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Trade unions and their influence on the political process

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NGOs and trade unions play a vital role in political, economic and societal transformation processes, as they offer valuable opportunities for citizens to engage in topical, problem-oriented initiatives. In addition, they often fill the void left in countries without well-established, deep-rooted party system, which is the case in every Arab Spring country.

Yet, governments and lawmakers react quite differently to NGOs' and trade unions' contribution potential. In Egypt, for instance, the government under the undisputed leadership of President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi has kept local and international NGOs under strict control, fearing their opposition and criticism. Trade unions have been brought back under state surveillance too, as they are perceived, thanks to their potential to initiate mass strikes, as fundamental threat to the country's, and hence the regime's stability. Also, the existence of NGOs/trade unions with potential Islamist influence is a nightmarish vision for the current government.

In Tunisia, meanwhile, NGOs and particularly the powerful Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail (UGTT) have fundamentally contributed to the country's democratization process. When the political process came to a near halt after the murder of two oppositionists in summer 2013, they pushed the Constituent Assembly to continue its work. Today, however, many Tunisians debate whether there is a "too much" of NGO and trade union influence on the political process, as too many strikes might endanger the fragile economic development, which then might negatively impact on the country's overall transition success.

The committee will exchange views and ideas about NGOs' / trade unions' role in democratization processes and discuss ways how they can live up to their full potential.

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