

[Envoys from the Group of Seven Nations and the European Union Urge for a Timeline to Return to Functioning Democratic Institutions in Tunisia](#)

Addressing the ongoing crisis in Tunisia, diplomatic leaders from the Group of Seven (G7) nations and the European Union (EU) released a joint statement during this past week urging Tunisian President Kais Saied to establish a clear timeline that will pave the way for the country's return to functioning democratic institutions which would be allowed significant input in decisions affecting political and civil society. Back on July 25th of this year, Saied drew criticism for a string of actions which included suspending the elected parliament, dismissing the prime minister and cabinet, and claiming far-reaching powers for himself under the guise of addressing the nation's economic and political woes. More than several months since this took place, Saied continues to face large-scale opposition for his behavior with thousands of Tunisians engaging in widespread pro-democracy demonstrations demanding a reinstatement of democratic institutions. Now, he has elicited further ire for his recent decision to extend the months-long suspension of parliament, with Saied announcing that this would be done until new elections planned for December of next year with a constitutional referendum also set for July of 2022. In the country that was the birthplace of the 2011 Arab Spring, Saied's actions have justifiably raised fears of a backslide toward autocracy.

In a televised address this week, Saied stated that he would initiate a constitutional referendum on July 25th, 2022 and parliamentary elections on December 17th, 2022. Until then, parliament will remain suspended and he will continue to rule by controversial decree. Opposition voices have criticized this latest move to indefinitely extend the suspension of what is ultimately an elected legislative body – which they rightfully point out endangers the democratic progress that has been made in the country. They have also accused Saied of making attempts to extend his one-man rule and unilaterally alter the political system in his favor. Under his plan, a committee of experts appointed directly by Saied are slated to draft a new constitution by June in advance of the July referendum date. This development in Tunisia's democratic crisis takes place amidst substantial concern that the country will default on its debts without international financial assistance. President Saied's announcement has opened discussions with the International Monetary Fund, however other major Western donors have said that they will not engage with the country until a more inclusive reform process for resolving the political instability there exists.

G7 and EU leaders have indicated a readiness to support Tunisia in its recovery, but restated the importance of fundamental political and civil freedoms. They also said that people in Tunisia must be free to pursue democracy and an effective and transparent government. Since President Saied has given himself the power to rule by decree and ignore the country's democratic constitution, mass demonstrations have taken place from a fear that this will return the nation to an autocracy. Tunisians opposing the president have characterized his power grab as a coup even though Saied has tried to claim that he has no dictatorial ambitions.

What is also worrying for rights and pro-democracy activists is that the government under the president has made overtures to Saudi Arabia for financial assistance. Since President Saied closed his country's democratic institutions, Saudi Arabia has pledged its support for Tunisia, with the Kingdom expressing that anything Tunisia does internally is a matter of the country's sovereignty. Saied's appeal to one of the region's main anti-democratic forces has thus drawn concern as well.