reports, a total of 800 people was arrested during the demonstration, with 200 of them being aged between 15 and 25.

Two years ago Tunisia signed an agreement with the International Monetary Fund that allowed it to obtain a loan of 2.8 billion dollars for 4 years, however that the government was supposed to introduce a series of severe economic and social reforms. Demonstrations were the answer to these planned reforms.

It's no wonder that local authorities were in a rush to turn their back on the austerity regime they were introducing, pledging to allocate more than 70 million dollar to help the poor. According to the statement of the Tunisian Minister of Social Affairs, Mohamed Trabelsi, this measure will assist a total of 250,000 poorest families.

The Financial Times noted in an editorial that although Tunisia is the only Arab country that has maintained democratic achievements after 2011, however, the democratic course of this country is under threat largely due to the fact that all of the nine governments that were formed after the downing of Ben Ali could not satisfy their people with the rate of improvements in the economic situation, but also because "a very unusual mixture of nationalist and Islamist sentiments do not allow the government to choose an optimal path."

Terrorism has dealt a severe blow to the tourism industry and does not encourage investors to leave their money in Tunisia, while the government, which consists of 44 representatives, can not really be described as effective, since ministers are more concerned about future elections than anything else.

According to the Al-Jazeera, this latest political crisis shows that after the overthrow of Ben Ali local elites are getting increasingly detached from the people, with all of the major political forces being engaged mainly in discussing their relations between themselves and distributing posts in the government.

It is likely that as a result of the recent turbulent events in Tunisia, a new prime minister will be appointed, but essentially nothing will change, as local political parties, according to the media source mentioned above, use the people's anger in order to gain more influence by making all sorts of empty promises.

It is likely that this could mean an increase in authoritarian tendencies in Tunisian society, because the current period of so-called democratic changes dictated by Western pressure hasn't just destroyed people's welfare, but has made the country much more susceptible to internal crises.

Among the population there is a growing sense of nostalgia for centralized government, as the problem of social inequality becomes more acute. Meanwhile, the government fails to bring at least some sense of optimism into the hearts of the people.

Vladimir Mashin, Ph.D. in History and a political commentator, exclusively for the online magazine “New Eastern Outlook”. 