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Egypt 'never ceases to surprise the West'

Debate on govt resignation, future president, multifacetedness

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(ANSAMed) - ROME - The resignation of Prime Minister Hazem Beblawi's government is only the latest of surprises Egypt has had in store for the world over the past few years.

Many have asked since the mid-2013 ousting of President Mohamed Morsi by the military - seen as a coup abroad but held to be the only way to prevent the country from becoming a helpless victim to unpopular Muslim Brotherhood rule by many within the country itself - exactly what is it that induces Egyptians to make choices so different from what Westerners expect. This issue was focused on during a debate held Monday in Rome by the foreign press club and the Anna Lindh Foundation Corrente Rosa Association. Discussion began on some of the chapters of the book 'Oltre Tahrir. Vivere in Egitto con la Rivoluzione' ('Beyond Tahrir. Living in Egypt with the Revolution', published in Italy by Editori Internazionali Riuniti) by ANSA journalist Luciana Borsatti.

"Egypt," the author said, "often surprises Egyptians themselves, as well as the world" - or at least the West, which envisioned a democratic future for the country after the fall of Mubarak and which after June 30 classified the act ending the Muslim Brotherhood rule as a 'military coup'.

It seems difficult to understand exactly what prompted PM Beblawi to announce his government's resignation. "I don't think the resignation of the Beblawi government will change anything. Changing a few faces doesn't mean change. What we have to change is the system, not just the faces. As it is right now, it is not clear who made this decision and for what reason," said Rasha Abdulla, Associate Professor and Chair of Journalism and Mass Communication at the American University in Cairo.

The government's resignation will probably make everything more complicated, coming as it does amid a worsening economic situation and widespread political insecurity, noted Stefano Polli, head of ANSA's international division. Post-uprising Egypt is not only a country on the verge of an economic collapse, divided between Morsi supporters and opponents. It is also that of 'Oltre Tahrir' and its multifaceted realities and contradictions, its secular intellectual class, its shopkeepers, its women and its youth.

Where you can find those who hope and those who regret, those who accuse and those who call for reconciliation. People like Mohammad Tolba, the Salafist who frequents the Western coffee shop chain Costa and writes a blog called Salafyo Costa, through which he aims to foster dialogue between all the sections of Egyptian society. Egyptian Salafism is not monolithic, Borsatti noted. It is a veritable galaxy of several diverse realities, from jihadist extremism to factions more open to an exchange of ideas with others. Individuals with a more open view can also be found among the Muslim Brotherhood, she added, citing one of the protagonists of Jehane Noujaim's 'The Square': a multifaceted character torn between friendship with secular revolutionaries and loyalty to the group he belongs to, and as a result willing to question himself and his group. There are many stories and many different realities within Egypt today. Including that of former jihadist leader Nabil Naim, who in the book gives his personal view of how

Osama Bin Laden actually died and provides an overview of the jihadist groups operating in the Sinai, helping to shed light on more recent developments in the area. Women deserve special mention as well: those Egyptian women who took to the streets in the violent, heady days starting on January 25, 2011 - the same women who in poor areas come up against conservative social traditions and violence at the hands of men. Women who are still fighting to get their rights recognized as such, said Ambassador to the Holy See Wafaa Bassim, adding that a gradual approach to change is essential. The debate, moderated by Serena Romano, was also attended by Rome's foreign press club chief Marteen van Aldeeren, the Egyptian journalist Mahdi El Nemr and the deputy director of Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), Nathalie Tocci. (ANSAMED).

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