



## Multiple gains: Saied's Call for Changing the Tunisian Political System

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On September 12, during a tour of Habib Bourguiba Street, amid heavy guard, Tunisian President Kais Saied said that the new government would be formed “as soon as possible”, and hinted that Tunisia’s constitution may be amended.

### Roadmap procedure

The key measures taken by President Kais Saied may be illustrated as follows:

**1- Amending the Tunisian constitution:** The Tunisian President reiterated his respect for the 2014 constitution, but also stressed upon the possibility of amendments, adding that “Tunisians are fed up with the constitution and the legal rules tailored to their size” referring to the Ennahda, the political arm of the Muslim Brotherhood. He also highlighted the fact that amendments can be made to address the demands of the people.

On September 9, Walid Al-Hajjam, Adviser at the Tunisian Presidency, explained that there is a tendency to amend the Tunisian political system, possibly through a referendum, and that the constitution should be suspended and an interim regime should be issued.

This means that the Tunisian President will move to

modify the country’s political system from a presidential-parliamentary regime to a presidential system, which is supported by some of the country’s political factions.

**2- The selection of a new government:** President Saied confirmed that the formation of the government is due to take place soon, stressing that he will seek to select a “technocratic and noncorrupt” head of government. Saied seeks to overcome the experience of the government of Al-Mashishi, who was selected by himself, but who quickly went up against him and turned to ally with the Ennahda, adopting counter-policies to the Tunisian President.

### The Tunisian President’s justifications

By reviewing the developments prior to President Saied’s announcement of his vision for the Tunisian roadmap, it can be said that the following factors played a role in his announcement at this time, which can be detailed as follows:

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**1- Accomodating international pressures:** The President's announcement coincided with the growing intervention of some international powers in Tunisia, including the call by the G7 ambassadors, on September 6, for Saied to quickly appoint a new head of government and return to the constitutional order, where the elected parliament plays a major role.

The US administration is also pressuring Saied to speed up the formation of a new government. Moreover, a delegation from the US Congress visited Tunisia in early September and met with a number of political forces. Despite the rejection of the visit by political and popular forces, particularly the Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT), the delegation met with representatives of the Tunisian Ennahda Party, the political arm of the Muslim Brotherhood, which may have taken advantage of the President's failure to announce the roadmap in order to convey a negative view to the U.S. administration and promote its position that the president's actions represent a military coup.

**2- Responding to internal demands:** On September 11, 2021, Nouredine Taboubi, Secretary General of the UGTT, launched an initiative to resolve the country's current political crisis, including inviting President Saied to articulate a specific roadmap for the coming period, urging him to involve all political, community and economic forces.

The initiative also included calling for the formation of a mini-national government to run the country's affairs, as well as holding early parliamentary elections leading to the formation of a national parliament to draft a constitution and change the current political system.

**3- Lobbying the international community:** A new roadmap and the formation of an interim government will contribute to gaining the confidence and support of international financial institutions and donors to provide the economic support necessary for reviving Tunisia's economy.

**4- Responding to the Ennahda:** On September 12, President Saied asserted that he and his team are working within the framework of legitimacy, criticizing those who "talk about a coup and a derogation

of the constitution". He is thus responding directly to the Muslim Brotherhood accusations, particularly to Ennahda's insistence on portraying what happened as a military coup to the international media and the US administration.

Saied also stressed his respect for "law, ethics and all values", and explained that "unfortunately those who were supposed to be their supporters broke their covenants" referring to Al-Mashishi and the Muslim Brotherhood. The Tunisian President also warned against those who "leak rumors", referring to those against his actions.

**5- Taking advantage of developments in Morocco:** The Tunisian President's announcement of his new direction coincided with the collapse of the Justice and Development Party (PJD), the political arm of the Muslim Brotherhood in Morocco, in the parliamentary elections held in early September. The PJD's weight fell from about 125 seats to only 13 seats, indicating a popular trend in the region towards rejecting parties associated with the Muslim Brotherhood.

## Expected divergence

The Tunisian President's calls are expected to be rejected by some parties, particularly the Ennahda party, while others are expected to support them, which can be detailed as follows:

**1- Rejections from the democratic current:** The party denounced the statements of Walid Al-Hajjam, Adviser at the Tunisian Presidency, regarding the direction to suspend the constitution and change the political system. Accordingly, what the Tunisian President has referred to as a new roadmap is likely to be rejected.

**2- Support by the General Labour Union:** The UGTT expressed confidence in President Saied's extraordinary decisions, supporting the call for a change in the country's political system, as the actions announced by the Tunisian President are in some respects in line with the initiative launched by the UGTT several days before.

**3- Opposition by the Ennahda party:** The Ennahda announced its opposition to amending the constitution and changing the existing political system under the pretext that this measure was contrary



to the 2014 constitution, that these measures were contrary to the democratic process, and that the President's insistence on doing so would cause him to lose his popularity and would bring back the rule of the individual.

On September 12, Former Tunisian President, Moncef Marzouki, who is affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, called on "secular and Islamist Tunisian democrats" to set aside their differences to stand against the return of the "dictatorship" in case the constitution is suspended.

In fact, the Ennahda's objection is not associated with the pretexts it has proclaimed, namely, the preservation of a democratic system, since any regime, whether parliamentary or presidential, is a democratic system as long as it adopts the electoral mechanism. Yet, the Ennahda is opposing to the presidential system for other reasons, linked to its

understanding that the failure of the parliament to play a key role in the formation of the next government.


The Ennahda, on the other hand, failed in the 2019 presidential election, with its candidate, Abdelfattah Mourou, coming out on the first round with 434,530 votes and finishing third. Given the current decline in the Ennahda's popularity on the Tunisian street, it is not expected to aspire the position of the head of state. Thus, the establishment of a presidential system implies its remaining in the opposition, something the movement has not been accustomed to since 2011.

Therefore, the Ennahda is expected to launch a media and diplomatic campaign against President Saied and seek to push Washington to pose pressure on the Tunisian President to stop the pursuit of changing Tunisia's political system.


**In conclusion, the Tunisian President's announcements regarding amending the current constitution are expected to receive popular support, albeit with opposition from some parties, which were benefiting from the framework of the former regime, such as the Ennahda. During the coming period, the Tunisian President is expected to select a prime minister to manage the next transitional period, deal with the country's economic challenges, as well as highlight the procedures under which a referendum on the country's new constitution will be held.**

## ABOUT FARAS

Future for Advanced Research and Studies (FARAS) is an independent think tank founded on April 4, 2014 in Abu Dhabi, U.A.E. FARAS seeks to enrich public dialogue, support decision-making and enhance academic research pertaining to future trends that currently constitute a real problem in the Middle East region. In light of instability and unpredictability, the overarching goal of FARAS is to help ward off future shocks regarding these developments.

 [www.futureuae.com](http://www.futureuae.com)

 Tel: +971 24444513

 P.O Box. 111414 Abu Dhabi