

Democracy and participation in the face of global changes

The role of citizenship and human rights education

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Project 2: Arab Democracy Building (Vote Match)

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www.ikhtiartounes.org (Tunisia)

The German international cooperation agency, or "Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit"(GIZ), asked me to manage this project in 2011.

During a period of three months I analyzed the political situation in Tunisia, met many NGOs and decided to carry out the project with the group Jeune Democraties Independents (JID, <https://www.facebook.com/JIDtunisie>), which was established after the ouster of President Zine Elabidine Ben Ali in January 2011.

Of different political orientations, about 110 parties attempted to reach Tunisian citizens and convince them about their programme. The choice to vote for a specific party is a difficult task. New parties may find themselves, for financial reasons, placed in the back of political visibility and thus miss opportunities to communicate with voters. This violates the principle of equal opportunities between the parties in a democracy.

However, even in a situation of equal opportunities for communication, it is difficult for citizens to synthesize programmes of a large number of parties. This could increase misunderstanding and lead to a serious level of abstention, which would jeopardize the legitimacy of the Constituent Assembly.

Together with JID I chose the Tunisian experts who then helped us develop the questionnaire with 30 statements to be sent to the parties that ran for the elections of the Constituent Assembly in October 23, 2011. This assembly is to write a new constitution.

The Expert Panel's (see <http://www.ikhtiartounes.org/experts/>):

- Salsabil Klibi, professor of Constituent law
- Prof. Sana Ben Achour, women's rights activist
- Faouzi Belhadj, economist
- Mounir Majdoub, environment and sustainable development expert
- Awatef Mabrouk, expert in regional development
- Kouraich Jaouahdou, expert in media, communication and development associations
- Aya Khiari, pro-democracy activist

They are not candidates for the Constituent Assembly and are known for their integrity.

Political parties were not involved in the process of writing the questionnaire.

The website was launched on September 15, 2011. It allowed for better visibility of the political landscape for Tunisian voters. This tool, developed by Tunisians in Tunisia, guided voters to find out what political party is closest to their expectations and values.

Ikhtiartounes.org supports the democratic transition process in Tunisia. It is simple, information-rich, and it targets the broad community of internet users in Tunisia.

The questionnaire (<http://www.ikhtiartounes.org/questions/>) provided the position of political parties, who responded to the solicitation of JID, regarding the main concerns of Tunisians (political system in free Tunisia, women rights, reforming institutions, economic system, transitional justice, environmental protection, nuclear power, etc.).

We tried to ensure that the 30 statements covered the main topics that Tunisians discussed. We were forced to make a choice, which may have seemed arbitrary to some. Some topics were not treated despite their importance, for the simple reason that all parties agree on them (sovereignty, rule of law...).

Ikhtiartounes.org is a tool of political orientation that helps Tunisians to choose who to vote for. Visitors to the site respond to the 30 statements with "agree", "disagree" or "no opinion". After answering to all statements the program of ikhtiartounes.org presents political parties whose beliefs are closest to the site user.

JID sent the questionnaire to all registered political parties and asked them to respond within a fixed time. 25 parties – including all main 15 one (<http://www.ikhtiartounes.org/parties/>) – responded to the questionnaire that, according to feedback from a few parties, clarified their positions about a certain thematic priority.

Not all parties have responded to the questionnaire. We contacted all registered political parties until August 23. Each of them received the questionnaire. Some refused to answer, others are unreachable: their email addresses were invalid, their telephone numbers did not work and/or they have no known address. Others returned the questionnaire after numerous reminders.

We asked only parties to fill the questionnaire, and not independent lists because the latter we officially know early September 2011. There was just not enough time to contact them, give them time to fill the questionnaire. Political parties were known months before.

The questionnaire itself is the result of a long process of thematic reflection and consultation between JID and the experts. My role was that of a facilitator. The questionnaire was subjected to a strict principle of neutrality.

The project was funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and implemented by the GIZ. It was inspired by similar tools introduced in elections in Europe:

- http://www.stemwijzer.nl/Stemmentracker_2012/app.html (Vote Match Netherlands)
- www.votematch.eu (elections for the European Parliament)
- <http://www.bpb.de/politik/wahlen/wahl-o-mat/> (Vote Match in Germany)