

Summary

In recent events in Tunisia, challenges abound as President Saeid rejects an EU-agreement, sparking concerns over inadequate financial means and worsening economic issues. Shortages of essential goods have surged, and political tensions persist with arrests, protests, and notably hunger strikes by prominent figures. President Saeid's internal efforts to stabilize the economy face criticism, with accusations of neglecting basic needs to cover deficits. Amidst controversies, the situation may lead to further civil unrest and violence, echoing past incidents in Tunis.

Recent events and developments

On October 2, an agreement between the EU and Tunisia was rejected by President Saeid. The latter claimed that the assistance amount of 127 million euros was insufficient and conflicting with the memorandum of understanding signed in July. It included a pledge of 1 billion euros in aid, aiming at mitigating both the economic and illegal migration crisis. Furthermore, shortages in subsidized imported items have been on the rise in Tunisia since the previous year, resulting in absences of basic foods such as rice, sugar, oil, dairy products, and even certain medications from store shelves. On the other hand, another incentive for social turmoil is the increasing suppression against the opposition. While former Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali was freed after 7 hours of questioning, two top officials of the moderate Islamist Ennahda party, the main opposing party to Saeid's power grab were arrested on September 5. Two days later, protesters gathered outside the Court of Appeal in Tunis to show solidarity with the detainees. Moreover, former Speaker of Parliament Rached Ghannouchi, who has been imprisoned since April, started a hunger strike on September 29 in solidarity with prominent activist Jawhar Ben Mbarek, who has also gone on hunger strike two days prior in protest of his detention in February.

Impact assessment

In light of the diplomatic, human rights, and economic controversies in Tunisia, President Saeid's internal efforts to sustain the country's economic security have proven to be problematic. The EU deal that would have supposedly boosted the attempts at reducing the deficit, no longer shows promise. Besides, the government has been accused of sacrificing the people's basic needs to cover a multi-billion deficit. For instance, considering the limitations on importing subsidized goods to manage the deficit, Tunisia might experience shortages, such as the rice shortage in August, causing concern especially amongst people suffering from coeliac disease. Between managing the country's financial drawbacks, its migration crisis, and restraining the opposition, the government could be facing a new wave of challenges. Given this situation, it is reasonable to anticipate further civil unrest in the shape of protests, strikes, and riots. In fact, in the last three months, Tunis witnessed over 20 protests for different goals. These are likely to persist in the capital and will probably turn violent again, like they did on June 18, April 12, and most prominently in October 2022. Tear gas and violence by the police have been previously employed by security forces.

Advice from Forth Global

- Advise staff to avoid of any gatherings or protests related to social and political issues.
- Constantly monitor local news sources and establish communication with locals to remain informed about any changes.
- It is recommended that individuals bring additional medication if deemed necessary.
- Make sure all employees travelling to Tunisia undertake several-days HEAT training prior to deployment.

Customized advice

Please contact us for specific advice:

+31 (0) 35 543 04 37

christiaan@forthglobal.com

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