

## ABSTRACT

The analysis aims to provide a thorough and detailed profile about the Yemeni situation.

In the first macro-unit, it will go to deal with political, economic, cultural and religious aspects of the multifaceted reality. The difficulties in Yemen come not only from the secessionist movement, which accuse the regime of marginalizing the population of the South and exploiting the already stretched resources, but also from the rebellion of the irredentist Shiite in the North, financed and supported by Iran. Furthermore, the Southern area is historically known for its important position as a stronghold for international jihadist and Islamic terrorism. Then, many villages are situated in rural or desert areas. Here, the government is not able to provide basic public services because of the lack of roads and similar infrastructures. So sheikhs serve as a communication link between rural population and government. Data shows how alarming the Yemeni situation is. According to the U. N. World Food Program of 2012, 54.5% of people has less than two dollars a day to live. The average income per capita, per year, is barely a thousand dollars. Moreover, Yemen is the first country on the charts with the highest level of malnutrition. The World Economic Forum, in collaboration with Harvard University and the University of California, has developed the Global Gender Gap 2010. It is an index to measure the gap between the genders by comparing certain standards, such as opportunities in the labor market, life expectancy, political participation and access to higher education. Yemen classified 134<sup>th</sup>, in last place among the countries evaluated. Low rate of urbanization, literacy and schooling are symptomatic of the chronic problems that Yemen must face in order to improve and ensure minimum standards of living to citizens. Despite this chilling reality, as much as 12% of GDP is devoted to military spending. President Ali Abdullah Saleh started a long season of sultanistico regime in the country, as well as Ben Ali in Tunisia, Mubarak in Egypt or Assad in Syria. President Saleh's main purpose was to maintain personal power and strengthen the loyalty of political and military elites, by using favoritism. Even after allowing a formal election cycle, the Yemeni regime was again based on corruption and absolute discretion of power: decisions were arbitrary, nor limited by rules nor justified on ideological basis. When political and social discontent extended to the majority of the population, Yemeni revolution was imminent. Civil societies played a

special role during the so-called "Arab Spring." In 2000, on the eve of their Spring, Arab countries were pushing the process of renewal from the base, not following the traditional ways of change, but utilizing Internet to communicate. Indeed, Internet and social networks allow people to be aware of other social models. They open new possibilities for those who want to escape from local conformism. On the 27<sup>th</sup> of February 2012, after a long period in which street violence took turns with negotiations, the Yemeni President ceded power to his former deputy Abdrabuh Mansour Hadi. The agreement between these two politicians was originally proposed by the Gulf Cooperation Council, a political and economic union of Arab states bordering the Persian Gulf. President Saleh has obviously benefited from the immunity law passed by Parliament, by which he will be protected from any attempts of judicial prosecution for international crimes. Nothing has changed since then. Although new elections took place to confirm Hadi, these did not provide any guarantee of freedom. The only candidate was former vice president and prime minister in the previous government. Actually, he was too weak to challenge the existing centers of political power. So justice continues to be administered in ad hoc tribunals and the family of Saleh still plays key roles in society. On March 2013, Yemen inaugurated the Conference of National Dialogue, whose objective is to elaborate a draft Constitution paper to prepare presidential and legislative elections, foreseen in February 2014.

The following chapter explains the reason that led to the various problems that currently shock Yemen, known in the past as the Kingdom of the Queen of Sheba and one of the most picturesque countries in the world. Nowadays, trips to the country are absolutely not recommended for safety reasons. Learning about the roles played by foreign countries, such as Great Britain or former USSR, is fundamental to easily understand the Yemeni process of state-building. British and Soviets have influenced Yemeni culture. Foreign forces aimed to assert their superiority during this historical period characterized by the contrast between two blocks (East-West), based on divergent political, economic and social ideology. Yemeni reunification in 1990 was boosted mainly by the block of the flow of Russian loans due to the dissolution of the USSR. At this time, people from the South claimed that unification would allow them to overcome and modernize obsolete production facilities, inherited from the Soviets. It would also help better exploitation of oil fields recently discovered, and increase bargaining power against Saudi Arabia, especially in border

disputes. But this belief was not supported by any evidence in reality. So the unification turned out to be just an annexation to the North. Yemeni legislation was then identified in the Sharia, the Islamic moral code. President Saleh, elected for the first time in 1999, gained favoritism of tribal families by granting great resources to sheikhs, continuously dependent on government. Nowadays, people from the South do not think that Yemeni hardships, such as the high rate of unemployment and political dissatisfaction, are equally shared. Regarding religious matters, there are also certain difficulties. Sunni Muslims still continue to discriminate the Shiite minority living in the North, while Islamic fundamentalists are trying to re-educate simple people to what they call the true values of Islam. In terms of geography, Yemen is logistically complicated to govern with its countless isolated villages, and political authorities can hardly control the governorates due to the fact that the regime concentrated all its power in Sana'a's capital. Therefore, extremists do not have any difficulties in forging ties with clans that control rural areas.

The final chapter is about the general situation in the Middle East. It opens up issues concerning the possibility to build liberal political models within states that have a Muslim majority, in order to avoid the restoration of conservative orthodoxy. More important, extremism very often comes naturally tempered by democratic participation. Since no political system is considered the best or recommended as the most fair, Islam is not incompatible with the democratic model. Despite some difficulties, some concepts of the Arab political culture, if properly developed, could create the basis towards an Islamic democracy. Among these concepts, "Ijma" and "Shura" are the most important ones. The first, which is the Arab translation for consensus, found in a *hadith* of the Prophet, reads "My community will not ever agree on an error". Its application is demonstrated by the practices of appointment and dismissal of any leader, at least during the early period of caliphs. The more extensive interpretation of the concept, according to which the "Ijma" identifies the consent of the majority, is revived as a theory of popular sovereignty. The twin concept of "Shura" is rooted directly in the Qur'an. It is defined as, the people's right to participate in decisions, or as the "democracy of Islam." Inevitably, some passages of sacred texts need to be reformed and historically contextualized. This means reversing the current scheme of interpretation, in search of a way to place Islamic values in the hands of the community. Decolonization showed that even deeply rooted ideas within a culture, such as the inseparability between legal

requirements and search for God, can be adapted into new political and social contexts. As an example, the institutions of modern Arab countries, born after decolonization, are based on legal and constitutional doctrines of the West. Just think about the Tunisian Constitution of 1956 which banned polygamy and promoted women's rights to vote and divorce, reducing the gender gap. Also, about the Yemeni Constitution which, before being abolished during the civil war in 1994, granted extensive rights to women. Since the nineteenth century a new modernist trend has emerged. It attempts to incorporate the legal system of a modern country, international trade and scientific rationalism into the bosom of a reformed Islam. It is clear, that development and social progress can work together within the spirit of religion. To create positive changes, Muslim modernism must call into question the authenticity and validity of the assumptions of the orthodox religion that do not agree with the demands of the current civil society. Certain provisions of the Qur'an are less suited for the contemporary world than they were in the seventh century. It is necessary to avoid contrast between tradition and innovation. This contrast has characterized almost every region on the globe, but in the Muslim world it causes anger, because the contrast overlaps the fact that the "innovator" has also been the colonizer for a long time. "Arab Springs" have finally brought to light the idea that democracy can be differentiated in many ways, in order to follow the historical - cultural development of people. The challenge is to develop theories that are not an importation of European concepts. A winning solution is heading towards multi-party states, based on free and transparent elections, which are not completely secular. That is to say, religion continues to be the foundation for ethical action of people in society, although Islam should not be the sole source of law, superior to any constitutions or international conventions. By many Middle Eastern citizens, secular countries are associated to impiety.

In conclusion, the international community must play a decisive role in supporting Yemen, in order to prevent citizens from being abandoned again. The cooperation will help Yemeni authorities to face the second phase of the transition process, which began with the establishment of the National Unity Government and will conclude with democratic elections in 2014. The creation of the group "Friends of Yemen", by proposal of the Italian Government, meets this goal. Countries and organizations are engaged to examine the dynamics of political process and security issues. Their aim is to reorganize the armed forces and face challenges such as terrorism, piracy, and

drug traffic. Supporting development programs for the environment and rural areas is important, too. Other issues concern training for Yemeni diplomats, as well as educational assistance for Coast Guard officers. Innovative proposals have also been put in place to help overcome traditional problems of the region, although the crisis seems to increase. The proposal of National Dialogue was suggested in the Saudi capital Riyadh with the aim to mitigate traditional conflicts. This unusual experiment hopes to bring together religious and non religious people, north and south regions, political parties and civil society, in a single forum which redesigns Yemen's political asset. There is a positive element, after thirty years of autocratic rule. This model is designed to avoid a traumatic transition, and it has undoubtedly considerable merits also because it could be proposed in other contexts where deep social divisions occur. National Dialogue is supported by international forces and NGOs: only a representative government can guarantee control of the army, which dismisses hypothesis of political collapse. Its priority is to prevent discontent from spurring military defections. If the experiment fails, the shadow of civil war will loom again over the Yemeni scenario. The transition to democracy also passes through the fulfillment of certain economic requirements. The majority of Yemeni problems is due to Catha Edulis production, unemployment, and the decline of tourism. Concerning qat, there is the risk that the cultivation of the plant prevents other cultures from being produced, these particularly target the livelihood of the poorest rural groups. Moreover, the high amount of water required for the extraction of qat causes an increase in price of water for domestic use. The only solution to dissuade people from using qat, is to raise public awareness through information for water resource development and agriculture. Some steps have already moved in this direction. The authorities of the Ibb governorate are now cooperating with farmers, by giving them incentives and technical support in order to uproot qat plants and replace them with other crops such as coffee or mangos. The World Bank supports these initiatives. It decided to create communication centers to make Yemeni citizens aware of the risks involved in the trade and use of qat. Japan, too, offered financial assistance: it donated \$2.78 million in the beginning of 2010. In the long run, it is obvious that these projects will bear fruit. Another economic problem is the widespread unemployment that every year forces thousands of Yemeni workers, generally illiterate and unskilled, to take their chances in finding new jobs in rich Gulf states. In order to improve workers' competitiveness in the labor market,

regional initiatives and training courses are important. Their aim is to provide vocational training for 100,000 unemployed workers. Some people also argue that GCC's countries should give priority to the Yemeni workers instead of those from Asia. In this way, integration in the Red Sea region will be facilitated. Others call on Saudi Arabia to stop the forced repatriation to Yemen. Finally, the last challenge for Yemen is to increase its tourist industry in order to avoid economic collapse. Pursuing priorities such as safety and stability is important to increase the flow of European and US tourists in areas that have been devastated by civil war, terrorism and government inefficiencies.