



Forum Tunisien pour les Droits Economiques et Sociaux

# Annual Report on Irregular Migration - Tunisia 2021



MARCH 2022

# Introduction:

Since the street peddler overthrew the “transformation maker”, the state of the country and the people has not changed. Rather, the state has lived on the reality of a decade marked by economic and social stagnation and political turmoil. Contexts of this last decade have many similarities with the Tunisian Eyalah contexts during the nineteenth century<sup>1</sup>, which have been described by historians as the century of “successive horrors<sup>2</sup>” or “the arduous century<sup>3</sup>,” or a “morally and emotionally weak Eyalah”. Thus, “history is not what has passed, but rather what remains within us after all that has passed.<sup>4</sup>”

Based on these similarities, we can describe the decade of the revolution (2011-2020) as “**a decade of successive terrors**,<sup>5</sup>” starting from terrorism to the pandemic outbreak. “**The decade of successive terrors**” is a tragic narrative of thousands of immigrants and the escalation of protest movements that ended in despair and frustration. It is the story of a distorted democracy, the frailty of the Tunisian state, the escalation of indebtedness, foreign interventions, and the corruption of the political elite. We describe it as “**The decade of successive terrors**” because its price was human life, either through terrorist operations that affected the security and military institutions, political assassinations, the loss of many human lives at the Mediterranean, or during the pandemic.

It should be pointed out in words that the decade is nothing but a continuity of the corruption of the political elite that ruled before 2011, except that the methods of corruption became more visible after the revolution due to the presence of freedoms despite their limitations and sometimes threats, and it should also be pointed out that the 25<sup>th</sup> of July is not the event that stifled the flow of migration waves, but rather that migrations after this date shows the state of frustration that has affected almost all groups and classes with varying degrees before and throughout this decade of successive terrors.

Our paper attempts to answer a central problem: to what extent can we consider that the economic and social crisis, the violation of rights and freedoms in the protests of winter 2021 - which coincided with the spread of the epidemic and the loss of many lives in the context of the parliamentary democracy crisis, the rise of populism and the increasing trend towards the securitization of migration by the European Union, as factors that have accelerated the surge of mixed streams of irregular migration waves in Tunisia?

## I. The economic and social landscape of the second and third trimesters of 2021

No matter how many different readings and reasons about the phenomenon of irregular migration there are, economic and social factors remain at the forefront of expulsion factors. Therefore, it is useful both cognitively and methodologically to present a brief and intensive reading of the general economic landscape for the year 2021 according to the report of the National Institute of Statistics entitled

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<sup>1</sup> For similar readings, the reader can return to Qassumi, (Al-Muldi), “The Grammar of the Language of Sociology in the records of the Historian Al-Hadi Al-Taymoumi”, presented by: Fathi Lesser, Dar Noqoush Arabia , 2019, pp. 35, 36.

<sup>2</sup> Al-Taymoumi, (Al-Hadi), “Peasants’ revolt in the contemporary history of Tunisia: An example of 1906,” Bayt Al-Hikma, Carthage, Tunisia, 1993.

<sup>3</sup> Al-Sharif, (Mohamed Al-Hadi), “The History of Tunisia from Prehistoric Times to Independence”, translation: Muhammad Al-Shawsh - Muhammad Ajina, Dar Siras Publishing, third edition, Tunis, 1993.

<sup>4</sup> Al-Manasr, (Adnan), “Sand Years. Reflecting on the battles of the democratic transition in Tunisia 2011-2014,” Sotimedia for Publishing and Distribution, Tunisia, 2021, p. 21.

<sup>5</sup> We borrowed this description from the Tunisian historian Al-Hadi Al-Taymoumi in his book, “Peasants’ revolt”...previously mentioned.

“Employment and unemployment indicators for the third quarter of the year 2021”, issued in November 2021. Among the highlights of the report:

The number of employees continued to decline, recording a decrease of 28 thousand employees during the third quarter of 2021 compared to the second quarter of the same year. The unemployment rate increased by 0.5 point compared to the second quarter of 2021, reaching 18.4%. In the context of unemployment, according to the institute’s report, the unemployment rate of young people aged between 15 and 24 years rose during the third quarter of 2021 to reach 42.4% compared to 41.7% during the second quarter of same year. This percentage is estimated at 42.8% for males and 41.7% for females. The report also recorded a decrease in the activity rate to about 46.5% during the third quarter of 2021. Indeed, according to the national survey on employment for the third trimester of 2021, the number of active population in Tunisia reached 4141.6 thousand, compared to 4153.3 thousand during the second quarter, that is, a decrease of 11.7 thousand. Accordingly, the activity rate decreased by 0.5 point to reach 46.5 percent during the third quarter of 2021, after ranging 47.0% during the second quarter.

The western regions of Tunisia and the Tunisian south also maintained the highest unemployment rates, reaching 33.0% in the northwest, 26.3% in the southwest, 23.0% in the center west, and 22.5% in the southeast. These rates exceed the national average by a margin of four to fourteen points. To a lesser extent, the north-east, the center-east and Grand Tunis have unemployment rates below the national average, reaching, respectively, 10.8%, 13.9% and 16.1%.

Compared to the second quarter of 2021, the unemployment rate witnessed a relatively high increase in the western regions of the country: the Northwest (+3 points), the Southwest (+1.3 points) and the Midwest (+0.9 points). Unemployment witnessed a slight decrease in the Northeast (- 1 point) and the Southeast (- 0.9).

These figures indicate the existence of a crisis in the country in a context of an increasing number of infections and deaths amid the epidemic, an inability of the public health system to provide the minimum level of resistance to the epidemic, especially in the period before July 25, 2021, the paralysis of the tourism sector, the crisis of the agricultural and fishing sectors, the growth of corruption and the rise of protest movements. All of these are factors shaping the idea of a migration project in the minds of people who are tired of their situation and who have no prospects.

## II. The Winter of 2021: Protest movements and access to freedom

In the context of the failure of the political authority to manage the economic and social crisis and given that the economy is the beating heart of societies, the path will remain open to tensions between the people and the state, and protest will remain a constant behavior through which protesters are trying to impose their economic and social rights. Moreover, “historians see that the attack on the **Bastille** during the French Revolution constitutes the actual entry of the “**people**” into political life: later, it became clear that taking to the streets is the only form through which individuals find their means to express their demands as a united group. This descent into the public sphere has become, in contemporary history, one of the most direct means of expression, not because it shows the character and unity of this group, but rather because it represents a confirmation that this group is the source of all standards and all sovereignty<sup>6</sup>”. Therefore, the involvement of the youth of popular neighborhoods in the protest movements during the winter of 2021 and their intrusion into the public space are only

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<sup>6</sup> - Astatî Zein El-Din, (Al-Habib), "Protest Dynamics and the Crisis of Political and Syndicate Mediation: The Street as an Alternative to Institutions in Morocco", Center for Arab Unity Studies, website and date of its visit: [caus.org.lb](http://caus.org.lb) on 01/01/2022 at 16:34.

expressions of their dissatisfaction with their economic and social situation. By taking to the streets, it was their method and form of expressing their resentment towards a reality mired in fragility and poverty and demanding their rights of employment, freedom, and national dignity, which many young people, politicians and jurists have fought for since the mining basin uprising in 2008. After all, protesting is a normal reaction, and it must be considered as such as long as the political authority has not been able to solve social issues. But their protest was soon met with a police and political confrontation. On the one hand, the number of detainees who were subjected to violations and torture increased, and on the other hand the ruling political elite criminalized the protest movements in popular neighborhoods on media outlets.

Given the uncountable large number of attacks and violations, we will only mention some of the abuses carried out by law enforcement bodies through the reports of the Tunisian League for the Defense of Human Rights. On January 18, 2021, the Association recorded 632 arrests in the capital only, from the residents of Al-Tadamon neighborhood, Al-Malasin, Fouchana, Al-Sijoumi and Tabarba. On January 20, 200 arrests were recorded and most of them were minors. The following day, January 21, 242 arrests were recorded. The number of files received by the Committee to follow up on Arrests and Protests stationed at the headquarters of the Tunisian League for the Defense of Human Rights: 777 files, including 126 minors that volunteer lawyers took over the task of defending them.

Among the charges brought against them: damage to the property of others, assault on internal state security (political charges that may lead to the death penalty), severe violent assault on a public official, insulting a public official, attempting to set fire to the premises of others, premeditated assault on the freedom to roam at night, violating the curfew, violating the state of emergency law, seizing and manufacturing incendiary and explosive materials without a permit and without legal reason, forming a corrupt alliance and gang with the intent of attacking property and people, inciting riots, commotion and confusion. Besides, summonses by the police station were directed to only 4 people at the national level out of 777 files.

To mention among the methods of violation recorded by the association: a citizen in Siliana was dragged away after being subjected to various types of torture, and all protest movements, whether night or day, resulted in police night raids, the use of tear gas and random arrests, and the authorities banning citizens from joining the Parliament procession on January 26, which resulted in 3 arrests and night raids, followed by a continuous approach and policy of arrests, leading to the arrest 52 protesters including 8 minors during the January 30<sup>th</sup> march. Citizens, who were documenting the demonstrations and marches of the police union, were also assaulted on February 2<sup>nd</sup>.

The association also recorded a violent assault on former ministers and former deputies, and the targeting of former Secretary-General of the General Union of Tunisian Students. Since the release of the police union's statement, the association has monitored the targeting of human rights activists, activists in social/political movements, and lawyers of the Tunisian League of Human Rights.

Through the complaints received by the Association in its various branches and reports of visits to places of detention, it was proven that the detainees were subjected to torture and ill-treatment while being driven in police cars and when they were put in detention centers:

- Taking off the pants of some of the detained minors and threatening them with rape.
- Pouring water on minors and hitting them with batons (Matrak).
- Children of police officers were detained and were assaulted with extreme violence.

- Causing serious fractures to some of the detainees, including one who received a medical certificate of 45 days, proving that he had a fall on the leg.
- Assault with extreme violence on detainees with mental disabilities.
- Violent attacks on the guardians of minors during the raids.
- Threatening a citizen who documented the attack with tear gas on his house and his wife who had a leg injury, by transferring him to the judicial police squad in Tabarba, assaulting and forcing him to sign a commitment to not document any attack in the future.
- Cursing / insulting / humiliation.

To further confirm that Tunisia has lived through repressive and violent contexts, the National Commission for the Prevention of Torture also confirmed in a communiqué issued on January 27, 2021, after paying several regular and sudden visits to detention centers, that there were many violations. The commission documented the violations despite some the difficulties encountered during the visits and demanded from the public authorities to take some urgent measures<sup>7</sup>. As Diaa El-Din Mourou, the general secretary of the National Commission for the Prevention of Torture, told Al-Sabah News on the occasion of the National Day Against Torture (May 08, 2021), that "the current year has been characterized by an escalation of cases of violence, torture and ill-treatment, as well as cases of suspicious death such as the removal of the testicles of one of the detainees." He also emphasized that "what we lack is putting an end to impunity."<sup>8</sup>

The violation of freedoms and the violent repression of the youth of popular neighborhoods, forgotten regions, activists and human rights actors in Tunis, raised the issue and hypothesis of returning to the frame of the authoritarian state in the minds of many actors and population groups in a context in which Tunisians lost many human lives due to the Corona virus. These are considered the most prominent motivating factors that lead to the decision to migrate, given that the ruling elites cannot lay an atmosphere of hope as much as they can succeed in strengthening feelings of agony.

Based on the economic data and the suppression of the protest movements that ended in failure, irregular migration in Tunisia, although it decreased in terms of the number of arrivals to Italy during 2019 compared to 2018, has returned to the rise since 2020. These two tables show the development of irregular migration.

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7 - See the commission's communiqué issued on January 27, 2021.

8 - assabahnews.tn 08/05/2021 à 12 :18H.

	<b>2018</b>			<b>2019</b>			<b>2020</b>			<b>2021</b>		
<b>Month</b>	<b>Migrants intercepted</b>	<b>Interception operations</b>	<b>Arrivals on the Italian coasts</b>	<b>Migrants intercepted</b>	<b>Interception operations</b>	<b>Arrivals on the Italian coasts</b>	<b>Migrants intercepted</b>	<b>Interception operations</b>	<b>Arrivals on the Italian coasts</b>	<b>Migrants intercepted</b>	<b>Interception operations</b>	<b>Arrivals on the Italian coasts</b>
<b>January</b>	188	17	611	177	8	31	316	22	68	463	17	84
<b>February</b>	537	47	449	46	4	21	571	25	26	1273	77	660
<b>March</b>	489	36	130	323	20	85	137	4	60	882	72	334
<b>April</b>	583	43	720	166	11	116	99	6	37	409	42	307
<b>May</b>	780	43	824	249	19	94	1243	60	494	2487	95	601
<b>June</b>	377	23	289	254	23	249	1611	119	825	2120	143	977
<b>July</b>	158	17	319	608	44	262	2918	245	4145	2993	211	4044
<b>August</b>	422	39	625	515	28	489	1621	191	2306	5582	317	4035
<b>September</b>	356	35	559	500	39	864	2035	170	1951	3199	308	1796
<b>October</b>	84	14	323	750	47	381	1349	157	1300	2739	263	1504
<b>November</b>	333	24	175	501	22	90	849	63	1298	1969	117	713
<b>December</b>	212	23	242	88	8	8	717	34	373	1541	86	616
<b>Total</b>	4519	361	5266	4177	273	2690	13466	1096	12883	25657	1748	15675

#### Detailed table of irregular arrivals in Europe on different routes

	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>
<b>Central Basin Mediterranean (Italy and Malta)</b>	27982	2255	835	1683	880	1207	6415	5444	2681	12985	15675
<b>Western and Eastern Basin Mediterranean</b>	31	28	21	14	136	98	80	21	6	9	3
<b>Terrestrial irregularly (East) Turkey Serbia Romania Balkan States Albania.</b>	815	434	367	38	44	62	27	22	64	190	452
<b>Terrestrial irregularly (West) Spain.</b>	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	519	1236	192	283
<b>Total</b>	28829	1717	1223	1735	1060	1367	6526	6006	3987	13376	16413

### **III. A paralyzed representative democracy, the rise of populism, and the growth of irregular migration**

In a condensed and brief manner, it can be said that the consociational democracy in Tunisia “has responded to all the flaws of failed experiments, carrying in its body all the tumors of politics because of its illegitimate sons who signed the testimony of its vulgarity and invalidity from the beginning. Its birth was, therefore, anomalous, its end was premature, and it spent its short live being eaten from the inside. This is because it has become a subject of fraudulent consensus and an address for political agnosticism, serious thinking about it has started, and working enthusiastically to establish it as the best governance system created by the human political mind has declined”<sup>9</sup>.

Thus, this impotent and weary democracy gave birth to the populist leader who is not elected for his performance but rather as a retribution for the impotent ruling class of questionable honesty and integrity.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the crisis of representative democracy has paved the way to the formation of “diverse groups of Kaisian masses”<sup>11</sup>. Thereby, the political model, that is based on conflict, became forgotten, and any form of opposition became classified as dated and detrimental. The social and political discourse has lost its value and ethics have powerfully taken control to become a measure of the collective work. So, instead of talking about the rightwing and the leftwing, we’re now talking about evil and good.<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, the decade of successive horrors produced a “national reservoir” of irregular migrations that is open to receive hundreds of thousands of unemployed, marginalized and impoverished people. In this context, a study conducted by Zuhair Ben Jannat, which is one of the publications of the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights, entitled “The Pandemic and the Evolution of Migration Intentions among Tunisian Families”, was carried out in seven regions during the period between June 15 and July 20, 2021. It showed that 70% of the interviewed sample from Tunisian families has admitted that the economic conditions abroad are better than Tunisian ones, and that the percentage of total dissatisfaction with the general surrounding conditions among groups aged between 18 and 29 years is 45% and 14% for the groups aged over 60 years old.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Gassoumi, (Al-Mouldi), in the face of history. Echo of the High Commission for Achieving the Goals of the Revolution in the Path of Political Reform and Democratic Transition in Tunisia, Coordination and Follow-up: Reem Issa, Dar Muhammad Ali Publishing, Sfax, Tunisia, 2021, pp. 682-683.

<sup>10</sup> - Gassoumi, (Al-Mouldi), The Groups diversity of the Kaisean Crowds, The Movement of Tunisian Society in the Decade of the Revolution. Between "The Will of Life" and "The Response of Fate", presented by: Mouldi Gassoumi, Dar Mohamed Ali Publishing, Sfax, Tunisia, 2020, pp. 225-257.

<sup>11</sup> Alloush, (Noureddine), The Politician and the Dynamics of Collective Sentiments by the Belgian Philosopher Chantal Mouffe, Logos magazine, second issue. Labopheno.com. Website visit: Thursday, December 23, 2021 at: 16:07.

<sup>12</sup> -A statement by Zuhair bin Jannat via Mosaique FM on January 04, 2021 at 09:34 am.

<sup>13</sup> - Abd al-Rahim, (Hafiz), “Democratic Transition Actors: What Role do the Elite has in Understanding the Transitional Phases in the Tunisian Experience?”, Elites and the Democratic Transition. Formation, tasks and roles, edited by Mahdi Mabrouk, Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, Beirut 2019, pp. 545, 575, p. 566.

## Irregular migration since 2011

YEAR	ARRIVAL IN EUROPE. THROUGH DIFFERENT PATHS	MIGRANTS INTERCEPTED
2011	28829	7595
2012	1717	1230
2013	1223	1120
2014	1735	1191
2015	1060	1881
2016	1367	1035
2017	6526	3178
2018	6006	7146
2019	3987	4177
2020	13376	13466
2021	16413	25657
Total	82239	67676

### جدول عدد4: تطور الهجرة غير النظامية من جانفي إلى جويلية 2021

Month	Arrivals	Male	Female	Accompanied minors	Non-accompanied minors
January	84	66	5	0	13
February	660	525	16	12	107
March	334	279	9	4	52
April	307	229	8	2	68
May	601	386	16	13	186
June	977	651	37	34	244
July	4044	3150	153	147	594

### 1- The post-July-25<sup>th</sup> political scene: When the spark of ‘hope’ collides with ‘hurt’

In the aftermath of July 25<sup>th</sup>, there emerged the Cassandran people (named after Cassandra, one of king Priam’s daughters in *The Iliad*) on media platforms and in public spaces. The Cassandran practice consists in foretelling misfortunes; horrifying and even dramatic... these people, drowned in pessimism, usually exaggerate their prophecies<sup>14</sup>. Here, we mean mainly Ennahdha movement, its supporters, its allies, and people who profited from it during its rule. Every time they issue a statement or they give an analysis, it has to convey that this “coup” is founding a dictatorship and is framing the country within a severe economic crisis and increasing scenes of pain and famine. However, as opposed to these pessimistic voices, there appeared the overly optimistic ones, not only urging people not to yield to the rhetoric of the Cassandran people, since they are one of the symbols of the sordid past, but also promising Tunisians with a bright future.

Between the pessimists and the optimists, the economic and social visions and programs are nonexistent and the spark of hope has started to turn into discomfort as was the case in the first months of the year 2011. “Hope can turn into a disappointment in the minds of the various segments of the rebellious society, which is already carrying numerous and differing expectations but is unable to see even glimpses of their realization in the beginning: “The first months of enthusiasm will pass, and the

<sup>14</sup> - Previous reference, pg. 568.



robe of joy will recede, uncovering what was hidden underneath”, as in the words of the Spanish sociologist Juan Lenz.”<sup>15</sup>

Month	Arrivals	Male	Female	Accompanied minors	Non-accompanied minors
August	4035	3316	153	197	369
September	1796	1478	73	90	155
October	1504	1246	53	78	127
November	717	754	17	22	65
December	616	545	13	15	43

#### IV. The securitization of migration in the EU policies

The term “securitization” first appeared within the Copenhagen School, and it means the conversion of any subject into a security issue where the actors present it as a threat and the public accepts it. The American historian and political scientist, and one of the pioneers of the Copenhagen School, Barry Buzan, maintains that “the imposition of security on a particular field is carried out through a speech act, as this discourse works to infer the existence of a threat to the physical and moral survival of a security reference, which may be an individual, a group, or state or identity. And let’s not forget that migration has motives for its securitization.”<sup>16</sup>

The European Union has taken a set of measures in the context of the securitization of migration, including, but not limited to:

- the creation of the European Border Surveillance Agency
- the European border Surveillance system EUROSUR
- International Center for Migration Policy Development
- Forced deportation policies
- Detention facilities for illegal immigrants

##### 1- The joint European pressure on Tunisia in 2021

From 2020, after the growing waves of illegal migration which amounted to 12883 immigrants arriving to Italy, and Nice’s terrorist attack in October 29, 2020, the short visits to Tunisia that started take place namely by the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Luigi Di Maio, the Italian Minister of the Interior Luciana Lamorgese, the Swedish politician, filling the position

<sup>15</sup> - For more information on the securitization of immigration, the reader can return to - Meshri, (Morsi), "Securitization of Illegal Immigration in European Politics: Motives and Repercussions", Arab Politics Journal, No. 15, July, 2015, pp. 61-72, p. 63

<sup>16</sup> - Karim, (Youssef), "Migration transformations in the Mediterranean region. The case of Morocco ", Arab Democratic Center for Strategic, Political and Economic Studies, Berlin, Germany, March 2021.

- Hamouta, (Fatima), “Securitization of Illegal Migration in the Mediterranean: Concept, Theory, and the Current Situation ,” an article published in the Journal of Political Studies and International Relations, No. 22, 2019 - Bousti, (Tawfiq), "Securitization of Illegal Immigration in the Policies of the European Union", Egyptian Institute for Studies, Political Studies, November 05, 2021.

- Shufi, (Asmaa), Shufi, (Maryam), “Migration as a Social Security Factor: The Need to Securitize Migration in the Light of the Clash of Civilizations,” an article published in the Journal of Political Studies and International Relations, No. 18, 2018.

- (Anastassia), Le traitement médiatique de la criminalité étrangère en Europe, *Déviance et société*, vol 26, 2002, pages 61 à 82.

- Bousnan, (Soufiane), “Illegal immigration and the European Union: A Reading in the securitization of the phenomenon”, *Journal of Political Science*, No. 55, 201

of the European Commissioner for Internal Affairs since 2019, Eva Johansson, and the French Minister of the Interior, Gerald Darmanin, have made the joint European pressure clear. Hence, Tunisia found itself in the EU goalbox, a goal indeed to Italian and French pressures. Many politicians in these two countries associated illegal Maghrebi immigration to the threat of terrorism so that more people demand the enactment of new laws that restrict immigration and defend the republic's values. This incident even became indicative of contest, with a sarcastic tone at least, where the Italian far-right leader Matteo Salvini made a sarcastic statement, asking for forgiveness from the French people and the victims of the Nice attack on behalf of the Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte and the Minister of Interior Lamorgese. In this context, Darmanin and Lamorgese stated in December 2020 that Italy and France would deploy naval and air units off the Tunisian coast with the help of the Tunisian authorities to control their borders. Frontex further supports this statement by announcing at the end of the year 2020 the deployment of drones in Malta, Sicily and Lampedusa, with the mission of the surveillance of these coasts and the exchange of information with the Tunisian Naval Guard.

In March 2021, Lamorgese, accompanied by Eva Johansson, returned to Tunisia, but this time their technical work teams joined them, and they held unannounced meetings with the General Director of Security then. At the end of the visit, Lamorgese announced the opening of a "direct line" between Tunisia and Italy for direct communication. The main tasks of this line are:

- Identify the identities of immigrants.
- The question of cooperation for forced deportation.
- and the most important thing is the surveillance of the Tunisian coastal borders

Indeed, since April, the Tunisian naval army began carrying out maritime interception operations in international waters. Also, the result of coordination began to appear at the level of identifying the identities of migrants through the Tunisian quick response. Forced deportations as well, escalated and amounted to 160 deportations per week in late 2021 instead of 80 operation per week.

## **2- The aftermath of July 25, 2021: “who will frame the phenomenon of irregular immigration?”**

At the turn of the 25<sup>th</sup> of July, Rached Ghannouchi declared to the Italian newspaper, *Corriere della sera*: “if Tunisia does not reinstate representative democracy, Europe will witness huge flows of refugees and terrorists; a state of instability will prevail in Tunisia, forcing people to leave. It is expected that more than 500 thousand immigrants are likely to head to the Italian coasts in no time.” As a response to the former president of the parliament on the one hand, and a reassurance to the European Union on the other hand, the Tunisian president declared that there is no room for the instrumentalization of irregular immigration, and that he will confront all maneuvers and attempts to use this file for political purposes. His declaration came on August 1, 2021, on the occasion of the meeting with the Italian ambassador, Loranazo Vanara, and the reception of 500 thousand vaccine doses as an aid from Italy. He has also cast light on the Tunisian position that calls for a comprehensive and cooperative treatment of the irregular immigration issue and the confrontation of smuggling and human trafficking networks, so that the 2011 scenario does not happen again.

But at the end of 2021, and despite Di Maio's visit to Tunisia on December 28, 2021, the transcontinental displacement networks were not eradicated, and forced deportations continued to escalate, whether from Italy or France. Indeed, during the last months of 2021, both countries worked

on declining many 'return visas' ('Visa de retour')<sup>17</sup>, while irregular migrants continued to pay the price by being arrested and thwarted by the maritime security authorities. Hence, we see the contradiction of the Presidency of the Republic between statements and positions. Tunisia has, in the end, remained the "goal keeper" of the European Union, a contributor to the securitization of immigration. The immigration file thus became a case for the national political tensions between the Islamist and populist movements, and not for the human rights issue.

All in all, Tunisia remained at the service of the securitization of the irregular immigration approach, and the European Union I still committing to this paradigm. To justify this conclusion, we have appended some tables and figures to explain our analysis.

Besides, as the securitization approach causes several human tragedies and losses, we provide quantitative data to account for this painful narrative.

### Irregular migration operations per region

	TERRESTRIAL	MARITIME
January	76.5%	23.5%
February	30%	70%
March	82.1%	17.9%
April	69.7%	30.3%
May	68.4%	31.6%
June	31%	69%
July	51.9%	48.1%
August	25.8%	74.1%
September	51.64%	48.34%
October	46.3%	53.7%
November	56.5%	43.5%
December	36.5%	63.5%
TOTAL	52.2%	47.8%

### Irregular migration operations per region

	Jendouba	Bizerte	Tunis	Nabeul	Sousse	Monastir	Mahdia	Sfax	Gabes	Medenine
January	*	%5.8	%17.6	%11.7	%5.8	*	%17.6	%41.1	*	*
February	*	3.3%	13.3%	18.3%	5%	6.6%	25%	26.6%	1.6%	3.3%
March	*	*	5.1%	20.51%	7.6%	2.5%	12.8%	52.2%	*	*
April	*	%3	%15.1	12.12%	%6	%9	*	%51.5	*	%3
May	*	%3.15	%8.42	%7.21	%2.1	%11.57	%13.68	%44.21	*	%9.45
June	*	%2.4	%4.7	%21.42	%4.7	%7.1	%11.9	%35.71	*	%11.9
July	*	%2.32	%7.75	%13.9	%3.1	%11.62	%16.27	%33	%1.5	%10
August	*	%1.3	%4.5	%6.8	%1.8	%2.2	%10.9	%56.6	%1.3	%14.15
September	%1.1	%3.3	%11.1	%3.3	%11.1	%8.8	%14.4	%41.1	%2.25	%4.5
October	*	%3.7	%9.8	%8.3	%6	%10.6	%21.21	%28.78	%3.7	%7.5
November	*	%2.4	%3.5	%15.2	%4.7	%8.2	%10.5	%44.7	%1.7	%9.4
December	*	%3.2	%8.1	%11.4	%3.2	%11.4	%13.11	%40.9	%1.6	%6.5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>0.09%</b>	<b>%2.8</b>	<b>%9</b>	<b>%12.5</b>	<b>%5.1</b>	<b>%7.4</b>	<b>%13.9</b>	<b>%41.3</b>	<b>%1</b>	<b>%6.6</b>

<sup>17</sup> -Many Tunisian irregular immigrants residing in France marry a French woman in order to move from an irregular status to a regular one. After the marriage, many of them go back to Tunisia in order to complete the administrative procedures by requesting a return visa. Usually, any immigrant who has no criminal record in Tunisia or in France, proven in his B3 [certificate n°3], no wide age gap between him and his wife, and who shows no evidence that his marriage is a "marriage blanc" and gets a certain degree proving his ability to speak French by the French Cultural Institute, is in good health and not carrying any infectious and dangerous diseases, obtains a one-year visa. But in recent months, many young people who meet all the conditions have been denied their return visa.

## The tragedies of irregular migration

	NUMBER OF VICTIMS AND MISSING PERSONS
January	4
February	50
March	39
April	41
May	81
June	39
July	117
August	17
September	11
October	34
November	*
December	7
TOTAL	440

### V. Tunisia: A Passage Country

Because of its strategic location within the Mediterranean, Tunisia is indeed a country of passage as well as departure. It also plays the role of a connecting point in the Mediterranean region. That's why, every year, the Ministry of Interior records around 70 to 80 nationalities of people illegally entering Tunisia. And the lion's share goes to sub-Saharan nationalities; people who use Tunisia as a passage to complete the last stage of a long journey that starts from the forests of Africa to its deserts, then to snowy and freezing Europe, in case the adventure is crowned with success, of course. However, these groups are often subjected to inhumane treatment, here in Tunisia, whether by police authorities or sometimes by Tunisian citizens. In some cases, they are indeed exposed to theft or robbery of their money and phones ('brakaj'/ 'braquage') or even exploited by some employers in commercial spaces (cafés, restaurants, etc) or as domestic workers (for women).

These groups also face harassment, frustration and objection, within the framework of the immigration securitization, since this approach does not recognize neither exceptional, nor human, or human-rights cases. Similar to the Tunisian nationality, this table shows the growth of these different nationalities, especially the sub-Saharan, in making Tunisia a passage country.

### Migrants by nationality

	TUNISIANS	OTHER NATIONALITIES
January	16.8%	83.2%
February	45.1%	54.9%
March	46.6%	53.3%
April	46.8%	53.2%
May	40.4%	59.6%
June	50.2%	49.8%
July	57.62%	42.38%
August	71.5%	28.5%
September	48.7%	51.2%
October	35%	65%
November	27.18%	72.81%
December	49.2%	50.8%
TOTAL	44.6%	55.4%

## Conclusion

The decade of successive horrors is characterized by larceny, nepotism and corruption. It has witnessed the escalation of conflicts and the impotence of the political elite to respond to the Tunisians' social and economic issues, where the crisis is exacerbated by a growing pandemic all over the country and protests are met with despair and frustration. All these factors have prepared the ground for the consideration of irregular immigration plans. That's why, this decade, which is a continuity of the corruption of a pre-2011 authoritarian state, represents the trigger for the surge of immigration waves.

The exceptional measures that the President announced on July 25, only provide "make-up" tactics that are unable to produce deep radical changes. Therefore, the Mediterranean is still the last recourse for the wishes of poor and the marginalized.

The paradigm of the securitization of immigration did not frame the irregular immigration waves, instead, it contributed in its increase. This approach has only produced tragedies and human miseries.

At the end, it can be said that the phenomenon of irregular immigration will not stop unless a "historic bloc" (in Gramscian terms) is formed. It does not only mean the issue of class alliance but also the social, economic, cultural and political project that this alliance carries out, and this is the starting point for the renewal of the social and democratic contract.