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## "Crisis, chaos, violence - is that really what we want?" A stalled democratization in Jordan

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## **“CRISIS, CHAOS, VIOLENCE – IS THAT REALLY WHAT WE WANT?” A STALLED DEMOCRATISATION IN JORDAN**

### **ABSTRACT**

Amidst the regional turmoil in the Middle East, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan prevails its relative stability despite undergoing only limited democratic reforms. The article aims to present and analyze the Jordanian regime's reaction to the Arab Spring in light of the international historical sociology, which depicts multidimensional and interlinked relations between the state, society and international environment, all immersed in historical context. The analysis finds that Jordan is a case proving that some nations praise stability over rushed political reform and, what is a key to understand the phenomenon, this is the view shared not only among the ruling elite but also by a vast part of the society. The somewhat stalled democratisation works in favour of the autocratic regime of King Abdullah II who retains power, of the Jordanian society, which does not have to fear internal disorder, and of the international community for whom Jordan is a long-standing and reliable partner.

### **Key words**

Arab Spring, Jordan, democratisation, stability, International Historical Sociology

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan was closely observed by the international community since the very onset of the Arab Spring. By many it was doomed as another Middle Eastern autocratic regime endangered by massive protests and socio-political mobilisation, capable of overthrowing the monarchy. Rightly, demonstrations in Jordan started earlier than those in Egypt or Syria, yet they have neither gained critical mass nor did they really seek a change in the regime. Up to this point, Jordan prevails in its relative stability, despite undergoing only limited democratic reforms and facing regional turmoil. The article aims to present and analyze the Jordanian regime's reaction to the Arab Spring in the light

of the international historical sociology, which depicts the multidimensional and interlinked relations between the state, society and international environment, all immersed in historical context. Therefore, the paper aspires to depict how these three elements of the system interconnect in the case of Jordanian monarchy and, concurrently, how do they influence the democratisation process. The thesis of the article is the notion that the stalled reform process in Jordan is working in favour of almost all parties concerned: the autocratic regime of King Abdullah II, the Jordanian society and the international community.

## 1. International Historical Sociology & Democratisation

Historical sociology that emerged in the late 1970s and matured in the 1990s can be described as studying the past in order to explain how societies function and encounter changes; studying mutual connections between the past and the present, and between events and processes<sup>1</sup>. Despite a variety of works published within the stream of historical sociology, all of them are “perceiving the social reality as a process and underlining the role of historical momentum, pace and rhythm of changes”<sup>2</sup>.

Initially reserved only for analyzing societies, historical sociology very quickly became ‘internationalized’, particularly by including into analysis the international system and the relations between the state and security. A prominent work by Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions* introduced the concept of a state as an open system, arguing that social changes can be stimulated not only by internal factors (eg. class rivalry, economic pressure) but also by political, economic and military pressures coming from the international environment<sup>3</sup>.

Fred Halliday explains that the term ‘historical sociology’ implies both historicisation of the state and locating that history within an international context<sup>4</sup>. What is important, international historical sociology “refuses to treat

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<sup>1</sup> D. Smith, *The Rise of Historical Sociology*, Cambridge 1991, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> A. Kolasa-Nowak, *Socjolog w badaniu przeszłości. Koncepcja socjologii historycznej Charlesa Tilly’ego* [A Sociologist Studying the Past. Charles Tilly’s Concept of Historical Sociology], Lublin 2011, p. 14.

<sup>3</sup> T. Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*, Cambridge 1979, passim; J. Czaputowicz, *Teorie stosunków międzynarodowych. Krytyka i systematyzacja* [Theories of International Relations. Critique and Systematisation], Warszawa 2008, pp. 389–390.

<sup>4</sup> F. Halliday, *For an International Sociology* [in:] *Historical Sociology of International Relations*, S. Hobden, J. Hobson (eds.), Cambridge 2002, p. 245.

the present as an autonomous entity outside of history, but insists on embedding it within a specific socio-temporal place”<sup>5</sup>. Hence it is necessary to place the studied reality in a broader context of historical structure, within which it is rooted. “We can never understand the detail if we do not understand the pertinent whole, since we can never otherwise appreciate exactly what is changing, how it is changing, and why it is changing”<sup>6</sup>. Nonetheless, history, which offers an analytical framework for events, contingencies and local specifics, is only one element of the theory; sociology brings into study the understanding of how relatively constant configurations of social relations influence these processes, whereas international relations underline the central role played by the international dimension in shaping their dynamics<sup>7</sup>.

Consequently, historical sociology proposes epistemological changes which are meant to address the reductionism of neorealism and Marxism. As such, an adequate theory of the state, society and international relations should include:

- 1) A study of history and change,
- 2) Multicausality (many independent power sources),
- 3) Multidimensionality (space without clear borders between dimensions),
- 4) Partial autonomy of power sources and actors,
- 5) Historicism – complexity of history and change,
- 6) (Nonrealist) theory of state autonomy and power<sup>8</sup>.

Full understanding of the contemporary social relations thereby requires knowledge about short-term and long-term events, as well as the processes which preceded them. Such assumption stems from acknowledging the path dependency with all its consequences. Importantly, historical sociology is far from claiming that such path is linear or structurally determined. On the

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<sup>5</sup> J. Hobson, *What's at Stake in 'Bringing Historical Sociology Back into International Relations'? Transcending 'Chronofetishism' and 'Tempocentrism' in International Relations* [in:] *Historical Sociology...*, S. Hobden, J. Hobson (eds.), op.cit., p. 13.

<sup>6</sup> I. Wallerstein, *European Universalism. The Rhetoric of Power*, New York–London 2006, pp. 82–83.

<sup>7</sup> J. Hobson, G. Lawson, J. Rosenberg, *Historical Sociology*, LSE Research Online, <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/28016> [access: July 2013], p. 13. Originally published in: R. Dene-mark (ed.), *ISA Compendium*, New York 2010.

<sup>8</sup> T. Lapointe, F. Dufour, *Assessing the Historical Turn in IR: An Anatomy of Second Wave Historical Sociology*, “Cambridge Review of International Affairs” 2011, p. 11; J. Hobson, *The Historical Sociology of the State and the State of Historical Sociology in International Relations*, “Review of International Political Economy” 1998, No. 2, pp. 294–295.

contrary, “it has been a story of conflict and struggle as individuals, groups, political communities, religions, firms, nations, and empires have interacted within rapidly shifting contexts in the construction of contemporary world politics”<sup>9</sup>. Simultaneously, as Andrzej Gałganek argues, social development is not only a multilinear but also an interactive and interdependent process and, as such, it might be determined or transformed by external pressures<sup>10</sup>.

Multidimensionality offered by historical sociology suggests coexistence of different spatial levels – subnational, national, international and global – mutually interlinked and influencing each other. In other words, every single of these levels cannot exist separately: society, state and international community are interdependent<sup>11</sup>. Therefore, it is impossible to explain politics of an individual actor (state) without taking into consideration numerous factors, both internal and external, historical and contemporary. It is essential to link sociological explanation focused on the nature of societies with geopolitical explanation based on conditions generated by their coexistence<sup>12</sup>. Needless to say, the international dimension is not merely a background for the state activities – it rather has a dominant character and decides about state formation. However, it does not remain autonomous as to some extent it is shaped by other elements of the system which in general can be seen as presented in Figure 1.

As Fred Halliday indicates, historical sociology could be of a real value when applied to analyze the themes important for the Middle East studies, such as conflicts and their determinants, the role of ideology and religion in international relations, transnational movements, domestic changes witnessed by the countries of the region and their foreign policy<sup>13</sup>. Likewise, historical sociology recognizes the trend of world homogenisation – convergence of

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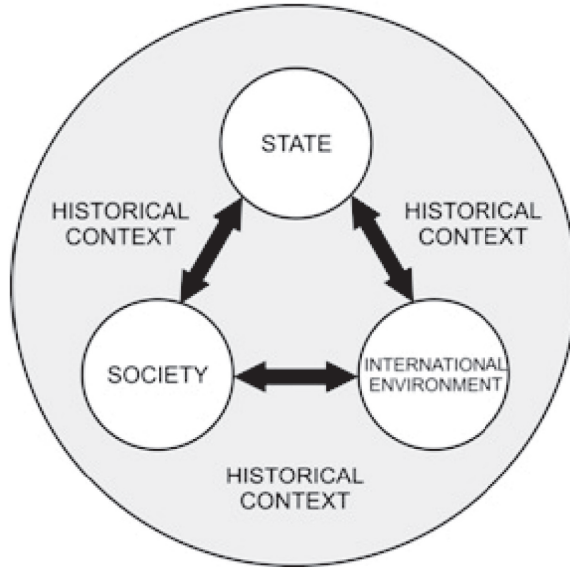
<sup>9</sup> G. Lawson, *The Promise of Historical Sociology in International Relations*, “International Studies Review” 2006, Vol. 8, pp. 403–404.

<sup>10</sup> A. Gałganek, *Abstrakcja nierównego i połączonego rozwoju w wyjaśnianiu historii stosunków międzynarodowych* [The Abstract Theory of the Uneven and Combined Development in Explaining the History of International Relations], “Prawo i Polityka” [Law and Politics] 2009, No. 1, p. 80.

<sup>11</sup> J. Hobson, *State and International Relations*, Cambridge 2000, p. 195.

<sup>12</sup> A. Gałganek, *Czy istnieje teoria społeczna »międzynarodowości« i »wewnętrzności«?* [Is There a Social Theory of ‘Internationality’ and ‘Intranationality’?], “Przegląd Politologiczny” [Political Science Review] 2007, No. 2, pp. 22, 32.

<sup>13</sup> F. Halliday, *Bliski Wschód w stosunkach międzynarodowych. Władza, polityka i ideologia* [The Middle East in International Relations. Power, Politics and Ideology], Kraków 2009, pp. 42–43.



**Figure 1.** International relations according to historical sociology  
Source: Artur Malantowicz

political institutions in effect of modernity and the regional context, which aims at strengthening international legitimacy and stability<sup>14</sup>. In such form, the theory can also contribute to our understanding of the democratic process, since it acknowledges the shifting functions of the state and changeable definitions of the civil society. It also considers international dimension as a source of the role models, inspiration for the domestic political scene. Consequently, historical sociology claims that in order to make it work, democratisation needs a “democratic coalition” historically consisting of the bourgeoisie, the middle class and the working class. Likewise, democracy requires a balance between the ruler (state) and the independent social groups (society), “in which the state is neither wholly autonomous of dominant classes nor captured by them, allowing a space within which civil society can flourish”<sup>15</sup>.

When applied to the case of Jordan, international historical sociology aims to underline the interconnectedness between the state, the society and

<sup>14</sup> Ibidem, p. 45. For a broader account see: F. Halliday, *Rethinking International Relations*, London 1994, pp. 90, 94–123.

<sup>15</sup> R. Hinnebusch, *Authoritarian Persistence, Democratization Theory and the Middle East: An Overview and Critique*, “Democratization” 2006, No. 3, pp. 378–379.

the international environment and to show that the democratisation process mirrors the shifting interests of all three elements of the system. While it proves that, very often, the external dimension has a decisive impact on the pace and direction of socio-political reforms in the kingdom, it nonetheless admits the role society plays in voicing its approval or discontent towards the state apparatus. Subsequently, in order to fully understand the links between the state, the society and the international community, and their joint influence over the shape of political system of Jordan, it is essential to explore the historical context.

## 2. Jordan & Democracy prior to the Arab Spring

Unlike most of the countries in the Middle East, Jordan has a long tradition as the constitutional monarchy with a parliament that, in theory, limits the king's executive power. Nevertheless, the political history of Jordan experienced only two episodes of democratisation, first of which took place in the mid-1950s.

The 1952 constitution, at the time perceived as liberal, guaranteed various personal freedoms (e.g. freedom of opinion and the right of free association, political parties included), direct elections to the Chamber of Deputies, and a system of checks and balances between the legislative and the royal court. The king's position was nevertheless relatively strong – he was entitled to appoint the Senate, to appoint and dismiss government officials, to dissolve the lower house of parliament and to call for new elections<sup>16</sup>. Soon after the constitution emerged, however, the regime started to restrict the public sphere, fearing the increasing support for Arab nationalism. The ruling elite was also aware that political freedom worked against its interests, such as maintaining the alliance with the United Kingdom or close ties with Israel<sup>17</sup>. In 1957, martial law was declared in response to the coup attempt and, after it was lifted in late 1958, it was subsequently reintroduced in effect of the June 1967 War and lasted until early 1990s.

The second wave of democratisation reached Jordan in 1989, when its economic situation severely deteriorated due to the structural decrease in oil prices worldwide, and, accordingly, a serious decline in private remittances by

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<sup>16</sup> R. Brynen, *Economic Crisis and Post-Rentier Democratization in the Arab World: The Case of Jordan*, "Canadian Journal of Political Science" 1992, No. 1, pp. 76–77.

<sup>17</sup> M. Oren, *A Winter of Discontent: Britain's Crisis in Jordan, December 1955–March 1956*, "International Journal of Middle East Studies" 1990, No. 2, p. 173.

expatriate workers and official assistance from the Gulf states. Hence, facing budgetary deficits, weakening terms of trade and falling rates of growth, Jordan turned to international financial institutions to renegotiate its debt. In return for help, Jordan was forced to cut governmental expenditures and subsidies, impose a new sale tax, improve and expand the tax base in addition to public administrative reform, financial deregulation, trade liberalisation and significant privatisation<sup>18</sup>. All of the reforms sharply increased prices of fuel and food which, unsurprisingly, triggered anti-government riots across the kingdom. Confronted with the legitimacy crisis, King Hussein used the democracy agenda as a tool to re-establish the monarchy's authority and bring back its stability.

The first full parliamentary elections in more than twenty years were held in November 1989. Consequently, the National Charter was drafted and endorsed by the king in June 1991, a month later the martial law was lifted and in 1992 political parties were ultimately legalized. The following twenty years brought ups and downs in the democratisation process, depending on the international context of Jordanian politics, with a visible influence of phenomena like the Middle East peace process or the war with terrorism on Jordan's domestic political scene. The facade aspect of democracy – parliamentary elections – was nevertheless maintained<sup>19</sup>.

By the end of 2009, the level of dissatisfaction with the parliament's work arose so high that King Abdullah decided to dissolve – not for the first time in Jordanian history – the Chamber of Deputies. A day later he instructed the government to amend the electoral law so that the new elections were “a model of transparency, fairness and integrity, and a promising step in our process of reform and modernisation, the aims of which are to achieve the best for our

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<sup>18</sup> H. El-Said, *The Political Economy of Reform in Jordan: Breaking Resistance to Reform?* [in:] *Jordan in Transition 1990–2000*, G. Joffé (ed.), London 2002, pp. 261–262; C. Ryan, *Peace, Bread and Riots: Jordan and the International Monetary Fund*, “Middle East Policy” 1998, No. 2, p. 56.

<sup>19</sup> For a detailed account of the democratisation process in the 1990s and 2000s see, for instance: B. Milton-Edwards, *Façade Democracy and Jordan*, “British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies” 1993, No. 2, pp. 191–203; K. Rath, *The Process of Democratization in Jordan*, “Middle Eastern Studies” 1994, No. 3, pp. 530–557; L. Brand, *The Effects of the Peace Process on Political Liberalization in Jordan*, “Journal of Palestine Studies” 1998, No. 2, pp. 52–67; J. Choucair-Vizoso, *Illusive Reform: Jordan's Stubborn Stability* [in:] *Beyond the Façade. Political Reform in the Arab World*, M. Ottaway, J. Choucair-Vizoso (eds.), Washington 2008, pp. 45–70.



nation and to expand the horizon of progress and prosperity for Jordanians”<sup>20</sup>. However, the new Elections Law of May 2010 contained only some of the popular demands: total number of the parliamentary seats increased from 110 to 120 with the women quota rising from six (introduced already in 2003) to twelve; extra four seats were granted to underrepresented urban areas of Amman, Irbid and Zarqa; the previous multi-seats districts were re-designed into 108 smaller single-seat sub-districts; strict punishments for votes-buying were introduced along the expansion of the role of the political observers to assure fairness and transparency<sup>21</sup>.

Even though in the weeks leading up to the election there were several incidents noted, mostly concerning arrests of the young people who were protesting against government and calling for an electoral boycott as well as instances of press censorship, the election day itself – November 9 – was an example of transparent, free and fair voting. It has also set a precedent in Jordanian history – for the first time the king invited international observers who joined national monitoring groups. Some of them indicated a paradox of the voting process being credible even if “the elections unfolded within a broader political system that lacked credibility”<sup>22</sup>. Barely two months later the Arab Spring brought a new momentum to the Middle East.

### 3. Arab Spring in Jordan: 2011–2013

Similarly to other countries of the region, Jordan became a scene of the Arab Spring as early as in January 2011, when the Jordanians went out on the streets of major cities to protest against the worsening socio-economic conditions<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> K. Malkawi, *King Directs Government to Amend Elections Law*, “Jordan Times”, November 25, 2009, [jordantimes.com/king-directs-government-to-amend-elections-law](http://jordantimes.com/king-directs-government-to-amend-elections-law) [access: July 2013].

<sup>21</sup> M. Beck, L. Collet, *Jordan’s 2010 Election Law: Democratization or Stagnation*, 2010, pp. 1, 3–5.

<sup>22</sup> M. Dunne, *Jordan’s Elections: An Observer’s View*, “Carnegie Commentary”, November 17, 2010, <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=41954> [access: July 2013].

<sup>23</sup> First protests took place as early as on January 7, 2011 in the city of Theiban in the south of Jordan and soon spread across whole country. See: A. Vogt, *Jordan’s Eternal Promise of Reform*, “Internationale Politik und Gesellschaft” [International Politics and Society] 2011, No. 4, p. 65; C. Ryan, *Identity Politics, Reform, and Protests in Jordan*, “Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism” 2011, No. 3, p. 565.

Initially, the demonstrations mostly gathered educated and unemployed youth along with leftist activists, although soon later they were joined by many representatives of Islamist groups, including the Muslim Brotherhood, and ex-regime officials. They raised demands for improving living conditions, efficient fight with unemployment and corruption, prime minister Rifai’s dismissal and the political system reform<sup>24</sup>. Luckily for the Hashemite monarchy, however, the popular protests, even if run on a regular basis, have never assembled more than 8,000–10,000 people.

Contrary to the other regional leaders, king Abdullah II was prompt to address the popular demands and replaced Samir Rifai with Marouf Bakhit as the new prime minister at the end of January 2011. Nonetheless, it did not calm the public tension, since merely two weeks later the 36 traditional Bedouin leaders from the south of Jordan, commonly perceived as the monarchy’s backbone, sent to the royal court an open letter, in which they overtly criticized the royal family. They mostly condemned Queen Rania’s political involvement which they perceived as going “against what Jordanians and Hashemites have agreed on in governing and [being] a danger to the nation and the structure of the state (...) and the institution of the throne”<sup>25</sup>.

The continued protests convinced the regime of a need to undertake several political reforms. For this aim, in mid-March 2011 the king established the National Dialogue Committee consisting of leaders of political parties, lawmakers, journalists, and activists, and assigned it with the task of reviewing the Elections Law and Political Parties Law to make the political system more democratic and more pluralistic. After the heavy clashes occurred in Amman on March 24–25 (with dozens of civilians and policemen injured) and again in mid-April, King Abdullah eventually ordered the formation of the Royal Committee on Constitutional Review on April 27. The results of its work were published on August 14<sup>26</sup> and instantly became the framework of the discussions about strengthening the rule of law, ensuring balance between powers and wider public participation.

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<sup>24</sup> A. Jebrin, *What Did the Arab Spring Bring to Jordan?*, “Middle East Flashpoint” 2012, p. 2.

<sup>25</sup> *Jordan Tribes Criticize Queen Rania’s ‘Political Role’*, BBC News, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-12400274> [access: July 2013].

<sup>26</sup> *Recommendations Made by the Royal Committee on Constitutional Review*, “Jordan Times”, August 15, 2011, <http://jordantimes.com/recommendations-made-by-the-royal-committee-on-constitutional-review> [access: July 2013].

Throughout September 2011 the Committee's recommendations were consequently discussed and endorsed by the parliament with only minor alterations. By the end of the month, the amendments were signed by King Abdullah, who called them a "turning point in the history of the Kingdom". Indeed, the Constitution of The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan was amended for the first time since 1984 and, what is even more important, for the first time on such a large scale. The new provisions not only made any infringement on the rights and public freedom a crime punishable by law (Art. 7), officially forbade torture (Art. 8), guaranteed freedom of scientific research and artistic activity (Art. 15), introduced independence of the judiciary (Art. 27) and the rule of "innocent until proven guilty" (Art. 101), but, above all, they established an independent commission to oversee the elections (Art. 67) and the Constitutional Court as an independent judicial body (Art. 58–61), a novum in the Jordanian legal system. Even though almost one third of the constitutional provisions were changed, the reform almost entirely omitted royal prerogatives – the king has lost only the right to indefinitely postpone elections to the parliament in case of force majeure (Art. 73), which was severely abused by successive monarchs<sup>27</sup>.

Soon after the constitution was amended, Jordan has witnessed yet another government reshuffle, when the Prime Minister Marouf Bakhit was replaced by Awn Khasawneh, a widely respected lawyer and a former judge at the International Court of Justice. His primary assignment was to conduct reform of the electoral law and political parties law<sup>28</sup>. As soon as in December 2011, the new government established the Independent Elections Commission tasked with administration and supervision over all stages of parliamentary elections. Barely three months later, in February 2012, the Political Parties Law was amended, slightly reducing the requirements for establishing a new political party. The reform of electoral law came only in June 2012, already under the new prime minister – a conservative politician Fayez Tarawneh, since Khasawneh resigned from his post at the end of April 2012. Despite changes, the commonly criticized "one man, one vote" system remained a significant part of the new regulations, thereby constantly discriminating political parties and favouring minorities. To mitigate such effect the national list based on proportional representation

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<sup>27</sup> For a full list of constitutional amendments see *Constitutional Reform in Arab Countries. Jordan*, Max Planck Institute for Comparative Public Law and International Law, [http://www.mpil.de/shared/data/pdf/overview\\_amendments.pdf](http://www.mpil.de/shared/data/pdf/overview_amendments.pdf) [access: July 2013].

<sup>28</sup> A. Mahafzah, *Jordan: The Difficult Path towards Reform*, Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, 2012, p. 6.

system with 27 seats (out of 150) was introduced and, in consequence, voters were granted an additional ballot. Also in June 2013 the Constitutional Court was established to “interpret the Constitution and to examine the constitutionality of laws and regulations”<sup>29</sup>.

The path of reform was not entirely progressive as one might have expected – in fact, it arrived nowhere close to a substantive change that would shift the status quo. In some areas it was even retreating from previous advancements, eg. the September 2012 Press and Publications Law was commonly perceived as cracking down on freedom of expression and an effort to shut down websites critical of government. As Asher Susser argues, even though king Abdullah called for the protection of responsible press freedoms, in reality it was “nothing more than code words for state supervision of the media”<sup>30</sup>.

Furthermore, in mid-2012 Jordan became a scene of growing problems of both internal and external character. A direct military threat and the refugee exodus caused by the war in Syria, the energy crisis caused by the destabilisation of the Sinai Peninsula, the increasing pressure from the Gulf States, Egypt, the United States and the International Monetary Fund, the deterioration of the economic situation and the increase in development disparities – they all were matters of serious concern for the decision makers.

Since the very beginning of the Syrian crisis, Jordanian authorities remained cautious in framing its response to the challenges coming from its northern neighbourhood. Above all, Jordan was afraid of a spill over of the conflict, and of possible retaliatory actions on behalf of the Assad’s regime and further destabilisation of the region, which would directly hit its relatively weak economy. It constantly called for a political solution of the crisis, maintained good relations with both the Friends of Syria and the supporters of Assad (Iran, Russia) and tried to manoeuvre between Syrian government and opposition<sup>31</sup>. Nevertheless, when faced with a massive influx of Syrian refugees, Jordan turned into a more decisive stance and overtly criticized Syrian authorities for its bloody

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<sup>29</sup> A detailed overview of the reforms see: *Key Facts on Elections and Jordan’s Political Reform. January 2013*, Embassy of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan to the European Union, [http://winweb10.ovh.net/specicom.net/www/jordan/election\\_new.asp](http://winweb10.ovh.net/specicom.net/www/jordan/election_new.asp) [access: July 2013].

<sup>30</sup> A. Susser, *Is the Jordanian Monarchy in Danger?*, “Middle East Brief” 2013, No. 72, p. 5.

<sup>31</sup> E. Gnehm, *Jordan and the Current Unrest in Syria*, “USIP Peace Brief 2011”, No. 114, pp. 1–2.

response to popular demonstrations. Such a position was understandable, since dozens of thousands of refugees have already started to be a burden for Jordan's scarce water and energy resources, its economy and job market.

Further deterioration of the economic situation was caused by the instability in the Sinai Peninsula and the consecutive disruptions of the gas supplies from Egypt. By mid-2012, they fell as low as to 16% of the agreed level and in October 2012 they were completely halted<sup>32</sup>. The lack of Egyptian gas forced Jordan to seek alternative and more costly sources of energy, which in effect contributed to an enormous budget deficit, which grew by \$2 billion during one year only. For a country whose GDP in 2011 amounted to roughly \$30 billion, it was a huge sum, which in fact pushed Jordan into financial crisis. Combined with pressure exerted by the International Monetary Fund, it forced the new government (in power since October 2012) to implement severe cuts in the public expenditure.

Along with other austerity measures, on November 13, 2012 Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour announced his decision to lift state subsidies on fuel which consequently led to a drastic increase in the price of gasoline, diesel and cooking gas by 15%, 33% and 54% respectively<sup>33</sup>. Quite predictably, such move triggered popular unrest with many demonstrations all over the country, during which some protesters called for the downfall of the regime<sup>34</sup>. Initially supported by opposition, soon the manifestations lost their momentum, due to many incidents of vandalism and clashes between the rioters and police that took place. Even while opposing the government's decision, all political forces criticized violence and called for peaceful protests, expressing opinions in a civilized and democratic manner, and respect for national unity<sup>35</sup>. Such stance of the opposition, an intensified public presence of the security apparatus, and the arrest of several

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<sup>32</sup> *Egyptian Gas Supply to Jordan Stabilizes at below Contract Rate*, Ahram Online, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/72994.aspx> [access: July 2013].

<sup>33</sup> O. Obeidat, *Fuel Prices up after Subsidies Removed, Decision Triggers Protests*, "Jordan Times", November 13, 2012, <http://jordantimes.com/fuel-prices-up-after-subsidies-removed> [access: July 2013].

<sup>34</sup> S. Al-Khalidi, *Jordan Protesters Call for 'Downfall of the Regime'*, Reuters, November 16, 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/11/16/us-jordan-protest-idUSBRE8AF0LK20121116> [access: July 2013].

<sup>35</sup> See: T. Luck, *Vandalism, Arrests as Fuel Riots Continue*, "Jordan Times", November 14, 2012, <http://jordantimes.com/vandalism-arrests-as-fuel-riots-continue> [access: July 2013] and T. Luck, *Calm Returns to Streets after Fuel Price Riots*, "Jordan Times", November 15, 2012, <http://jordantimes.com/calm-returns-to-streets-after-fuel-price-riots> [access: July 2013].

hundred rioters, ultimately resulted in the termination of the unrest after six days. Soon after the government captured the public attention by launching the electoral campaign.

At the end of 2012, the monarch had already become actively involved in promoting the royal vision of the reform, initially presenting it in an interview with two major newspapers<sup>36</sup> and then in the form of royal discussion papers<sup>37</sup>. King Abdullah outlined his roadmap, in which the elections scheduled for January 23, 2013 were meant to become a crucial milestone initiating the majority-based parliamentary governments in Jordan, therefore setting the basis for a real constitutional monarchy. The elections' aftermath was to introduce stable governance with the four-year terms of office<sup>38</sup>, based on a parliamentary majority rather than the monarch's autonomous decision. In consecutive discussion papers, the king underlined the need to strengthen the political parties system and the civil society.

Nonetheless, the pre-elections period proved that both society and the political system are far from maturity. Missing from the campaign was a serious debate on Jordan's needs and on ways to tackle the problems of its growing economic concerns, energy dependency, young generation's frustration or poverty. What dominated the posters and fliers all around the cities were simply slogans of fighting corruption and unemployment. Even though for the first time the entire electoral process – voters and candidates' registration, campaign and the poll itself – was prepared and supervised by the Independent Election Commission, during both the campaign and the election day many law violations were observed. They included clashes between voters, campaigning, vote buying and single cases of vote forging. In comparison with previous years, however, the scale of infringements was a minor one, hence the elections were commonly described as free and fair by international and local monitoring groups<sup>39</sup>.

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<sup>36</sup> *King Outlines Vision for Reform Roadmap for New Jordan*, “Jordan Times”, December 5, 2012, <http://jordantimes.com/king-outlines-vision-for-reform-roadmap-for-new-jordan> [access: July 2013].

<sup>37</sup> See: *Discussion Papers*, King Abdullah II Official Website, [http://kingabdullah.jo/index.php/en\\_US/pages/view/id/244.html](http://kingabdullah.jo/index.php/en_US/pages/view/id/244.html) [access: July 2013].

<sup>38</sup> In Jordanian reality it is phenomenon almost like a political fiction since during 14 years of king Abdullah's term eleven different prime ministers governed the country.

<sup>39</sup> K. Neimat, *Majority Says Elections Were Free and Fair*, “Jordan Times”, February 20, 2013, <http://jordantimes.com/majority-says-elections-were-free-and-fair----survey> [access: July 2013]. An observatory mission was also dispatched by the EU whose report described the elections as transparent and credible with minor shortcomings. See:

Despite the main opposition party – the Islamic Action Front – boycotting the elections on the charge of electoral law discriminating political parties, the society has legitimized the path chosen by the monarchy. Almost 57% of the registered voters casted their ballots by choosing to the 150-seat lower chamber of parliament 37 representatives identified with the opposition (independent Islamists, pan-Arabists and leftists) and 18 women (of out which 15 got their seats within the quota system)<sup>40</sup>.

Unfortunately, serious fragmentation of the parliament and the lack of political affiliation of the majority of the deputies have caused that the long-awaited political consultations with parliamentary blocs in the process of nominating the prime minister turned into a political show. After six weeks, the king nominated for this position an old-new Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour. Further three weeks were devoted to consultations over the government's composition which at the end of the day was nominated with disregard for any of the parliament's demands<sup>41</sup>. In other words, it turned out that, in reality, both the new parliament and the new government do not differ significantly from hitherto existing institutions. Both are largely occupied by loyal and conservative monarchists who care more about the status quo and the regime's stability than any sincere reform.

#### 4. Why the Democratisation Remains Stalled?

An analysis of why the democratisation process remains somewhat limited in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan should be conducted at this point. To that end, the international historical sociology shall be applied in order to present how state, society and international community are interrelated, all being immersed in historical context which constitutes an explanatory key to the problem. In this light, democratisation should be seen as a reflection of shifting interests of

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*The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Parliamentary Elections, 23 January 2013. European Union Election Observation Mission Final Report, European Union External Action, [http://www.eueom.eu/files/dmfile/final-report\\_en.pdf](http://www.eueom.eu/files/dmfile/final-report_en.pdf) [access: July 2013].*

<sup>40</sup> 2013 Elections – Final Results, “Jordan Times”, January 28, 2013, <http://jordantimes.com/2013-elections----final-results> [access: July 2013].

<sup>41</sup> O. Al Sharif, *Jordan's New Government: Same Old Politics*, “Al Monitor”, March 31, 2013, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/03/jordanian-government-formation.html> [access: July 2013].



the three elements of the political system in that particular historical moment (2011–2013), largely overlapping in fact. Even though Jordan experiences similar socio-economic and political situation as most of the countries in the Middle East, the Jordanian Arab Spring was approached significantly different. Factors standing behind it can be divided into two groups: one connected with the events unfolding in Jordan in 2011–2013 and the second stemming from the society’s permanent attitudes and perception of the monarchy and the foreign actors.

First of all, contrary to other countries that witnessed revolutions, demonstrations in Jordan, with a very few exceptions, have never been of a spontaneous character. Generally, they were planned and organized by certain political movements, and even if they gathered participants with a very diversified background and broad agenda – from leftists to Islamist groups, both Jordanians of Palestinian and East Bank origins, youth and elders, traditional opponents of the regime and its former officials<sup>42</sup> – they never reached a critical mass capable of seriously influencing the decision makers.

Furthermore, the anti-governmental protests were nothing new for the Jordanian society and Jordanian political culture – organized massive and nation-wide demonstrations have taken place many times in the history of the Hashemite monarchy. It is sufficient to mention the protests of 1989, which initiated the opening of the political system of Jordan, or those of 1996, when people showed their discontent due to drastically increasing prices as a result of cancelling subsidies on food and fuel<sup>43</sup>. Jordan has also an endless history of demonstrations targeting the pro-Israeli policy of the government in the form of the so-called anti-normalisation movement<sup>44</sup>. Consequently, immediately before the Arab Spring, five months prior to the Tunisian spark, Jordanian teachers went on strike and organized several manifestations in Amman and other cities, demanding their long-denied right to establish a professional association. It clearly evidenced an increasing pressure between the state and the society,

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<sup>42</sup> The most prominent ex-regime official taking part in the demonstrations was Ahmad Obeidat, a former intelligence chief (1974–1982) and a former prime minister (1984–1985) who in 2011 established the National Front for Reform, a coalition of Islamist, nationalist and leftist parties. See: A. Mahafzah, *op.cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>43</sup> About the protests in 1989 and 1996 see, for instance: C. Ryan, *Peace, Bread and Riots: Jordan and the International Monetary Fund*, “Middle East Policy” 1998, No. 2, pp. 54–66.

<sup>44</sup> See, for instance: P. Scham, R. Lucas, ‘Normalization’ and ‘Anti-Normalization’ in *Jordan: The Public Debate*, “Israel Affairs” 2003, No. 3, pp. 141–164.



nevertheless it has never led to a massive insurgence of the people against the government<sup>45</sup>.

Equally important was the regime's reaction to the demonstrations and the behaviour of the protesters themselves. Despite an increase in the number and scale of the manifestations, they have almost never escalated into violent clashes – an exception to this tendency were the fuel riots of November 2012. The peaceful character of those demonstrations was on one hand related to the moderation of Jordanian political elites, who decided not to use excessive force – even though security forces were present during protests, they were unarmed in order not to provoke the crowds. Moreover, following the king's orders, they were very often distributing water to the demonstrators. On the other hand, the protesters believed that by avoiding violence they would achieve better negotiating position in their dialogue with the regime<sup>46</sup>.

Jordan's domestic political scene is inseparable from the international and regional affairs. Firstly, the monarchy's stability lies at the core interest of the United States, probably more than ever before in its history – the fact that Jordan is a reliable partner and a buffer zone between Israel and the hostile and full of turmoil Arab world, makes it a strategic and not-to-lose asset for the Americans. The monarchy is also actively engaged in the recent American attempt to revive the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. Consequently, Amman is the channel through which Washington reaches into the regional terrorist networks – the Jordanian Mukhabarat (General Intelligence Directorate) is commonly seen as one of the CIA's key collaborators<sup>47</sup>. One should not expect the US to let this particular status quo element change. That is why the Americans support the monarchy even in the moments of its biggest crisis, above all by praising its stability: "We call on protestors to do so peacefully. We support King Abdullah II's roadmap for reform and the aspirations of the Jordanian people to foster a more inclusive political process that will promote security, stability as well as economic development"<sup>48</sup>. Likewise, the EU has its interest in a stable Jordan

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<sup>45</sup> H. Barari, C. Satkowski, *The Arab Spring: The Case of Jordan*, "Ortadoğu Etütleri" [Middle Eastern Studies] 2012, No. 2, pp. 49–50.

<sup>46</sup> Ibidem, p. 50.

<sup>47</sup> A. Malantowicz, *Stosunki jordańsko-amerykańskie. Prawdziwy sojusz czy przejaw neokolonializmu?* [The Jordanian-American Relations. A True Alliance or a Manifestation of Neocolonialism?], Centre for International Initiatives Analysis 2012, No. 20, <http://centruminicjatyw.org/?q=pl/node/190> [access: July 2013].

<sup>48</sup> U.S. State Department Spokesman Mark Toner. Quoted in: Scott Stearns, *US Supports Jordan's King Abdullah Over Fuel Protests*, "Voice of America", November 15, 2012,

and that is the reason why it is engaged in supporting the king’s vision of reform and cautioning against any moves which could hinder Amman’s security. As Julien Barnes-Dacey puts it, “Jordan is a key strategic ally and, at a moment of significant regional volatility, the preservation of a calm in the kingdom is clearly an important aim”<sup>49</sup>.

Events taking place in Egypt and Syria have also left their trace on Jordanian land – both in the streets and inside the royal palace. Even though the Islamic Action Front boycotted the January 2013 election and continually contests the regime, now it would possibly count on much less popular support than even a year ago. The fear that the Islamists in Jordan would not be willing to share power, once taking a grip on it, mounted significantly after the December 2012 constitutional struggle under Morsi. Recent events in Egypt – massive demonstrations and coup d’état – further increase the concerns about the possible polarization of the Jordanian society, which is quite significant already. The Syrian Civil War, on the other hand, constitutes the biggest security threat for Jordanian regime – a possible spill over of the conflict, the continuing massive influx of the refugees (estimated at more than 600,000 up to date) along with the terrorist activity made Jordanian elites very cautious about further developments in Damascus. Both crises also have a moderating impact on the public opinion in Jordan – you can hardly meet a Jordanian citizen who would like to see the violence escalate in the streets and for that particular reason a lot of them are willing to maintain the status quo. Not without importance is the huge financial assistance from the Gulf countries (\$5 billion to be provided over a period of five years), which helps Jordan mitigate its serious economic burden – for them Jordan’s stability is also in the centre of attention.

That smoothly brings into consideration the issue of the durable attitudes in the Jordanian society. One should remember that the Jordanians are largely supportive of the monarchy, while the royal family is commonly perceived as a symbol of national unity and an element of national identity. It stems from a social contract agreed between the Hashemites and the Transjordanian tribes, which dates back to the 1920s. Similarly, the majority of Jordanian citizens are satisfied with the direction their country is heading. When asked about

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<http://www.voanews.com/content/us-support-jordan-abdullah/1547111.html> [access: July 2013].

<sup>49</sup> J. Barnes-Dacey, *Jordanian Tremors: Elusive Consensus, Deepening Discontent*, “ECFR Policy Memo” 2012, p. 2, [http://ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR68\\_JORDAN\\_MEMO\\_AW.pdf](http://ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR68_JORDAN_MEMO_AW.pdf) [access: July 2013].

reasons that lead them to believe so, they indicate above all the security and stability provided by the current regime (46%), the Hashemite leadership (6%) and a situation relatively better than in other countries of the region (7%). Simultaneously, citizens who are discontent about the developments in their country argue that it is mostly caused by increasing socio-economic problems (corruption, poverty, unemployment, high cost of living etc.), rather than, as an outside observer could think, the lack of democratic reforms. Consequently, barely 12% of the Jordanians believe that political reform should be the state's priority<sup>50</sup>.

A proof for the lack of critical mass needed to implement bottom-up changes in Jordan and for the high support for the monarchy is the unwillingness of majority of the citizens to participate in anti-government demonstrations. 70% of the Jordanians see no reason for which they should take part in the protests, whereas only a small percentage has in fact participated or intends to participate in the manifestations in the future<sup>51</sup>.

In order to fully understand the society's stance in the democratisation discourse one has to draw attention to the advancing growth of the middle class in Jordan, particularly within the capital area of Amman. It is a group of educated and cosmopolitan people, who are acquainted with the Western cultural trends. As Sarah Tobin illustratively describes, they are "a population who 'want peace' and are relieved not to discuss the Civil War of the 1970s and to retreat to their apartments and villas in sympathetic disdain for Israeli raids of the homes of Palestinian family members and friends just 60 miles away. They are consumers of political information put forth on blogs, news and Internet sites, but are not otherwise politically engaged. Instead, they organize around certain places and times for consumption and around economic points for solidarity"<sup>52</sup>. They are the Jordanians who consciously observe the situation in the neighbouring countries and see only "civil wars, death, chaos, poverty, refugees, extremism, and the collapse of governmental systems"<sup>53</sup>. It is not a perspective favourable

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<sup>50</sup> *National Priorities, Governance and Political Reform in Jordan. National Public Opinion Poll #9. July 17–20, 2012*, The International Republican Institute, <http://www.iri.org/news-events-press-center/news/iri-poll-jordanians-split-over-direction-country-economy-and-corruptio> [access: July 2013].

<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>52</sup> S. Tobin, *Jordan's Arab Spring: The Middle Class and Anti-Revolution*, "Middle East Policy" 2012, No. 1, p. 100.

<sup>53</sup> U. Dekel, O. Perlov, *The Elections in Jordan: People Want Evolution, Not Revolution*, "INSS Insight" 2013, No. 402, p. 2.

to revolutionary attitudes, hence the Jordanians are more often keen to opt for consumption, to phrase slogans calling for “evolution, not revolution”, to label the Arab Spring more as a threat than an opportunity and to switch the centre of gravity of the public discourse to social and cultural issues, such as an active civil society<sup>54</sup>.

Consequently, it strengthens the feeling that Jordan “cannot afford to have the Arab Spring the way the others did (...), cannot afford to have any kind of instability”<sup>55</sup>. These words fall in line with Sarah Tobin’s opinion that “unitary construction of social life in Amman as middle class and anti-revolution is further reinforced by an outward-looking disposition”<sup>56</sup>. The Jordanians are not willing to replace the current regime with the situation in Syria, Egypt or Iraq; they cannot demand overthrowing the monarchy since “part of the socio-economic system [in Jordan] is how monarchy makes stability, not just for Jordan”<sup>57</sup>. In that option “people prefer to enjoy this medium level of freedom rather than lose security and stability”<sup>58</sup> and precisely such a standpoint has a predominant impact on what the democratisation of the socio-political system in Jordan looks like. It is hindered, cautious, limited, very often retracing and illusory.

## 5. Conclusions

The analysis clearly indicates that Jordan is a case proving that some nations praise stability and security over a rushed political reform and the full opening of the political system. What is crucial to understand the phenomenon, this is the view shared not only among the ruling elite, but also by a vast part of the society and foreign actors, since the current democratisation discourse largely reflects their overlapping interests. Additionally, a historical perspective is needed in order to fully explain interlinks and interdependency between the elements of the political system.

The somewhat stalled democratisation works in favour of the autocratic regime of King Abdullah II, who retains power and broad prerogatives. Likewise,

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<sup>54</sup> Ibidem. It was also the topic of King Abdullah’s last discussion paper. See: *Towards Democratic Empowerment and ‘Active Citizenship’*, [http://kingabdullah.jo/index.php/en\\_US/pages/view/id/253.html](http://kingabdullah.jo/index.php/en_US/pages/view/id/253.html) [access: July 2013].

<sup>55</sup> H. Esmeiran, author’s interview, Amman, February 14, 2013.

<sup>56</sup> S. Tobin, op.cit., p. 106.

<sup>57</sup> A. Dahmash, author’s interview, Amman, February 12, 2013.

<sup>58</sup> T. al-Masri, author’s interview, Amman, March 2, 2013.

maintaining the status quo is a vital interest for the political elites, whose influence over the shape of socio-political scene in Jordan may be extensively limited due to full democratisation. Equally important is the stance of the Jordanian society, which does not have to fear internal disorder and, consequently, may run their ordinary life without any disruption. Finally, stability of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is also profitable for the international community to whom Jordan is a long-standing and reliable partner.