

# Building a Security Community in the Neighborhood. Zooming in on the EU–Tunisia Relations

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# Building a Security Community in the Neighbourhood. Zooming in on EU– Tunisia Relations

Assem Dandashly

## **Abstract**

The Arab Spring events and the fall of several dictatorships have created a new reality in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA region) leading to expectations of change in the European Union (EU) approach towards security policies in its southern neighbours. To what extent has Tunisia become an integrated part of the EU security community? In seeking to answer this question, this paper argues that the degree of integration with the EU security community depends on two conditions: the level of integration and the level of relative attractiveness of the EU. A high level of integration with the EU would mean that the scope of the agreements is relatively extensive and that there is a certain degree of adaptation to EU rules as well as participation in EU policies. The EU, as a liberal integrative actor, works together with the domestic environment in the partner country, as well as the potential competition from other regional actors, to shape its relations with MENA and East European neighbouring countries.

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# 1. Introduction

For decades, the European Union has been trying to guarantee the security of its borders and the stability of its neighbours. However, with the events of the Arab Spring, security and stability goals have seemed to be collapsing, due to chaos on its southern borders (Egypt, Libya and Syria), illegal migration and security threat on the rise, and Islamists winning the first free and fair elections in several countries. The latter was of great concern for the EU especially in Egypt until the military coup of 3 July 2013 that toppled the Muslim Brotherhood-elected president and government. This fear, that Islamists may attain power through free and fair elections, is nothing new in the Western world. Memories of the sweeping victory of Islamists (*Front Islamique du Salut*) in Algeria's 1991 parliamentary elections – that ended with military coup and civil war – still raise fear among the EU countries. The Palestinian elections of Hamas in 2006<sup>1</sup> and Hizbollah in Lebanon in the last two decades are recent examples of the threats that could emerge with such groups in power. This situation creates a dilemma for the EU: how to cope with the issue of supporting democracy while not accepting its results?

The lack of democratic changes in the region was highlighted in the 2011 review of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) (European Commission 2011a). The main reason for this ineffectiveness is widely seen as being the EU's quest for security and serving as security provider in the region – given the cooperation of the authoritarian regimes in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Despite the importance of economic and trade relations since the Barcelona process, agreements with the EU have essentially focused on security and stability, at the expense of democracy (Pace 2010; Dennison and Dworkin 2011).

With the Arab Spring events and the fall of several dictatorships, a new reality was created that leads to expect a change in the EU approach towards policies in its southern neighbours. To what extent has Tunisia become an integrated part of the EU security community? In seeking to answer this question, this paper follows the argument put forward by Rieker (2014) and holds that the degree of integration with the EU security community depends on two conditions: the level of integration, and the level of relative attractiveness of the EU. The EU, as

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<sup>1</sup> In the case of Hamas, the EU and other Western powers refused to deal with Hamas and did not accept the results of the elections that were held by the same players to be 'free and fair'.

a liberal integrative actor, works together with the domestic environment in partner countries, as well as the potential competition from other regional actors, in shaping its relations with MENA and the East European neighbouring countries.

## 2. Analytical framework – the EU as a liberal rational player

The 'civilian power' approach developed by Duchêne (1973) during the economic crises of the 1970s rests on the idea that the EU is 'a civilian group long on economic power and relatively short on armed forces' (Duchêne 1973: 19). The main difference from the realist approach is that it focuses on other means of influence than military power (see Twitchett 1976). The European Union's influence in the world has always rested on economic and diplomatic means. Hill highlighted how Western European behaviour based on 'diplomatic rather than coercive instruments, the centrality of mediation in conflict resolution, the importance of economic solutions to political problems, and the need for indigenous peoples to determine their own fate' (Hill 1983: 200).

The civilian power concept continued to be the focus of discussion during the 1980s and was developed further in the 1990s. Maull defined civilian power in terms of three dimensions: 'a) the acceptance of the necessity of cooperation with others in the pursuit of international objectives; b) the concentration on non-military, primarily economic, means to secure national goals, with military power left as a residual instrument serving essentially to safeguard other means of international interaction; and c) a willingness to develop supranational structures to address critical issues of international management' (Maull 1990: 92–93). An actor is considered to be a civilian actor when it 'uses civilian means for persuasion, to pursue civilian ends, and whose foreign policy-making process is subject to democratic control or public scrutiny' (Smith 2005: 68-69).

The EU tries to persuade other players to comply and agree by providing a set of economic incentives. The EU's civilian power 'does not lie in the deployment of battalions or bombers, but rather in the quiet promotion of democracy and development through trade, foreign aid and peacekeeping' (Moravcsik 2002). This lack of military power is what makes the EU a unique, attractive and influential international actor in the world (see Feldman 1998). The EU is seen as a 'magnet for surrounding states' (Ginsberg 1999: 446). It has the largest share of world GDP – 25.8 per cent in 2010, compared to 22.9 per cent for the USA (Eurostat 2013). The EU is among the world's largest trading blocs and is a highly influential player in the World Trade Organization. Its market is one of the most successful and attractive markets in the world, which 'creates a nearly irresistible impetus to political and economic reforms' (Moravcsik 2002). States either do whatever it takes

to join the European Union or sign a partnership or association agreement. This attractiveness makes the EU an influential civilian player, permitting or denying its membership or its market, or conditioning the access to its market on certain rules and norms that third countries must implement (Smith and Woolcock 1999: 451).

The EU is the major provider of development aid in the world, and is also heavily represented in peacekeeping missions. In many instances we see some division of labour here between international actors. While the military aspect is taken care of by NATO or other states such as the USA, the peacebuilding missions and postwar aid and missions are ensured by other actors including the EU: ‘America can bomb aggressors with impunity. But when the shooting stops, only the Europeans can play the superpower in keeping the peace, reconstructing the economy and promoting democracy’ (Moravcsik 2002). However, the effectiveness of EU policies is heavily dependent on the cooperation of the elites in the targeted country, a favourable domestic environment that makes the possibility of complying with EU rules high, and how attractiveness the incentives are. As we shall see, cooperation between the EU and Tunisia has been based on rational attitudes that led to the creation of an EU security community.

## 3. Decades of cooperation: EU–Tunisia relations

### 3.1 Background

Tunisia has long been considered an important ally and partner of the EU. The Tunisian population and its elites hold values and beliefs that are very close to those held in the EU (interviews with Tunisian politicians and civil society leaders, October 2013). Tunisia's relations with the EU date back to March 1969, when a cooperation agreement (mainly trade-based) was signed between the European Economic Community (EEC) and Tunisia. This agreement was followed by a new one, under the umbrella of the Overall Mediterranean Policy,<sup>2</sup> in 1976. Similar agreements were signed between the EEC and two other Maghreb countries, Algeria and Morocco. The 1976 agreement deepened economic relations between the EEC and the Maghreb countries by including economic and financial assistance. The agreement with Tunisia (25 April 1976) aimed at developing the country's socio-economic situation 'through trade, economic, technical and financial cooperation and cooperation in the social field' (European Commission<sup>3</sup> 1982: 2).

As the term for the 1976 agreement was for five years, it was renewed twice, in 1981 and in 1986. The renewal was accompanied with a net increase in the European Commission's grants and loans share of the protocols. Then, in view of institutional changes at the EEC level with the move towards Maastricht Treaty and the accompanying developments, the Global Mediterranean Policy (GMP) was replaced by the Renovated Mediterranean Policy. In 1992, a new set of agreements was negotiated within the RMP framework for the 1992–1996 period. 'The main two innovations of the RMP consisted in prioritizing economic and structural reforms in the Beneficiary countries and the accent on the regional cooperation and on environment' (MEDEA 2013, online edition).

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<sup>2</sup> In 1972, the heads of the nine EEC members-states established the 'overall Mediterranean policy' in which they sought to create a futuristic view for developing their relations with the Mediterranean countries. This would allow the EEC members to 'establish the essential points of the agreements to be concluded or renewed with the countries concerned. Within this framework, increased importance was given to the question of financial and technical cooperation with the Maghreb countries' (European Commission, 1982: 1).

<sup>3</sup> For coherence, I use 'European Commission' throughout the entire text instead of switching between the 'Commission of the European Communities' and the 'European Commission'.

With the launch of the Euro–Mediterranean Partnership, established in Barcelona in November 1995, Tunisia became the first Mediterranean country to sign an Association Agreement (AA) with the EU, on 17 July 1995. This Agreement, which constitutes the legal basis for EU–Tunisia relations, entered into force on 1 March 1998. As we will see, the AA includes most of the points covered by EU agreements with candidates countries. It covers many areas, ranging from political and security partnership, to a financial and economic partnership and a social, cultural and human partnership. The AA set 1 January 2008 as the date for putting in place a free trade area for industrial products. It ‘also established permanent working structures for political and sectoral dialogue’ (European Commission 2011b). With the birth of the ENP, EU–Tunisia relations ‘have been developed in the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy, on the basis of an EU–Tunisia Action Plan, adopted in 2005 for 5 years’ (European Commission 2011b).

Following the fall of the regime of Ben Ali,<sup>4</sup> a steady process of democratization and institution building was initiated that led to the first open and fair elections of a Constituent Assembly on 23 October 2011, followed by the drafting of a new constitution based on democratic principles, which has been approved by the National Constituent Assembly. The domestic environment in the Arab Spring countries favours democratic reforms, and particularly in Tunisia. Although EU membership is not part of the ‘package’, Tunisia is interested in other incentives offered by the EU, like agricultural liberalization, visa facilitation to increase mobility, and greater economic cooperation eventually leading to participation in the Single Market. Moreover, the EU is still the most trusted international actor in the region generally, not least in Tunisia – which gives the EU stronger influence. As mentioned, the Tunisian population and its elites hold values and beliefs that are very close to those held in the EU (interviews with Tunisian officials and civil society activists, October 2013).

The agreement between the EU and Tunisia on a Privileged Partnership (PP) and the signing of a new Action Plan on 19 November 2012 show the common values and beliefs with the EU, as well as the attractiveness of the EU in Tunisia. The new agreement focuses on a range of areas that will support economic development and democratic transition. The EU has ‘reiterated its offer to gradually integrate Tunisia into the European internal market, to re-launch negotiations on liberalising trade in agriculture, to make rapid progress in the aviation discussions and to improve the mobility of EU citizens and Tunisians

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<sup>4</sup> President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali was the second president of Tunisia from November 1987 until he was forced by Tunisian protesters to flee to Saudi Arabia on 14 January 2011.

through the conclusion of a mobility partnership' (EU Council 19 November 2012).

### **3.2 The Dignity Revolution in Tunisia: new challenges to the EU**

Since the mid-1980s, the Tunisian regime has survived by using socio-economic development tools, with the aid of Western countries and international organizations such as the IMF and the World Bank, to support the agricultural industry and tourism, increase its exports, create jobs, and achieve stable growth rates. This economic prosperity helped the regime to survive despite the popular discontent with oppression and lack of freedoms. However, economic stability could not last long, given the increasing unemployment (around 17 per cent in 2012) – especially among the young educated and skilled Tunisians who account for over 30 per cent of the unemployment rate (*The Economist* 19 March 2013), growing inflation and poor living conditions.

The economy barely survived the repercussions of the global financial crisis of 2008, but could not escape the negative effects of the euro crisis – mainly in the banking sector, due to the drop in liquidity, which affected lending ability. Following a meeting of the Board of Directors of the Central Bank of Tunisia on 16 November 2011, a statement was issued showing the country's deteriorating economic situation (*Tunisia-live* 2011); exports were declining as Tunisia's main trading partners were the EU countries, economic growth was slowing down, foreign and domestic investments were falling short of targets. Further, the number of tourists was declining (the majority of tourists come from EU countries), causing a significant drop in the revenues from tourism and limiting the number of people benefiting from the tourism sector. The deteriorating economic situation increased the public debt, the budgetary deficit and inflation.

The inability of the Ben Ali regime to continue to use socio-economic tools to secure the stability of its rule, as it had done before, together with the decades of oppression and lack of basic freedoms, created suitable conditions for an explosion. The actual protests were triggered by the self-immolation of Mohammed Bou-Azizi on 17 December 2010, after his vegetable cart had been confiscated and he had been harassed and humiliated by a police officer in Sidi Bouzid. This symbolic act led peaceful marchers to gather in the place where Bou-Azizi had set himself on fire. The brutal response of the police and army led to nationwide protests, supported by labour unions and some parts of the elite such as lawyers. It did not take long before the will of Tunisians prevailed, and Ben Ali was toppled.

The fall of the regime paved the way for free and fair elections, held on 23 October 2011 and won by the *En-Nahda Party*, which formed a

coalition with the centre–left Congress for the Republic and the left party *Et-Takatol*. Despite the successful elections, the road towards democracy building and economic recovery have proved long and difficult. Let us now turn to the question: how does this new reality affect the scope of the agreement, level of participation and adaptation to the EU rules and criteria?

## 4. Scope of the agreement with the EU

The strong partnership and the long-term relationship between the EEC/EU and Tunisia have been characterized by high consistency. The Association Agreement (AA) signed within the Barcelona process framework, along with the Neighbourhood Action Plan and the PP, embraces various political, economic, security and cultural fields. The AA covers wide range of areas divided into the following categories: political dialogue; free movement of goods; rights of establishment and services; payments, capital competition and other economic provisions; economic cooperation; cooperation in social and cultural matters; financial cooperation; and institutional, general and final provisions.

Examining the EU enlargement process with candidate countries and comparing it to the AAs and the ENP action plans, we see very much the same focus and comprehensiveness in the areas covered, with almost identical areas for cooperation and reforms. However, the major components of the AA and Action Plan with Tunisia (as in the case of other ENP countries) are the clauses dealing with security matters and those providing for the creation of an EU–Tunisia free trade area by the year 2010 – not yet achieved, due to various delays and the outbreak of the Dignity Revolution in Tunisia. In comparison to the *acquis* chapters, the AA has more details on justice and home affairs, with special focus on issues related to migration, border security and the fight against organized crime<sup>5</sup> (see Table 1 in the Appendix).

The customs union (chapter 29 in the *acquis* chapters), which includes legislation binding on all member-states, is not included in the AA. Also what are missing in the AA with Tunisia in comparison to the *acquis* chapters are matters regarding fisheries, trans-European networks (chapter 21, which focuses on compliance with certain measures in transport, telecommunications and energy infrastructure, for adherence to European standards), financial control (chapter 32) and financial, budgetary provisions (chapter 33) and institutions (chapter 34, which relates to EU institutions and representation in

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<sup>5</sup> Migration (legal and illegal, re-admission, visas, asylum); border management; combating organized crime (including the smuggling of migrants and trafficking of human beings); drugs; money laundering, economic and financial crimes; judicial and police cooperation

them). Two areas that were added in the AA but missing from the *acquis* chapters are civil society and cultural cooperation (see Appendix).

Moreover, the major difference, aside from what was mentioned above – i.e. the prospects of membership and meeting certain macro-economic convergence criteria – is that the EU's agreements with its southern neighbours are based on bilateral negotiations in which the target country has a greater say in what it needs, and the policies and reforms it is willing to implement. This focus on cooperation in relation to national priorities is also reflected in the correspondence between the EU and the target country, in which the programmes included in national development plans and the needs of the national economy are clearly taken into consideration. At meetings of the Association Council, Tunisian ministers voice their demands and have a larger say in what figures on the meeting agenda. A main reason why the MENA countries have been granted a greater say is the importance of ensuring that their regimes will cooperate with the EU on security-related matters. This has pushed the EU to display a 'soft' attitude with the MENA, in comparison to the ENP countries in the east.

## 5. Adaptation to EU rules and norms

The level of adaptation to EU rules and norms, and complying with the EU values, has been more advanced in certain areas than in others. As mentioned, cooperation in the field of security (justice and home affairs, regional policies, regional cooperation in common security threats and issues, etc.) has been highly advanced. Under Ben Ali, Tunisia succeeded in complying with EU rules and could benefit from EU support to develop its security sectors – especially with respect to border control, anti-terrorism and efforts to counter illegal migration.

Economic cooperation was also quite advanced, despite unbalanced support and selectivity on the part of the EU as well as the Tunisian authorities regarding which fields needed to be developed. This lack of vision regarding the economy resulted in economic development being concentrated to the major cities, while the peripheral regions were ignored. This has put more pressure on measures to counter illegal migration, since most illegal migrants try to escape from these marginalized regions to the EU in their quest for a better life (interviews with senior Tunisian officials, October 2013). Moreover, although the EU supported Tunisia's economic reforms and development, decentralization development plans were not dealt with.

### 5.1 Democratic reforms

Neither the EU nor other Western actors have been successful in pushing MENA regimes to reform the areas of freedoms, human rights, civil liberties and corruption. Focusing more on stability and security, the EU failed to exert real pressure to get targeted regimes to fight corruption, or implement significant institutional and administrative reforms such as accountability, transparency and judiciary reforms. This stabilized the authoritarian regimes that maintained an iron grip on all political, economic and judicial aspects. The Western powers' fear of changes that might have uncertain consequences led them to support those regimes, even at the expense of democratic reforms. As regards freedoms and human rights, Tunisia always ranked very low and as 'not free' (except for 1997) until the Dignity Revolution broke out in 2010 (see Table 1).

Table 1 Tunisia: Freedom House Ratings

Year	Political Rights	Civil Liberties	Status
1995	6	5	Not Free
1996	6	5	Not Free
1997	6	5	Partly Free
1998	6	5	Not Free
1999	6	5	Not Free
2000	6	5	Not Free
2001	6	5	Not Free
2002	6	5	Not Free
2003	6	5	Not Free
2004	6	5	Not Free
2005	6	5	Not Free
2006	6	5	Not Free
2007	7	5	Not Free
2008	7	5	Not Free
2009	7	5	Not Free
2010	7	5	Not Free
2011	3	4	Partly Free

Source: Freedom House (2013)

\*the scale ranges from 1 for 'Free', to 7 for 'Not Free'

Despite the increase of support to institutional and political reforms, the post-Arab Spring era has brought some minor changes in EU attitudes regarding Tunisia. The EU focus is still on the justice and home affairs areas that deal with security and stability (interviews with various Tunisian officials, October 2013). However, in Tunisia, unlike the pre-Arab Spring period, supporting democratic reforms now would lead to more stability in the long term and better cooperation with the new regime. Supporting democratic reforms goes hand in hand with stability in Tunisia that will guarantee better cooperation regarding security. Moreover, there is increased assistance to civil society, which shows a shift from the EU focus on the top–down approach to bottom–up approach regarding the promotion of democracy.

Regarding justice, rule of law and freedom of expression and association as well as the terms of openness to civil society, dialogue with the government was often difficult. This represented an obstacle to the implementation of projects leading to reducing the objectives of technical and administrative improvements. However, that is not to say that nothing was accomplished. We can note achievements dating back to the first Tunisian president Habib Bourguiba (1957–1987), and continued under Ben Ali. Among these achievements are the absence of restrictions on tourism – a major source of income (see Daher 2011), female emancipation and equality of women, family planning, the

prohibition of polygamy, facilitation of women's access to divorce, and raising the marriage age for girls to 17 years.

Another important reform concerns the independence of the judiciary from political influence. The judiciary, which has not been free since Tunisian independence in the mid-1950s and has been suffering from corruption, must be reformed to meet the demands of the people and the new era (interviews with members of the Tunisian Constituent Assembly, October 2013). EU attempts to support this were blocked by the previous regime. As part of its Support for Partnership, Reform and Inclusive Growth (SPRING) programme launched in 2011, the EU agreed (in October 2012) to provide an additional €25 million over the next four years, to be directly invested in judiciary reform. The focus is on technical and financial support of judicial institutions and management as well as on training judges and attorneys and broadening their knowledge of laws and regulations.

Some EU member-states have also been involved in support to judicial reforms. Tunisian officials and NGOs representatives visited Poland in order to 'study the Polish justice system and learn about the Polish transformation experience' (Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2012). Tunisia has also committed to adjust 'its criminal and penitentiary legislation to become in line with international standards. That includes improving the working conditions of judges, the supervision of minors within the legal system and the terms in which someone can be detained' (*al-Arabiya News* 3 October 2012).

With regard to support to civil society, since the Barcelona process, the EU allocated parts of its financial support towards civil society organizations (CSOs). Unfortunately, the Tunisian regime blocked funding to most CSOs, and the EU was selective in its support, seeking to avoid dealing with Islamic groups. Islamic CSOs have remained active despite the regime's oppression that limited their margin of movement. The EU veto on Islamic CSOs showed a lack of understanding of an important player in Tunisian society. The Ben Ali regime allowed very few Islamic groups to exist, while other organizations operated from abroad.

During the reform period, EU civil society groups have been helping to develop their Tunisian counterparts. Member-state and especially CEEC civil society groups have become more involved lately in supporting their Tunisian counterparts. Poland, for example, has set up a programme to support Tunisian civil society and democratic transition within the framework of *Support for Democracy 2012 in the form of foreign aid and training*.<sup>6</sup> The following projects were

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<sup>6</sup> *Support for Democracy 2012* is a Solidarity Fund Poland programme funded by the Polish Foreign Aid Programme of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

implemented in 2012, aimed at not only developing the work of CSOs but also educating participants on the important role of an active citizenry and their relation to the state in a functioning democracy: ‘Project I: Training programme for Tunisian youth non-governmental organizations (in cooperation with the Embassy of the Republic of Poland in Tunis); Project II: Study visit to Poland for Tunisian local leaders’ (Polska Fundacja Międzynarodowej Współpracy na Rzecz Rozwoju ‘Wiedzieć Jak’ 2012). These steps are necessary to equip these organizations with the basic skills needed to become active players in the bottom–up construction of a consolidated democratic system.

In sum, we note positive developments regarding the adoption to EU norms and values. The democratic transition is moving forward, and Tunisia could become the first successful democratic case in the post-Arab Spring era.

## 5.2 Economic reforms

There is a need to address the deteriorating economic situation in Tunisia: low growth, high unemployment rate, poverty, social inequality, as well as underdeveloped regions as a result of the previous regime’s policies and political marginalization. Economic support and development has been a priority area in agreements between the EU and its neighbours. However, much of the invested money has focused on certain fields that were of interest to previous regimes, not the current ones. This situation led to the existence of many marginalized regions in Tunisia (interview with a Tunisian civil society leader and journalist, October 2013). Following the revolution, Tunisia has been seeking more EU support to address its socio-economic problems and marginalized regions. And indeed, the EU approach to economic support has undergone some changes since the Ben Ali era. Importantly, the EU has agreed to provide more funding and assistance to develop the marginalized regions and deal with social and economic imbalances– for example, in 2011 the EU allocated €12 million to reform the health system in the poorest regions (European Commission 2012b).

Tunisia’s transitional government had already launched some programmes, including ‘a US\$1.5 billion emergency plan to address unemployment and regional development, among a host of other concerns’ (World Bank 2012b). Despite the sums allocated for this programme, considerable external support is still needed, as well as ‘structural reforms to create a dynamic private sector capable of producing the quality and quantity of jobs needed by Tunisia’s predominantly young population’ (World Bank 2012b).

The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) and the International Finance Cooperation (IFC) have presented an Interim Strategy Note (ISN) for the fiscal year 2013/2014 to ‘support

the [Tunisian] authorities in the reforms necessary to promote private sector-led recovery and job creation, with a focus on openness, opportunity and accountability' (World Bank 2012a). These reforms are necessary for sending a clear message that the business environment in Tunisia has changed towards greater transparency and is more welcoming to foreign businesses. This programme has already been launched, but will require further support to succeed. Various donors such as the World Bank Group, the IBRD, the IFC and the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA) have facilitated its funding (World Bank 2012a).

The Privileged Partnership (PP), concluded in November 2012, has come to emphasize some major articles highlighted in the Association Agreement and the Action Plan with Tunisia. The PP has pledged to increase financial and technical aid to Tunisia, in addition to opening Tunisian agricultural products to the Single Market, advancing industry and liberalizing the service sector. Liberalization of the service sector will facilitate European companies' access to the Tunisian market, but there is no reciprocity involved. Tunisians still do not have free movement in Europe, and Tunisian companies have difficulties getting the necessary visas to access the EU (B'Chir 20 November 2012; interviews with Tunisian senior officials and civil society activists, October 2011). Here it should also be noted that the EU has launched negotiations on a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement with Tunisia.

At present, the EU, the World Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) as well as other international organizations and influential powers are focusing more on addressing the problems that led to the revolutions. Therefore, these actors are involved in or have promised financial support to certain projects intended to attract investments, create jobs, and increase growth. Based on consultations with the 'emerging civil society' on the priorities of the Tunisian economy, these players are working together to provide financial and technical assistance to support the efforts of the interim Tunisian government to create and implement reform programmes that can address the urgent needs of the country's economy (World Bank 2012a). Creating a suitable environment for investment and facilitating the establishment of new businesses are important areas where Tunisia needs help. The EBRD will be investing in various economic projects, with the main focus on renewable energy. With this financial support, the EBRD will not only target the economy and growth, but will also share its experience regarding democratization and reforms of the market economy.

Tunisia's labour force is also in need of technical and financial support. The former government started a reform process in the mid-1990s through the *Mise à Niveau de la Formation et de l'Emploi (Manforme)*. The main objectives here have been to bridge the gap

between supply and demand, to promote flexible training capacity, to meet specific and changing skill requirements, and to support training centres to spread skills and know-how to the labour force in order to meet market demands (OECD 2008: 647). Another important area is reform of the educational system. Recognizing this as crucial to economic development, the EU has contributed since the beginning of the reform period to reform of the national education system at primary, secondary and higher levels, as well as in the field of vocational training, to promote achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. The integration process of human resources in the labour market has been initiated, but still represents a major challenge for Tunisia.

The EU and other actors have been supporting economic development in Tunisia and other countries for a long time. This area has been the most advanced aspect of EU–Tunisia relations. Now we can see at least some changes in the allocation of economic support to address the urgent needs of the Tunisian economy: marginalized areas, unemployment and growth. Maintaining economic support is crucial to facilitate the work of the interim government regarding political reforms.

In sum, we see that significant reforms are being implemented, with a focus on liberalizing the economy further and fostering economic development and growth. These steps allow Tunisia to have better access to the internal market, as well as moving the economy closer to adapting to EU norms.

## 6. Participation in EU policies

As Tunisia was the first country to sign an Association Agreement,<sup>7</sup> its participation in EU policies and negotiations has been more advanced than that of other countries. Meetings and cooperation between the two parties were developed even prior to the events of the Arab Spring events. In this section, I discuss the actors involved in Tunisia's participation in EU policies in addition to the policies themselves.

### 6.1 Active participation in meetings

Meetings between Tunisia and the EU are frequent, and involve different actors at different levels. The highest political level is through the Association Council, which was established with the AA. The Association Council is the ministerial meeting that convenes on yearly basis and otherwise as necessary. It is composed of 'the Council of the European Union and members of the Commission of the European Communities, on the one hand, and of members of the Government of the Republic of Tunisia, on the other' (Article 79 of the Association Agreement). The chairmanship of the Association Council is held in turn between 'a representative of the Presidency of the Council of the European Union and by a representative of the Government of the Republic of Tunisia' (Article 82.3). All decisions are to be taken in agreement between the parties involved.

The first meeting of the Association Council following the Tunisian revolution was held in Brussels on 19 November 2012, chaired by the Tunisian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Rafik Abdessalem. This meeting 'provided an opportunity to seal a political agreement on the Privileged Partnership between Tunisia and the EU, as exemplified by the new Action Plan' (EU Council 19 November 2012). The meeting built on the Tunisian proposal presented at the Eighth Association Council meeting in March 2010. Furthermore, the EU and Tunisia agreed to establish a Task Force to support Tunisia's transition and better coordinate EU and international instruments. This Task Force is co-chaired by the High Representative and the Tunisian Prime Minister (European Commission 2011b). The joint Tunisia–EU Task Force held its first meeting on 28–29 September 2011 in Tunis. This offered an opportunity for the Tunisian authorities to give an orientation on their preparations for the presidential and parliamentary elections, in addition to the 'economic and social development strategy for 2012–

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<sup>7</sup> Tunisia signed its Association Agreement with the EU on 17 July 1995; this entered into force on 1 March 1998.

2016 ('Jasmin Plan'), while underlining the short term challenges confronting the country' (EEAS 2011). The meeting was attended by representatives of international organizations and third countries who 'expressed their support to the democratisation, development and reform process, and underlined that the success of this process would benefit both the stability and prosperity of Tunisia and that of the entire region' (EEAS 2011). During this meeting, the EU and Tunisian authorities announced 30 September as the start of the Privileged Partnership negotiations. This step not only involved authorities at the executive level but also entailed 'a step change in bilateral relations. It will strengthen political cooperation, in particular between the Tunisian Parliament and the European Parliament, boost the democratisation process and support progressive integration in the European Union's Internal Market, through a process of legislative and regulatory approximation in the spirit of the 2020 initiative' (EEAS 2011).

With the Privileged Partnership (PP), the EU and Tunisia agreed on a new Action Plan that also brought the level of integration one step higher. The Action Plan offers 'Tunisia a stake in the internal market and the possibility of participating progressively in key aspects of EU policies and programmes' in addition to increasing Tunisian involvement in some Community meetings and discussion – mainly related to the issues highlighted in the Action Plan (EEAS 2013). The Action Plan also reflects a high level of involvement in the preparation, implementation and review phases. Both the EU and Tunisian authorities review the implementation of the Action Plan and 'jointly amend and/or update the Action Plan on a regular basis to reflect progress in addressing the priorities' (EEAS 2013).

However, participation in negotiations is still limited to Tunisian officials and their EU counterparts. When it comes to implementation of some aspects of the agreements and discussing necessary practical measures that require the involvement of other actors – such as civil servants, or security force leaders – then there will be delegations representing the actors in question. The role of civil society is crucial to any functioning democracy, but this was long ignored in Tunisia. Not only were civil society groups banned from functioning freely, they were also were not included in any of the negotiations between the EU and Tunisia under Ben Ali. Even after the fall of Ben Ali, civil society has not been involved in the PP negotiating process, 'although the issues at play in the partnership constitute part of their daily work with regards to the protection of human rights' (FIDH 3 December 2013). This neglect of the importance of Tunisian civil society in EU–Tunisia relations moved civil society actors to call for their inclusion in the talks and the reform process, in addition to being 'recognised and involved as a full-fledged partner in identifying priorities and assessing policies implemented in the framework of EU–Tunisia relations' (Euro–Mediterranean Human Rights Network 2013).

Pressure from civil society actors succeeded in pushing the Tunisian government and the EU to agree on including civil society groups in the PP implementation process in addition to the ‘follow-up and assessment of the privileged Partnership’s Action Plan’ (Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network 2013).

## 6.2 Participation in some policies

The EU–Tunisia agreements cover wide range of policies (including R&D, healthcare, the environment, energy, infrastructure and civil society). Tunisia is involved in many programmes with its EU counterparts, with a high level of integration and cooperation. Our focus here will be on trade relations and security issues.

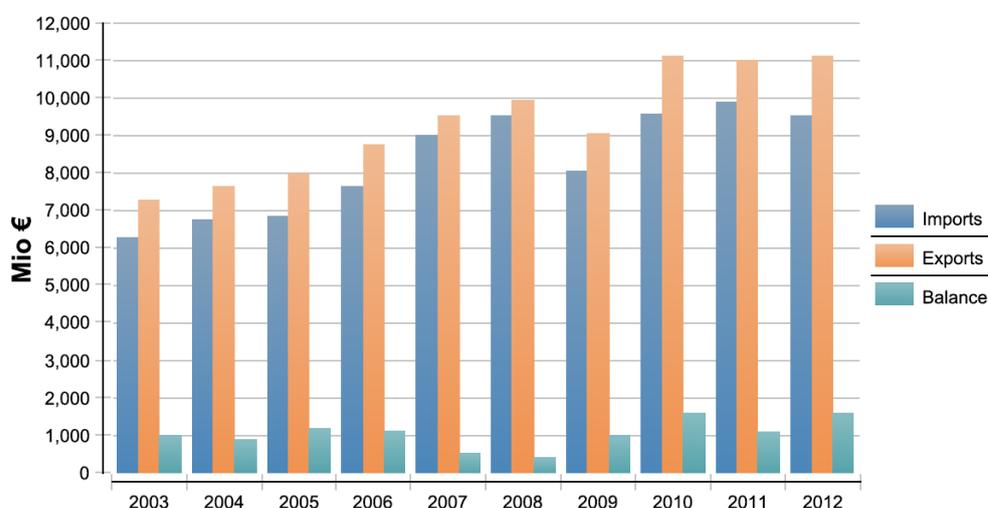
### 6.2.1 Trade and access to the Internal Market

In economic terms,<sup>8</sup> the EU is considered Tunisia’s primary trading partner. Access to the market has increased over the years, leading to deeper integration. With the exception of the small slowdown in 2009 due to the euro crisis, trade relations between the EU and Tunisia have been increasing since the 2003 (see Figure 1). In 2012, total trade between the EU and Tunisia amounted to €20.6 billion, or approximately 55.9 per cent of all Tunisian trade (European Commission 2013a). Here the EU absorbs 74.1 per cent of Tunisia’s exports, while 66.9 per cent of the country’s imports come from the EU (European Commission 2012a).

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<sup>8</sup> Within the framework of the Barcelona Process, Tunisia was among the major beneficiaries from the *Mesures d’accompagnement* (MEDA) Programme (both MEDA I and MEDA II; 1995-2006) with an annual average commitment reaching around €80 million. With the ENP, the cooperation was strengthened and the *National Indicative Programme* (NIP) for the period 2007–2010 allocated €300 million for three main areas: economic governance, competitiveness, and convergence with the EU; human resources and improvements in employability; and sustainable development. The NIP for 2011–2013 has a budget of €240 million that focuses on the social (employment), economic (mainly developing enterprises), and the governance sectors (mainly judicial system).

Figure 1 EU Trade Flows and Balance with Tunisia



Source: European Commission, 2013b, p. 3.

In 2008, Tunisia was the first Mediterranean country to remove tariffs for industrial products, thus entering into a free trade area with the EU. Tunisia has become the EU's 31st largest trading partner (European Commission 2010). Furthermore, on 14 December 2011, 'the Council adopted negotiating directives for Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (DCFTAs) with Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia' (European Commission 2013a). A DCFTA with Tunisia will support the country's efforts to reform the economy, in addition to creating an investment-friendly climate. It will move 'beyond the scope of the existing Association Agreement to include trade in services, government procurement, competition, intellectual property rights, and investment protection. Overall, it could lead to a gradual integration of Tunisia's economy into the EU single market. The main objective of the DCFTA is to bring Tunisian legislation closer to EU legislation in trade-related areas' (European Commission 2013a).

### 6.2.2 Cooperation on security issues

EU–Tunisian cooperation in issues related to the Common Security and Defence Policy in addition to Justice and Home Affairs has been developing since the Barcelona Process. Both parties 'have undertaken to strengthen their cooperation in the field of migration and asylum' (EU Council 2013). The EU and Tunisia have concluded a Mobility Partnership, still awaiting signature. This Mobility Partnership will mean enhanced cooperation on refugees, asylum and migration issues. In order to strengthen border control, the European External Action Service (EEAS) recommended that one should 'use the opportunities provided under the ongoing peer reviews on border management and

security sector reform to engage with the Tunisian authorities' (EU Council 19 November 2013).

Cooperation on fighting organized crime and trafficking is very active. Furthermore, the EU Mediterranean member-states and North Africa's Tunisia, Algeria and Egypt are planning to establish the Seahorse Mediterranean network by 2015. This network will allow the involved states 'to directly exchange factual information on incidents and patrols with each other in near-real time via satellite communication' (European Commission 4 December 2013). Regarding the refugee situation, Tunisia is involved in , *inter alia*, the Regional Protection Programmes (RPPs), aimed at improving the 'situation of the refugees at the local level' (European Commission 4 December 2013).

Most of these issues are highlighted in the Action Plan in greater detail in the section on Justice and Home Affairs and under 'Regional and international issues, cooperation on external relations and security questions, conflict prevention and crisis management' (EEAS 2013).

## 7. Attractiveness of the EU

Despite its blunt support to the Ben Ali regime, the EU is still viewed positively in Tunisia, and Tunisians see the EU as a legitimate actor in the region (interviews with various members of the Tunisian Constituent Assembly and government officials, October 2013). The EU is perceived more positively than other players in Tunisia due to its credibility (based on its soft power) and its historic relations with the region. Here it is important to distinguish between the EU and its individual member-states. For example, Tunisians have not forgotten the when the French Defence Minister Michelle Alliot-Marie offered Ben Ali support to suppress the revolution. This created tensions with France, but not with the EU (interviews with Tunisian officials, October 2013). That said, trade relations and cooperation with France continued: France has strong trade relations and investments in Tunisia.

Support for EU economic development, trade and human rights is very high in Tunisia –87, 83 and 76 per cent, respectively, in 2012 (ENPI 2013). The ENPI survey, conducted in November–December 2012, found that ‘77% of Tunisians feel the EU is an important partner, with 64% believing the EU and Tunisia share sufficient common values to be able to cooperate – significantly higher than the average for the ENPI South region (46% and 43% respectively)’ (ENPI 2013). Moreover, as one official highlighted in an interview in October 2013, the EU does not face competition from other international actors in Tunisia.

Despite the Qatari support to Tunisia during and after the revolution, there is no competition with the EU. Unlike the case in Morocco, where Saudi Arabia has good relations and many investments, Tunisia’s relations between Saudi Arabia are not as developed, and they deteriorated when Saudi Arabia provided Ben Ali with political asylum. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) welcomed the change in Tunisia and offered financial support; however, relations worsened after differences of opinion between Tunisia and the UAE on Egypt’s military coup in 2013. Following the speech given by the Tunisian president at the United Nations, in which he criticized the 2013 military coup in Egypt, UAE recalled its ambassador from Tunisia (*PressTV* 28 September 2013).

The geographical closeness, historical relations and close ties between Tunisia and the EU are unique. These ties, strengthened in agreements that date back to March 1969 and cover a wide range of policies and areas, have been developing and strengthening since then.

## 8. Conclusions

This contribution has examined the extent to which Tunisia can be seen as an integrated part of the EU security community. It has analysed the strength of Tunisian integration according to three dimensions of integration: scope of the agreements, level of adaptation, and the level of participation. In all three areas we found strong levels of cooperation and integration. The scope of the agreements is very thorough and comprehensive; indeed, most articles in the Action Plan are identical with chapters of the *acquis*. The level of adapting to EU rules of norms and complying with EU values varies, but is especially high in areas like cooperation in justice and home affairs, regional policies, regional cooperation on common security threats and issues (border control, anti-terrorism, countering illegal migration), in addition to trade relations. Also the level of participation is very advanced between Tunisia and the EU. Tunisian authorities participate in EU meetings at various levels, and Tunisians are working together with the EU as regards a wide range of policies. Moreover, in comparison to the EU's relations with the eastern ENP countries, it seems that southern ENP countries (Tunisia in particular) are more involved in the drafting of the agreements and policies. Therefore, we may say that Tunisia is strongly integrated in the EU security community.

How attractive, then, does Tunisia find the EU, also in comparison to other international and regional players? My interviews conducted in Tunisia in October 2013 clearly indicate the EU is not facing any threat to its position in Tunisia from any other actor: it is still the main security and economic player not only in Tunisia but also in the MENA (Bremberg and Rieker 2014). The EU is still the most attractive actor and the most accepted by both Tunisian elites and the general population.

Following the Arab Spring, the process of security- building that the EU had been developing along with authoritarian regimes in the MENA seemed threatened. Today, with the Dignity Revolution in Tunisia and the new reality highlighting the people's quest for democracy, the EU seems to have realized that it cannot continue to ignore democratic reforms. Democracy areas in action plans, once by-passed, are now getting more attention. The EU has increased its support and is focusing on areas that were ignored either by domestic authorities or by the EU for decades, due to fears of the rise of Islamists, security threats and increased immigration to the EU.

Tunisia offers a real test case for the reformed ENP. It presents a window of opportunity for the EU to promote and support democratic transition and consolidation in the region. Without a functioning economy and reformed institutions capable of creating jobs and addressing the demands of the people, there is no hope for democracy to prosper and for stability and security to be maintained in Tunisia. The Privileged Partnership has doubled EU economic aid to various economic sectors (regional development, economic growth, employment, etc.) in addition to planning access to the European market. Economic development is important for dealing with the problems inherited from the Ben Ali era and led to the revolution, and for ensuing stability. It is also a necessary condition for democratic transition and consolidation.

The EU has stepped up its support for further political and institutional reforms intended to promote more political participation and rights, good governance and accountability – reforms that were blocked by the Ben Ali regime. Also the judiciary is receiving its share of reform. EU support to civil society groups was not significant in the pre-Arab Spring era, whether due to the religious ideology of some of those groups or because the regimes blocked the funding. Following the Arab Spring, the EU and its member-states have also increased financial and technical aid for civil society groups, and have called on the new government to return to such groups the funds frozen by the Ben Ali regime.

The EU has increased its support in several economic and political areas, while keeping an eye on security and stability. The EU avoidance of using negative conditionality and sanctions in its relations with Tunisia and the neighbours makes it a typical liberal/civilian actor that uses economic incentives to push the targeted country to comply with rules and norms. This reality has not changed with events of the Arab Spring. The EU attitude regarding the promotion of democracy beyond its borders still operates within the framework of the ENP, using the same old tools to address a new situation. With the regime change in Tunisia, the EU pushed for the Privileged Partnership, equivalent to the advanced status that both Morocco and Jordan have enjoyed since 2008 – despite the lack of democratic reforms.

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# Appendix

Table 1 Comparison between the Accession Chapters and the Action Plan with Tunisia

<b>Enlargement Chapters</b>	<b>Action Plan with Tunisia</b>
Chapter 1: Free movement of goods	Movement of Goods: Trade relations Customs Technical rules, conformity evaluation standards and procedures (EU harmonised sector) Elimination of restrictions, streamlined administration (non-harmonized EU areas)
Chapter 2: Freedom of movement for workers	Movement of persons, particularly workers, and coordination of social security systems
Chapter 3: Right of establishment and freedom to provide services	Right of Establishment, company law and services: Right of establishment and company law Services Financial services
Chapter 4: Free movement of capital	Capital movements and current payments
Chapter 5: Public procurement	Public procurement
Chapter 6: Company law	Right of Establishment, company law and services: Company law
Chapter 7: Intellectual property law	Intellectual and industrial property rights
Chapter 8: Competition policy	Competition Policy State monopolies State aid
Chapter 9: Financial services	Financial control
Chapter 10: Information society and media	Information society
Chapter 11: Agriculture and rural development	Economic and social reform and development: Regional Development Sustainable Development
Chapter 12: Food safety, veterinary and phytosanitary policy	Health and plant health issues
Chapter 13: Fisheries	NA

Chapter 14: Transport policy	Transport
Chapter 15: Energy	Energy
Chapter 16: Taxation	Taxation
Chapter 17: Economic and monetary policy	As joining Economic and Monetary Union is not applicable, however the Action Plans focus on: Economic and social reform and development: Macroeconomic framework Structural reform and progress toward a functioning and competitive market economy
Chapter 18: Statistics	Statistics
Chapter 19: Social policy and employment	Political Dialogue and Reform: Fundamental Social rights and core labour standards Economic and social reform and development: Cooperation on social policy and employment
Chapter 20: Enterprise and industrial policy	Enterprise Policy Intellectual and industrial property rights
Chapter 21: Trans-European networks	NA
Chapter 22: Regional policy and coordination of structural instruments	Political Dialogue and Reform: Regional and international issues, cooperation on external relations and security questions, conflict prevention and crisis management Regional cooperation and initiative
Chapter 23: Judiciary and fundamental rights	Political Dialogue and Reforms: Democracy and the rule of law
Chapter 24: Justice, freedom and security	Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms Cooperation on Justice and home affairs Migration (legal and illegal, re-admission, visas, asylum) Border management Combating organised crime (including the smuggling of migrants and trafficking of human beings) Drugs Money laundering, economic and financial crimes Judicial and police cooperation
Chapter 25: Science and research	Science and technology, research and development
Chapter 26: Education and culture	People-to-people contacts: Education, Training and Youth Cultural Cooperation
Chapter 27: Environment	Environment
Chapter 28: Consumer and health protection	Public Health
Chapter 29: Customs union	NA

Chapter 30: External relations	Regional and international issues, cooperation on external relations and security questions, conflict prevention and crisis management
Chapter 31: Foreign, security and defence policy	
Chapter 32: Financial control	NA
Chapter 33: Financial and budgetary provisions	NA
Chapter 34 – Institutions	NA
Chapter 35 – Other issues	NA
NA	Civil society cooperation
NA	Cultural cooperation

Source: Personal compilation (2013) from the European Commission (n.d.) website on Enlargement and European Union External Action



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