

DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR EXTERNAL POLICIES
POLICY DEPARTMENT



**EU policies in Tunisia
before and after
the Revolution**

AFET



STUDY

EU policies in Tunisia before and after the Revolution

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the evolution and potential impacts of EU policies in Tunisia before and after the Revolution using an innovative analytical framework. To do that, the most important milestones in the frameworks of cooperation agreed between the EU and Tunisia and the policies implemented, are described. The impact of such policies before the Revolution and their subsequent evolution, are analysed to highlight the causes and the consequences of the shifting approach of the EU towards Tunisia. Finally, the analysis is complemented with inputs collected via a consultation from key participants across the Tunisian political and civil society landscape. In the pre-Revolution period, EU relations with Tunisia were narrowed down to an exchange of commercial, financial and strategic interests, in line with most development aid programmes across the world. The Tunisian Revolution brought two fundamental dynamics – democratisation and destabilisation – which had broad repercussions on the relations between Tunisia and the EU. These dynamics enhanced the probability of more synergies and complementarities between the two partners' political projects and the necessity to strengthen financial support, providing the EU with a window of opportunity for enhanced cooperation, underlined in a win-win philosophy, co-development and deeper integration.

This paper was requested by the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs.

English-language manuscript was completed on 21 April 2016.

Printed in Belgium.

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ISBN 978-92-823-9145-7 (pdf)

ISBN 978-92-823-9144-0 (print)

doi:10.2861/859618 (pdf)

doi:10.2861/504368 (print)

Catalogue number: QA-01-16-422-EN-N (pdf)

Catalogue number: QA-01-16-422-EN-C (print)

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1 Executive summary

Tunisia has been a **key partner** of the European Union (EU) since the very beginning of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, launched in 1995 under the Barcelona Process. It was the first South Mediterranean country to sign an Association Agreement in 1998 and an Action Plan in 2005. The scope and magnitude of the partnership with the EU has been stepped up progressively, in line with its strategic importance for the country. Tunisia has been the EU neighbour more actively engaged in, firstly, advancing the negotiations on a Free Trade Area (FTA), followed by a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) and, in collaborating on security-related matters, attesting to the interest both partners have in mutually addressing the main opportunities and challenges of the Mediterranean region as a whole.

In this study, the evolution and impact of EU policies in Tunisia – before and after the Revolution – is investigated and assessed. First, there is a description of the most important milestones in the frameworks of cooperation agreed between the EU and Tunisia and the policies and programmes implemented under such frameworks. Second, the impact of such policies before the Revolution and their subsequent evolution are analysed, using an innovative analytical framework developed for the purpose of this study, in order to highlight the causes and consequences of the shifting approach of the EU towards Tunisia and the added value this shift has brought to the cooperation between the two partners. Third, the analysis is complemented with inputs collected via a questionnaire from key players across the Tunisian government, political and civil society landscape. Fourth, conclusions and policy recommendations are formulated on the basis of the analysis performed, and the inputs collected, from the consultation.

In the pre-Revolution period, EU relations with Mediterranean partner countries, in general, and more particularly with the autocratic government of Ben Ali, were centred upon an **exchange of commercial, financial and strategic interests**, in line with most aid development programmes across the world. The rhetoric of the EU, based on the promotion of principles of democracy and market economy as the fertile soil for stability and prosperity in the region, was not always consistent with the implementation of EU policies on the ground, and this discrepancy was instrumental to the way that autocratic governments, like that of Ben Ali, perpetuated their control over the economy and the society. Hence, the analysis shows that **EU policies, implemented before the Tunisian Revolution**, relied on and **were limited by three fundamental trade-offs**, resulting from an exchange of interests with the incumbent regime. The three generic trade-offs retained in the analysis correspond to the three main axis of cooperation – political, economic and socio-cultural – and are, herewith, defined as trade versus aid, benefits versus freedoms and security versus silence.

The Tunisian Revolution brought two fundamental processes – **democratisation and destabilisation** – which had broad repercussions on the relations between Tunisia and the EU. These processes enhanced the probability of more **synergies and complementarities** between the two partners' political projects and the **necessity** to strengthen financial support, providing the EU with a **window of opportunity for enhanced cooperation**, underlined in a **win-win philosophy, co-development and deeper integration**, in line with the ambitions of the ENP. The EU enacted important changes in its policies and almost doubled its financial support in the years following the Revolution, **to seize this window of opportunity** in the three dimensions of cooperation.

The **evolution of political cooperation** between the EU and Tunisia after the Revolution is characterised by a **wide convergence of norms and values**, but also by the **emergence of new criticisms and related challenges**. In the areas of cooperation in which the EU and Tunisia have common values and shared interests, such as the building and consolidation of democratic institutions, political dialogue

could be substantially deepened. In the areas of cooperation in which the EU tends to reflect its own interests in the agreements, as in the case of migration related matters, the emergence of a number of participants expressing their views in the public domain, is forcing the EU to reconsider the way political dialogue is held. To **ensure consistency between rhetoric and practice of EU policies in the country to enhance transversal coordination between areas of cooperation and to increase participation** in the formulation and prioritisation of the policies, would make the EU far more sympathetic in the eyes of the Tunisian stakeholders and create the conditions for effective co-ownership of the policies implemented. More broadly, **building political cooperation on synergies between respective interests, rather than on supposedly shared priorities**, is tantamount to remaining in a position of trade-offs which have already proved unsustainable and that would risk, coupled with the current instability, undermining the outcomes of the Revolution.

The **margin of manoeuvre to push for socio-economic reforms**, aimed at laying the ground for trade liberalisation and limiting its detrimental effects in the short run, broadened with the Revolution, paving the way for greater economic integration and the establishment of a DCFTA. On the other hand, **persistent socio-economic and budgetary difficulties**, related to the instability and uncertainty of the transition period, remain a substantial challenge for Tunisia. This complicates the adoption of structural reforms, possibly involving delicate adjustments and, thus, requiring wide acceptance throughout society in order to be successfully implemented. In this context, this study argues that the promotion of socio-economic reforms that are most likely to bring tangible results in terms of employment creation, should be unambiguously prioritised and the **risks of moving too fast forward in much debated DCFTA negotiations, given the delicate situation in which the country finds itself**, should be acknowledged.

The scope of **socio-cultural cooperation between the EU and Tunisia** widened substantially after the Revolution, with the attention of the EU shifting from the government to the society at large. This completely fresh approach to socio-cultural cooperation entails the **direct engagement of the EU with a variety of participants**. This brings new opportunities but also new challenges, most particularly related to the discrepancies between the rhetoric and the practice of EU policies and the related criticisms coming from a lively and exigent emerging civil society.

Policy recommendations

- The EU should mind the gap between the perception and the realities on the ground when exporting its normative approach and adapt it to the broad convergence of norms and values with post Revolution countries such as Tunisia. The persistent discrepancies between the rhetoric accompanying its neighbourhood policy in pre-Revolution countries progressively eroded its legitimacy in the eyes of a variety of participants now engaging in policy dialogue. A renewed approach based on complementarities, synergies win-win and co-development should progressively emerge. A fully-fledged political, economic and social assessment conducted, whenever possible, with the stakeholders themselves is needed to maximise the impact of EU policies on the ground.
- The one-size-fits-all approach of the EU neighbourhood policy, under which the support provided to partner countries is implemented on the basis of a rather limited differentiation principle, should be reviewed for the case of Tunisia. The country fully embarked upon a democratisation process, entailing a number of destabilising effects, which requires ad-hoc measures of support and a much more tailored prioritisation of such measures, necessitating an enhancement of transversal coordination between areas of cooperation and more flexible planning in terms of timing. These changes in the cooperation approach to Tunisia would be in line with the political declaration for a Privileged Partnership, formulated in 2012. A new prospect should be provided to the country. The more for more principle could be lifted when Tunisia would complete a list of requirements related to realised political, economic and social reforms to ensure convergence to what can be called 'modern

democracies' to benefit from such a lift. This would render the partnership symmetric and would give positive prospects to other south Mediterranean countries that would embark in similar processes.

- The EU should be decisive in stepping up its action in terms of financial support and technical assistance to Tunisia, to cope with the political, economic and social needs stemming from the emergency, so as to maximise the chances for a successful democratisation and progressive stabilisation of the country. Such action should be done in collaboration and close coordination with international partners. Tunisia hangs in the balance between being, on one hand, an example of successful auto-determination for the whole South Mediterranean region and, on the other, falling under the pressure of radicalisation (the country is, as of today, the main purveyor of foreign fighters) and a neighbour of instable Libya. It is in the interest of the EU to further step-up its support and tip the scale towards democratisation and stabilisation as this is key for the security and stability for Europe.
- **On the political front**, the EU should better exploit the existing synergies between the Tunisian political project and its own, enhancing co-ownership of the policy dialogue, most particularly by dedicating more funds to create better understanding and to foster consensus over future policies that need to be implemented in the society at large. A unilateral, normative approach not reflecting the different existing views within the Tunisian political spectrum, could prevent the EU from turning the window of opportunity for enhanced cooperation brought by the Tunisian Revolution into concrete steps forward in the association with Tunisia. Concrete actions encompass the development and the implementation of a comprehensive support approach to democracy to which technical and financial means are allocated and carefully prioritised; Moreover a clear support action must target the judicial and the security sectors via more cooperation with EU institutions to achieve tangible progresses.
- **On the economic front**, the EU should review its approach to economic integration via the DFTCA and leave more leeway for a step-by-step approach, emphasising local priorities and economic needs. Partial and sectorial liberalisation should be explored, in line with the anticipated outcomes and tangible results of structural economic reforms, which will enable the Tunisian economy to cope with further trade openness, without perishing during the adjustment phase in particular in terms of the potential detrimental consequences on the already fragile employment; Moreover, concrete actions should target 1) regional development and the reduction of inequality for example allowing Tunisia to benefit from the EU regional policy and structural funds; 2) micro-small and medium sized enterprises development and their financing beyond an ailed banking sector, for example by supporting the enhancement of the role of credit guarantees organisations nationally and regionally, microcredit, cooperative finance...
- **On the social front**, the EU should focus on consolidating the civil society landscape, allocating an adequate amount of funds to the development of governance and networking skills of civil society organisations, while promoting a civic rather than politicised approach to their activities. This is a prerequisite to much needed, but also a possible limitation in greater participation of civil society in the policy dialogue between EU and Tunisia. Hence full-fledged independent assessments are needed to ensure that the supported organisations are truly engaged in the democratisation and stabilisation process of the country. In addition, the mobility partnership must be implemented without delay. Actions such as visa waiver for Tunisia must be explored, facilitation of visas to entrepreneurs, researchers, scientists, professors... should be granted. In the field of science, technology and innovation, an EU-Tunisia comprehensive action plan must be devised between both partners to agree on the priorities of the country in this field. More support to students and researchers should be given under the Erasmus programmes and other regional Euro-Mediterranean university networks.

2 Introduction and rationale

Tunisia has been a **key partner** of the European Union (EU) since the very beginning of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership launched in 1995 under the Barcelona Process. It was the first South Mediterranean country to sign an Association Agreement in 1998 and an Action Plan in 2005. The scope and magnitude of the partnership with the EU has been stepped up progressively, in line with its strategic importance for the country. Tunisia has been the EU neighbour more actively engaged, firstly in advancing the negotiations on a Free Trade Area (FTA), secondly on a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) and then in collaborating on security-related matters, attesting to the interest both partners have in together addressing the main opportunities and challenges of the Mediterranean region as a whole. The steady growth of both trade and aid flow between Tunisia and the EU registered in most recent years (with the exception of the period corresponding to the economic crisis in the EU) is in line with this commitment and resulted in the EU strengthening its position as main commercial partner (EU 28 accounts for 64.7 % of imports and 72.5 % of exports as of 2014, according to data published by the European Commission) and being amongst the most important providers of aid to the country.

The scope of the partnership between the EU and Tunisia widened with the subsequent revisions of the EU frameworks of cooperation with its neighbouring countries. It developed progressively from an initially restricted 'trade versus aid' formula to a more comprehensive approach, covering all aspects of Tunisia's polity, economy and society, within and across sectors.

The Tunisian Revolution brought fundamental changes in the political, economic and social conditions in the countries of the region, shaking off long-lasting status quos that were based on authoritarian and repressive regimes. It has also led to questioning of EU policies in the region, resulting in a thorough review of the EU approach towards its neighbourhood. The main results of this review consist in the application of the 'more for more' and differentiation principles within the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), which basically consist in rewarding, with additional support (technical and financial), those partner countries advancing faster with democratic reforms that are rooted in shared norms and values with the EU. These principles have been put into practice in the Mediterranean region through the implementation of the SPRING programme¹, which mainly benefitted Tunisia, in virtue of the ambitious process of democratic transition in which the country has embarked peacefully.

The so-called Arab Spring unfolded in **two fundamental processes** in Tunisia, namely **democratisation** and **destabilisation**. The terms of the equation between these two processes seemed to have shaped the evolution of the situation in the Mediterranean region, with Tunisia being the only country where the challenges of destabilisation did not prevail over the democratisation of the political system, as compared to other countries in the region, in particular Syria and Libya. In fact, whereas the destabilisation of the incumbent power within already tense regions and the resulting social and economic crisis have led to the disintegration of the Syrian and Libyan societies, or the reaffirmation of traditional political and/or military powers in other countries through more or less ambitious reforms, Tunisia has managed, so far, to move forward with a fully-fledged democratic transition and subsequent reforms², while facing severe economic and social difficulties within a complex and conflictual regional

¹ The Support to Partnership, Reform and Inclusive Growth - SPRING programme provided the EU with the necessary tools to step-up its support to Tunisia without compromising the coherence of its external actions in the neighbourhood, provided that under the 'more for more' principle the allocation of funds is tied to the ambition of the democratic reforms implemented in the partner country. See the EC memo on the adoption of the SPRING programme available at: [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release MEMO-11-636 en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-11-636_en.htm).

² However, the worrying surge of home-grown terrorism is leading in some instances to moving backwards in the reforms such as for example the unfortunate recent reaffirmation of the death penalty in the penal code. There is hence a tangible risk that basic human rights would be bridged.

context. A constituent assembly and a transition government were elected in 2011; a modern constitution was adopted in 2014, followed by parliamentary and presidential elections held later the same year. The transition has been accompanied by the flourishing of a lively civil society, which contributed substantially to the works of the constituent assembly through the intermediation of the Quartet – composed of the Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT), the Tunisian Confederation of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts (UTICA), the Tunisian Human Rights League (LTDH) and the Tunisian Order of Lawyers (ONAT) – and its mediation role between political factions. The transition has also shown the fundamental socio-economic weaknesses inherited from the repressive pre-Revolution regime, leading to thousands of educated and impatient young Tunisians³ fleeing the country to serve as foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq.

The EU strived to adapt its policies to the rapidly changing situation in Tunisia and, potentially, to make the most out of the **window of opportunity for enhanced cooperation** created by the democratic transition in the country. This resulted in stepping up the cooperation with Tunisia and in a substantial increase of funds allocated – from EUR 540 million in grants initially planned for the period between 2007 and 2013, to the EUR 775 million finally disbursed⁴ – complemented with up to EUR 500 million of Macro-Financial Assistance (MFA)⁵ and substantial lending operations through the European Investment Bank (EIB), with more than a billion invested since 2011⁶. These funds have been channelled into building the capacity in new or substantially renewed democratic institutions, supporting the government in dealing with the delicate situation of public finances and promoting the emergence of a lively civil society capable of responding to the changing realities.

The Tunisian Revolution undoubtedly opened a window of opportunity for the EU but, at the same time, it brought new challenges, consisting in finding **an optimal approach** between supporting the building of institutions and promoting reforms, which is more medium to long term, while responding to the economic, social and security emergencies which, by nature, require short term answers by, **inclusive of all key participants** in the democratic transition. Lessons learnt from other neighbouring countries suggest that the room for manoeuvre enjoyed by the EU when advocating for reforms, as well as the sustainability of the policies implemented, depend on the perception of all key participants across society in the region or countries where the EU is active. This room for manoeuvre appears to be somewhat constrained where political and civil society leaders are polarised between pro and anti EU⁷. In this sense, ensuring that the partnership with the EU is deemed strategic and is underpinned in a win-win philosophy by all key participants within the democratic transition, is herewith considered a crucial issue in ensuring there is a broad acceptance that will guarantee the effectiveness of EU policies implemented in the countries in the coming years.

In this study, the evolution and impact of EU policies in Tunisia – before and after the Revolution – is investigated and assessed. First, there is a description of the most important milestones in the frameworks of cooperation agreed between the EU and Tunisia and the policies and programmes implemented under such frameworks. Second, the impact of such policies before the Revolution and

³ According to a BBC report in March 2016, Tunisia exports the highest number of foreign fighters followed by Saudi Arabia; for further information see: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-27838034>.

⁴ See the overview of activities and results of the European Neighbourhood Policy available at: <http://enpi-info.eu/medportal/publications/726/European-Neighbourhood-Instrument-2007-2013-%E2%80%93-Overview-of-Activities-and-Results> (p. 35).

⁵ See the press release available at: http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-16-289_it.htm.

⁶ See the section on financial institutions of the 2014 annual report on the EU cooperation in Tunisia available at: http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/tunisia/more_info/publications/index_fr.htm (p. 148).

⁷ This statement is based on preliminary findings of research conducted by the authors in EU neighbouring countries under the Eastern Partnership yet to be published.

their subsequent evolution are analysed, using an innovative analytical framework to highlight the causes and the consequences of the shifting approach of the EU towards Tunisia and the added value this shift has brought to the cooperation between the two partners. Third, the analysis is complemented with inputs collected via a questionnaire from key participants across the Tunisian government, political and civil society landscape (Annex). Fourth, conclusions and policy recommendations are formulated on the basis of the analysis performed and the inputs collected from the consultation.

In the following sections of this study, the strategies laid down and the policies and programmes implemented by the EU in Tunisia before and after the Revolution are described; the conceptual framework retained to analyse the evolution of the policies implemented after the Revolution is illustrated; the causes and consequences of such evolution are thoroughly analysed; and the conclusions and policy recommendations are finally formulated, taking into account the inputs from key participants in Tunisia.

3 EU policies before and after the Revolution in Tunisia

The policy of the EU towards countries of the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean, among which Tunisia stands out as a key partner, has two main objectives; namely to encourage political and economic reforms in each individual country, in due respect of its specificities, and to encourage regional cooperation among the countries of the region themselves and with the EU. These two broad objectives are pursued respectively through bilateral and regional cooperation within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), complemented by specific programmes for the participation of partner countries in EU programmes (e.g. TEMPUS, Erasmus Mundus, Research Framework Programmes, H2020) or the cooperation between regions lying at the border between two countries, the so-called cross-border cooperation (CBC).

The overall objective of **bilateral cooperation through the ENP** is to achieve the closest possible political association and the greatest possible degree of economic integration, building on common interests and shared values of democracy, rule of law, respect for human rights and social cohesion. The ENP is a jointly owned initiative and its implementation engages, on the one hand, the partner country on a path of political and economic reforms aimed at enhancing democracy, human rights, rule of law, good governance, market economy principles and sustainable development, and on the other, the EU in supporting these objectives through financial support, economic integration, visa facilitation, technical assistance and civil society support.

The overall objective of **regional cooperation through the UfM** is to provide a unique forum to enhance regional cooperation and dialogue in the Euro-Mediterranean region, bringing together the 28 EU Member States and 15 North African and Middle Eastern countries, to formulate regional priorities and decide on specific cooperation initiatives to be put in place. The UfM covers six priority areas of cooperation, namely; business development, transport and urban development, energy, water and environment, higher education and research and social and civil affairs.

In this section, the subsequent bilateral, regional and cross-border strategies and policies implemented by the EU in Tunisia are mapped, taking into account the changing context in the country, but not digging further into the causes and consequences on the state of affairs in the country, in terms of the impact and added value of the policies under study. The mapping is conducted using public information about the EU-Tunisia partnership collected from desk research. The mapping is augmented with references from secondary sources. The conceptual framework for the analysis of the evolution and impacts of EU policies in the country is newly developed in the following section, to assess EU-Tunisia policies before and after the Revolution. To provide a qualitative assessment of the evolving nature of the EU-Tunisia partnership within this framework, the desk research is complemented with a targeted consultation, using a carefully crafted questionnaire through which responses of a group of key participants within the government, political and civil society in Tunisia (in Annex) are collected and analysed.

3.1 Bilateral cooperation

Table 1 – Milestones of EU-Tunisia bilateral cooperation⁸

Milestone	Date
Association Agreement	1995/1998
European Neighbourhood Policy	2004
ENP Action Plan 2005-2010	2005
SPRING Programme	2011
Privileged Partnership	2012
ENP Action Plan 2013-2017	2014

Source: Authors

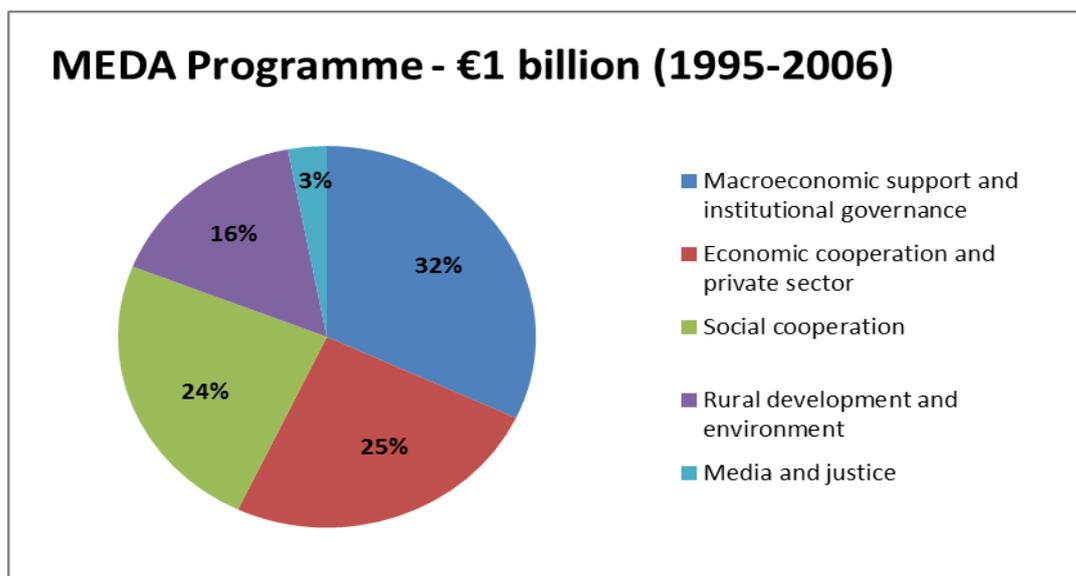
Tunisia was the first Mediterranean to sign an **Association Agreement** with the EU in 1995. The agreement aims at promoting sustainable development in the country through enhanced political dialogue and economic and financial cooperation, with a particular focus on trade liberalisation and security matters. In the period comprised between 1995 and 2006, the provisions laid down in the agreement were operationalised through the MEDA I and II programmes, which covered the different areas identified in the agreement. These programmes were complemented with financial resources allocated through the FEMIP instrument managed by the European Investment Bank (EIB), focused on creating the conditions for successful trade liberalisation and emphasising two areas of priority areas, namely private sector development and creation of an investment friendly environment.

The total financial resources allocated to Tunisia between 1995 and 2006 amounted to approximately EUR 1 billion in grants, disbursed through the MEDA programmes, and EUR 2 billion in loans disbursed under the FEMIP instrument⁹. Tunisia received 11 % of the total allocation for Mediterranean countries under MEDA I and II (EUR 9 billion) and 15 % of the total allocation under the FEMIP instrument (EUR 13 billion). In particular, under the MEDA programme EUR 320 million was allocated to macroeconomic support and institutional governance (32 % of the total), EUR 320 million to economic cooperation and private sector (25 %), EUR 240 million to social cooperation (24 %), EUR 160 million to rural development and environment (16 %) and EUR 30 million to media and justice (3 %). EUR 2 billion was allocated through the FEMIP instrument, aimed at consolidating economic infrastructure, protecting the environment and developing the private sector development.

⁸ See http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/tunisia/eu_tunisia/chronology/index_fr.htm for a more detailed chronology of bilateral relations between the EU and Tunisia.

⁹ For a review of the funds allocated through the MEDA programmes and FEMIP instruments see Estruch, E. (2007), *European Instruments and Programmes Towards Southern Mediterranean: A General Overview*, Centro Studi di Politica Internazionale (pp. 9-32). For a specific review of the MEDA II programme refer to European Commission (2009), *Evaluation of the Council Regulation N° 2698/2000 (MEDA II) and its implementation*, Final Report. For a broader overview of the Euro-Mediterranean Cooperation and the allocation of funds also see <http://www.medeas.be/en/themes/euro-mediterranean-cooperation/>.

Figure 1 – Fund allocation under the MEDA (I and II) programme for Tunisia



Source: Authors

In 2004, after the wave of enlargement, the EU launched the **European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)** to consolidate and strengthen its relations with neighbouring countries to the East and to the South. The ENP put forward shared values of democracy, rule of law, respect for human rights and social cohesion as a basis for deepened political, cultural and social cooperation. Its overall aim is to promote stability, security and prosperity in the EU neighbourhood through more comprehensive support of the reform agenda of countries such as Tunisia. The ENP builds on the Association Agreements signed with partner countries and is operationalised through ENP Actions Plans.

The main financing instrument supporting the implementation of the ENP for the period comprised between 2007 and 2013, was the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI). The financial resources made available through the ENPI were disbursed in line with three strategic objectives: supporting the democratic transition and the promotion of human rights; accompanying the transition towards the market economy; and promoting sustainable development and policies of common interest. EUR 9 billion was allocated to Mediterranean countries under the ENPI in the period 2007-2013, compared to EUR 5 billion disbursed under the MEDA II programme in the period comprised between 2000 and 2006. Tunisia ended up being the fourth main beneficiary of ENPI funds behind Palestine, Morocco and Egypt with EUR 775 million disbursed, representing approximately 8.5 % of the total allocation¹⁰. The share of total funds allocated to Tunisia slightly decreased compared to the previous periods considered (11 % between 1995 and 2006, 9 % between 2000 and 2006¹¹).

The **EU-Tunisia Action Plan** for the period comprised between 2005 and 2013, was signed in 2005 to pursue the objectives of the ENP in the country. It aimed at deepening political dialogue, trade liberalisation and economic, social, cultural and financial cooperation, supporting democratic reforms and good governance, enhancing sectorial cooperation, implementing poverty alleviation measures and developing people-to-people contacts. In concrete terms, seventy-nine measures are laid down in the Action Plan, encompassing six areas of cooperation: political dialogue and reforms, economic and social

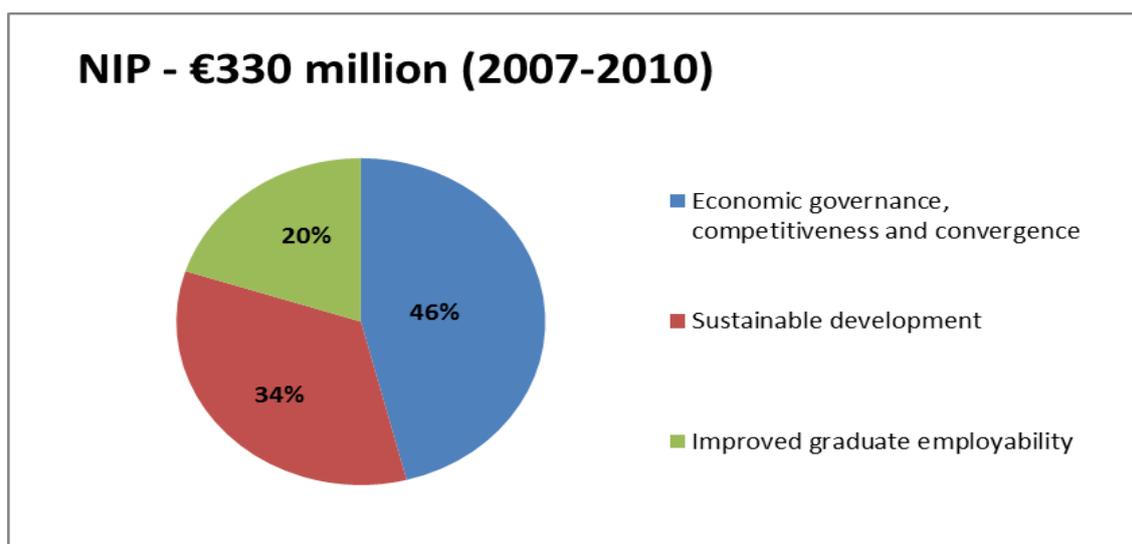
¹⁰ See Annex 1 of the overview of activities and results of the European Neighbourhood Policy available at: <http://enpi-info.eu/medportal/publications/726/European-Neighbourhood-Instrument-2007-2013-%E2%80%93-Overview-of-Activities-and-Results> (p. 74).

¹¹ Referring to data on fund allocation under MEDA I and MEDA II programmes detailed above.

reforms, trade, market and regulatory reforms, cooperation on justice and home affairs, transport, energy, information society, the environment and science and technology and people-to-people contacts.

The Action Plan was operationalised along guidelines formulated in a Country Strategy Paper (CSP) covering the period 2007-2013. The programmes to be implemented and the related allocation of funds were spelled out in two **National Indicative Programmes (NIPs)**, covering the periods 2007-2010 and 2010-2013 respectively. The total amount of resources allocated to Tunisia under the NIP for the period 2007-2010 amounted to EUR 330 million, mainly allocated to economic programmes, given the difficulties encountered in the areas of political and socio-cultural cooperation under MEDA. These programmes included economic governance, competitiveness and convergence with the EU (46 % - EUR 151 million), sustainable development (34 % - EUR 112 million) and improved graduate employability (20 % - EUR 66 million).

Figure 2 – Fund allocation under the National Indicative Programme 2007-2010 for Tunisia

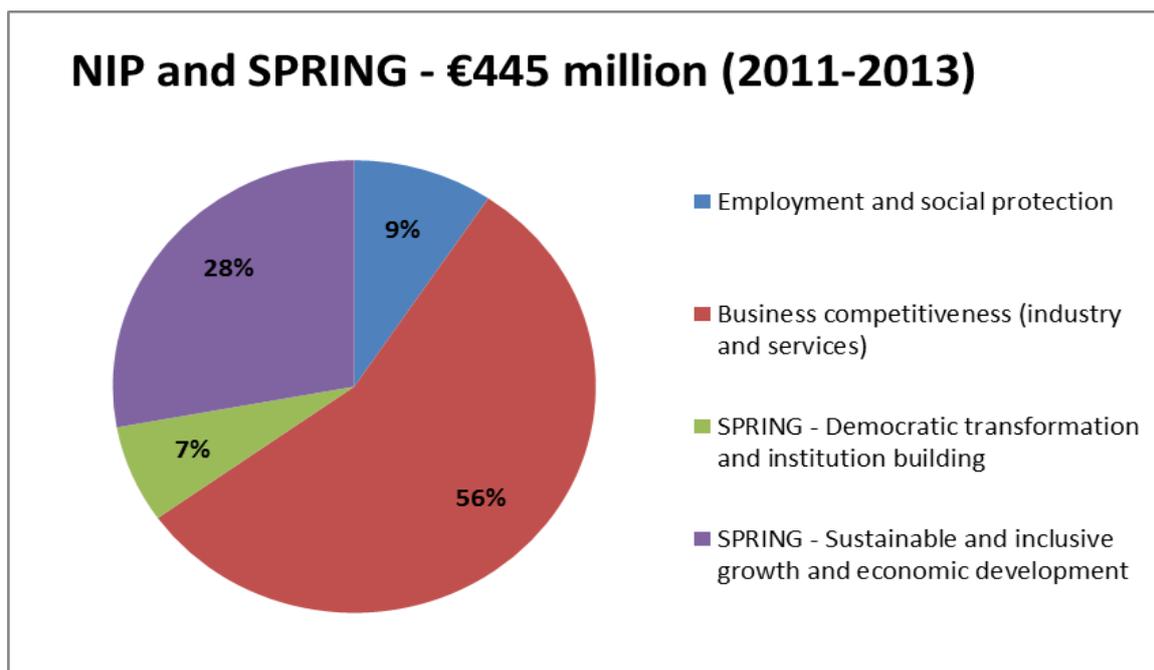


Source: Authors

The programmes implemented and the resources allocated under the NIP for the period 2011-2013 changed quite substantially from what was initially planned as a result of the Tunisian Revolution, the consequent revision of the ENP and the launching of the so-called SPRING programme. The main aim of SPRING programme was to support countries, such as Tunisia, in the process of transition to democracy while facing the related political, social and economic challenges. The overall development assistance provided to Tunisia for the period 2011-2013 eventually reached EUR 445 million, which is almost twice as much as the EUR 240 million initially forecasted for allocation, in line with what had been achieved in the period 2007-2013. The funds initially allocated were complemented with EUR 155 million disbursed under SPRING – Tunisia broadly benefitted from the ‘more-for-more’ principle in virtue of the ambitious democratic reforms implemented and quickly became the main beneficiary of the programme – and an additional EUR 35 million under the form of special measures. The programmes finally implemented under the revised NIP for the period 2011-2013 consisted in business competitiveness (56 % - EUR 249 million), employment and social protection (9 % - EUR 40 million) and two SPRING programmes respectively addressing sustainable and inclusive growth and economic development (28 % - EUR 125 million) and democratic transformation and institution building (7 % - EUR 31 million)¹².

¹² See the overview of activities and results of the European Neighbourhood Policy available at: <http://enpi-info.eu/medportal/publications//726/European-Neighbourhood-Instrument-2007-2013-%E2%80%93-Overview-of-Activities-and-Results> (p. 35).

Figure 3 – Fund allocation under the National Indicative Programme 2011-2013 for Tunisia



Source: Authors

ENPI resources were allocated through different support modalities, taking into consideration the absorption capacity of beneficiary countries and the implementation of agreed reforms. Tunisia was evaluated rather positively in both these criteria, partly explaining why it became the main beneficiary under the SPRING programme, with 62 % of the total funds allocated to the country disbursed through budget support. The remaining 38 % of the funds were allocated through other support modalities including TWINNING, TAIEX and the Governance Facility. Furthermore, the EU in collaboration with EU Member State and European Public Finance institutions, supported major investments through the Neighbourhood Investment Facility (NIF) and mostly the FEMIP instrument, which continued to provide Tunisia with loans to develop the private sector and improve its business climate.

The relations between the EU and Tunisia reached a new milestone in 2012 with the conclusion of a **Privileged Partnership** structured around three pillars: political cooperation, economic and social integration and people-to-people partnerships. The Privileged Partnership was operationalised with the negotiation and adoption of a new EU-Tunisia Action Plan for the period 2013-2017, breaking quite substantially with previous strategic documents. The 2013-2017 Action Plan focuses on consolidating democratic institutions and paves the way for the negotiation of a **Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA)**, streamlining inclusiveness and poverty alleviation in the economic agenda alongside wider approximation to EU norms and standards and the ever-present support for business competitiveness in the different sectors of the economy. Furthermore, enhanced cooperation on security matters is also foreseen, most particularly with the negotiations for a **Mobility Partnership**¹³, signed as of today with ten EU Member States including France, Germany and Italy¹⁴, as well as the modernisation and restructuring of the security sector.

In 2014 the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) replaced the ENPI as the main financial mechanism of the ENP. The indicative bilateral allocation to Tunisia for the period 2014-2020 ranges

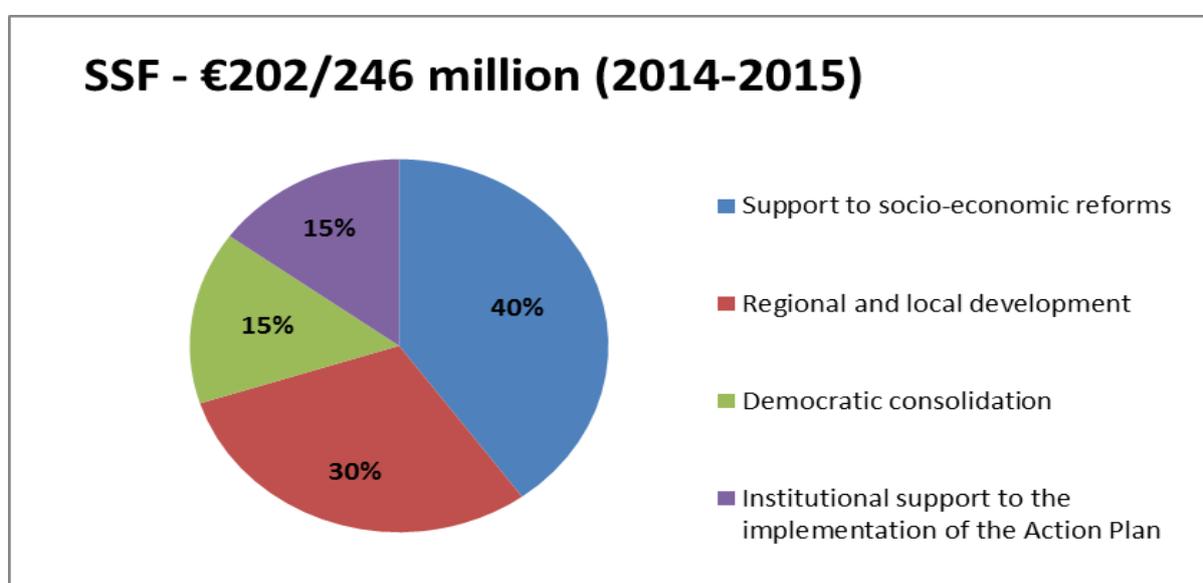
¹³ See the press release of the political declaration available at: http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-14-208_en.htm.

¹⁴ See Annex 1 of the report on migration related expenses in neighbouring countries published by the European Court of Auditors in 2016 (Special Report No 9/2016).

between EUR 725 and EUR 886 million (EUR 115 million per year in average)¹⁵, complemented with additional funding eventually disbursed under the so-called 'umbrella funds', proportional to the advance in democratic reforms, according to the 'more-for-more' principle, and through investment facilities such as the NIF, the FEMIP and other instruments created for specific purposes such as the Civil Society Facility (CSF).

The EU policies and programmes under the new Action Plan are formulated on an annual basis in line with the action of the transition governments in Tunisia, which are currently defining their reform agenda on yearly rather than five-year plans. The **Annual Action Plan for 2015** focuses on three strategic areas of cooperation: socio economic reforms for inclusive growth, competitiveness and integration, consolidation of democratic governance and institutions, sustainable regional and local development. In the indicative allocation of the Single Support Framework (SSF) for the period 2014-2015, 40 % of the total funding is allocated to socio-economic reforms, 30 % to regional and local development and 15 % to democratic consolidation and institutional support respectively. More concretely, a total of six programmes in support of the private sector (EUR 32 million), the security sector (EUR 23 million), the decentralisation and integrated development of the regions (EUR 43 million), the integration process (EUR 12.8 million), the cultural sector (EUR 6 million) and the touristic sector (EUR 70 million) are foreseen to be implemented.

Figure 4 – Fund allocation under the Single Support Framework 2014-2015 for Tunisia



Source: Authors

The measures laid down in the SSF are complemented with **Macro-Financial Assistance (MFA)**, consisting of EUR 300 million in support for the two-year comprehensive economic adjustment and reform programme agreed between Tunisia and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The programme has been launched to help Tunisia overcome the post Revolution severe economic difficulties caused by a weak external environment and the uncertainty related to the democratic transition upon which the country embarked. The European Commission announced at the beginning of 2016 its readiness to provide additional MFA of up to EUR 500 million, further attesting its commitment to support Tunisia in facing current economic difficulties.

¹⁵ Refer to the Single Support Framework (SSF) programming document for Tunisia for the period 2014-2015, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/single-support-framework-ssf-programming-document-tunisia-2014-2015_en (p. 10).

To conclude, the main objective of the Association Agreement between the EU and Tunisia is to pave the way for the establishment of a **Free Trade Area (FTA)**, as attested by the large number of provisions explicitly or implicitly aimed at liberalising trade. The Association Agreement encompasses both tariff and non-tariff measures, as well as a number of provisions for economic cooperation aimed at preparing the Tunisian economy for further openness and liberalisation, such as the establishment of anti-trust measures and protection of property rights to enhance competition in the market or the adoption of an enabling regulatory framework for the establishment of foreign service providers. Tariff dismantling, concerning manufactured goods, was completed in 2008, resulting in the establishment of a FTA for industrial products, the first ever signed between the EU and a Mediterranean partner country.

The EU and Tunisia launched the negotiations for a **Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA)** in late 2015, with the explicit aim to enhance market access opportunities, improve the investment climate and support on-going economic reforms in the country. The DCFTA is far-reaching, to the extent that it does not only extend the existing FTA to agricultural products and services, but it also encompasses a series of changes in the legal frameworks regulating areas, such as technical barriers to trade, sanitary measures, investment protection, public procurement and competition policy. The agreement builds on the provisions laid down in the Association Agreement and, if concluded, will mark an important step forward in the integration between EU and Tunisia.

3.2 Regional cooperation

Table 2 – Milestones of EU-Tunisia regional cooperation

Milestone	Date
Euro-Mediterranean Partnership – Barcelona Process	1995
Union for the Mediterranean	2008

Source: Authors

The **Euro-Mediterranean Partnership** was launched in 1995 in Barcelona with the aim of turning the Mediterranean into a common area of peace, stability and prosperity. The partnership covered three broad areas of multilateral cooperation: political and security partnership, economic and financial partnership and social, cultural and human partnership. In 2008, EU Member States and their Mediterranean counterparts, under the impulse of the French presidency of the EU and the organisation of the Paris Summit for the Mediterranean, agreed to strengthen their relations and give renewed focus to the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. The **Union for the Mediterranean (UfM)** was launched with the aim of enhancing co-ownership of the multilateral cooperation framework and delivering concrete benefits to the people and businesses of the countries involved.

The main objectives of the so-called Barcelona Process – creating an area of peace, stability, security and shared prosperity while promoting respect for democratic principles, human rights and mutual understanding – were maintained but the focus was put on concrete initiatives and enhanced co-operation under six priority areas of cooperation. These consist of business development, transport and urban development, energy, environment and water, higher education and research and civil affairs. The UfM Secretariat was launched in 2010 to empower regional dialogue and cooperation among UfM Member States and stakeholders and coordinate the concrete initiatives foreseen to be implemented.

Tunisia is currently involved in twenty-two regional projects under the coordination of the UfM Secretariat and worth in total more than EUR 1.2 billion. These include five projects launched under the **MED4JOBS programme** aimed at promoting effective and visible private sector job creation initiatives, three investment projects aimed at developing major transport and urban infrastructure, six projects addressing environmental concerns at regional, national and local level, as well as seven projects targeting the role of women and youth in society. The UfM-labelled projects implemented in Tunisia are summarised in Table 3 below.

Table 3 – UfM labelled projects per priority area of cooperation in which Tunisia is involved

Priority Area	Project
Business Development	Euro-Mediterranean Development Centre for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (EMDC)
	MED4JOBS – Establishment of a Regional Platform for the Development of Cultural and Creative Industries and Clusters in the Southern Mediterranean
	MED4JOBS – Generation Entrepreneur
	MED4JOBS – High Opportunity for Mediterranean Executive Recruitment (HOMERe)
	MED4JOBS – Mediterranean Entrepreneurship Network
	MED4JOBS – New Chance Mediterranean Network (MEDNC)
Social and Civil Affairs	Promoting Women Empowerment for Inclusive and Sustainable Industrial Development in the MENA Region
	FORMING RESPONSIBLE CITIZENS – Equal Citizenship Education to Prevent School Violence
	SKILLS FOR SUCCESS – Employability Skills for Women
	Women of the Mediterranean (WOMED) – Next Generation of Leaders
	CEED GROW – Growing and Scaling Small and Medium-Sized Businesses
	Developing Women Empowerment
	Young Women as Job Creators
Trade and Urban Development	LOGISMED Training Activities (LOGISMED-TA)
	Completion of the Central Section of the Trans-Maghreb Motorway Axis
	UPFI Sfax Taparura Project
Water and Environment	BLUEGREEN MED-CS – Networking Civil Society in the Mediterranean Region through Environment and Water Issues
	Governance and Financing in the Mediterranean Water Sector
	Integrated Programme for the Protection of Lake Bizerte against Pollution
	MEDITERRANEAN RESCP POST RIO+20 – Supporting the Adoption of Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) and Resource Efficiency (RE) Models in the Mediterranean Region
	Mediterranean Knowledge Platform on Water (MED WATER KNOWLEDGE)
	Capacity Building Programme on Water Integrity in the Middle East and North Africa

Source: Authors

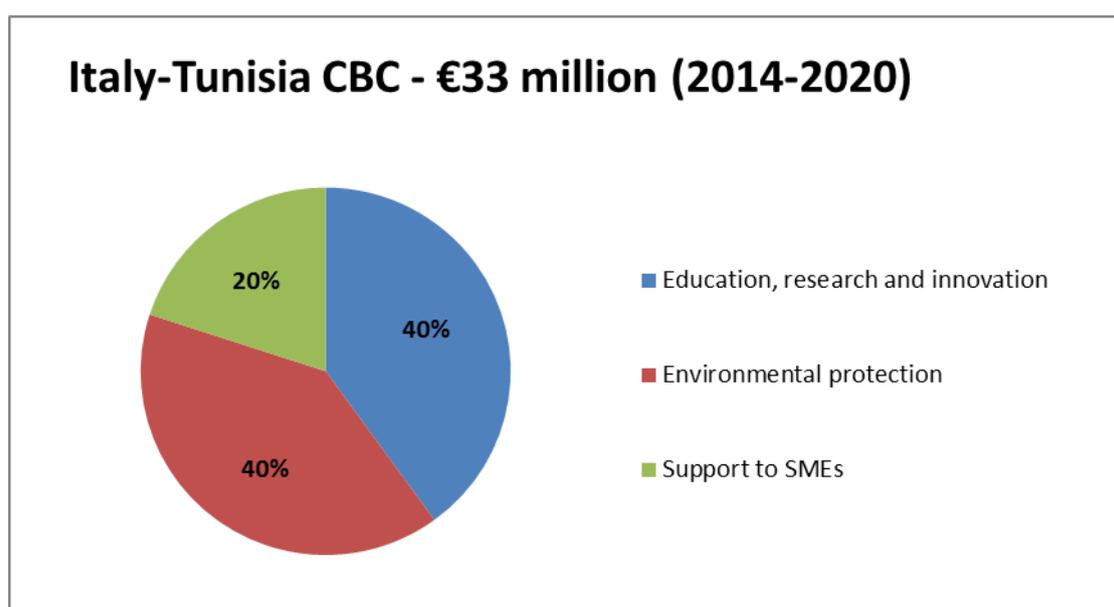
3.3 Other region-wide programmes

In parallel with bilateral and regional cooperation within the framework of the ENP and the UfM respectively, Tunisia benefitted from **Cross-Border Cooperation (CBC)** and region-wide programmes in support of higher education and research – **TEMPUS** and **ERASMUS** – and from instruments to accompany the democratic transition and, more particularly, the emergence of the civil society: the **European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR)**, the **Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP)** and the **Civil Society Facility (CSF)**.

Tunisia was involved in two CBC programmes for the period 2007-2013 which have been renewed for the period 2014-2020, namely the Italy-Tunisia CBC programme and the Mediterranean Sea Basin CBC programme¹⁶.

The **Italy-Tunisia CBC programme** for the period 2007-2013 aimed at promoting the economic, social, institutional and cultural integration between Sicilian and Tunisian territories, with three priority objectives: socio-economic development, common challenges and people-to-people contacts. These objectives have been revised for the period 2014-2020, on the basis of lessons learnt and a consultation with relevant stakeholders. The priority is now put on the development of SMEs and entrepreneurship, training support, research and innovation and the protection of the environment, while economic integration and employment creation have become transversal components of the programme. The total allocation of funds for the period 2007-2013 amounted to EUR 27 million, 65 % of which was allocated to socio-economic development, 25 % to address common challenges and 10 % for people-to-people contacts. This allocation has been stepped up under the 2014-2020 programme to EUR 33 million, 40 % of which is allocated to education, research and innovation and environmental protection respectively, while the remaining 20 % is foreseen for the support to SMEs.

Figure 5 – Fund allocation under the Italy-Tunisia CBC programme 2014-2020



Source: Authors

¹⁶ In comparison, Morocco benefitted from three CBC programmes for the period 2007-2013 under the ENPI programming, namely the Mediterranean Sea Basin together with Tunisia and two CBC programmes respectively targeting the Strait and the Atlantic CBC areas jointly managed in the context of Spain-Morocco territorial cooperation. The Strait CBC programme was not maintained under the ENI programming for the period 2014-2020 (see <http://www.eaptc.eu/en/eni-cbc-programmes.html>).

The **Mediterranean Sea Basin CBC programme** aimed, for the period 2007-2013, at pooling together coastal territories to co-operate in four areas of priority, consisting of promoting socio-economic development and enhancement of territories, environmental sustainability at the basin level, better conditions and modalities for the mobility of persons, goods and capitals, as well as cultural dialogue and local governance. In the 2014-2020 programming, the priorities have been rationalised into two overarching objectives – to promote economic and social development and to address common challenges in environment – with people-to-people contact being retained as a cooperation modality and institutional capacity building as a transversal component. These two overarching objectives are broken down in a set of priorities consisting firstly of business and SME development, support for education, research and innovation and promotion of social inclusion and poverty alleviation and secondly for environmental protection and climate change adaptation. The total allocation of funds for the 2007-2013 Mediterranean Sea Basin CBC programme amounted to EUR 171 million approximately, 40 % of which was allocated to socio-economic development, 30 % to environmental sustainability, 20 % to promotion of cultural dialogue and the remaining 10 % to the mobility of persons, goods and capitals.

The **TEMPUS** programme, launched in 2002 under the MEDA instrument and pursued until 2013 under the ENPI instrument, was aimed at enhancing cooperation and exchanges for the modernisation and the development of higher education in partner countries. The total allocation made under the programme amounted to EUR 222 million between 2003 and 2013. Tunisia received 11 % of this allocation and proved to be one of the most active countries with 62 projects implemented. Tunisia was the first Mediterranean partner country to join the **ERASMUS** programme in 2013. In the first year of implementation, 13 Tunisian universities benefitted from an allocation of EUR 4.8 million, leading to a total of 343 mobility scholarships accorded to students at the different levels of the LMD education system (Bachelor's degree, Master's degree and PhD) and administrative staff of the universities. Furthermore, since 2011 Tunisia has taken part in an **eTwinning** programme in favour of primary and secondary education, which involved 28 structures and up to 60 teachers in 2014¹⁷.

¹⁷ See the section on education of the 2014 annual report on EU cooperation in Tunisia available at http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/tunisia/more_info/publications/index_fr.htm (p. 47-48).

4 Evolution and impact of EU policies since the Revolution in Tunisia

In the previous section, the EU policies and programmes implemented in Tunisia before and after the Revolution have been mapped, without emphasising the consequences of their evolution over time. In this section, the impact of the policies implemented before the 2011 Revolution and their evolution, along with the country's challenging democratic transition, are assessed. The analysis is developed on the basis of an innovative **analytical framework** developed for the purpose of this study and illustrated in the Figure 6 below, which is structured as follows:

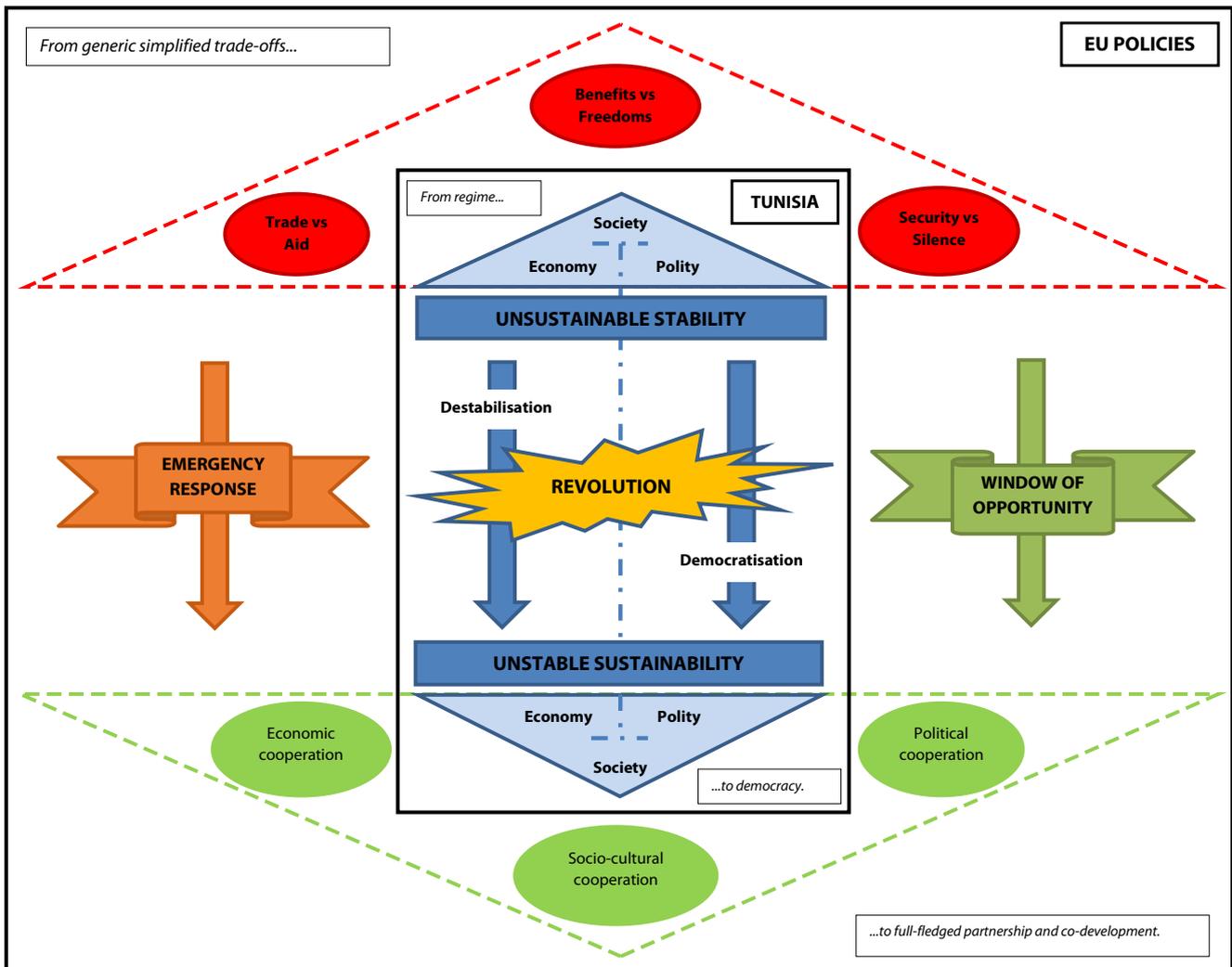
The **two interrelated dimensions** taken into consideration in the analysis – the **changing situation in Tunisia** and the **shifting approach of the EU** towards the country – are represented in the background of the scheme (black boxes). The changing situation in Tunisia is framed as a transition from an authoritarian repressive regime (referred to in the graph as 'regime') to a democracy resumed in two basic processes, **destabilisation** and **democratisation** (blue arrows). The shifting approach of the EU is framed as a reaction to the events in Tunisia, consisting of **providing an emergency response** to the socio-economic destabilisation, including insecurity matters (orange arrow) and **seizing a window of opportunity for enhanced partnership** resulting from the democratic transition (green arrow).

The intertwined triangles at the top and the bottom of the analytical framework provide an overview of EU policies in Tunisia before and after the Revolution (dotted triangles and circles). The **EU approach** towards the country **during the authoritarian regime of Ben Ali** is considered as being based on a series of **generic simplified trade-offs**: trade versus aid, security versus silence and benefits versus freedoms (red triangle). These generic trade-offs consisted in the EU bargaining power of deepening trade liberalisation, while increasing financial aid aimed at funding local structural adjustment programmes to support the modernisation efforts, enhancing cooperation on security matters related to illegal migration and criminal activities at the expense of advances on democratic reforms and focussing on economic benefits against political freedoms and basic human rights. The **current approach of the EU** towards the country is evolving towards **comprehensive**, to the extent that the current **Privileged Partnership** virtually covers all aspects of the Tunisian economy, polity and society (green triangle) and builds on an approach of win-win and co-development towards achieving peace and shared prosperity.

The reasoning underlying the choices made in the analytical framework is that Tunisia is shifting from a situation of **'unsustainable stability'** which characterised the country prior to the Revolution to one of **'unstable sustainability'**. In the first situation – unsustainable stability – macroeconomic and political stability was ensured by repressive authoritarian policies and the EU would close an eye to what could be defined as a façade democracy, characterised by a lack of freedoms and basic human rights and segmentation and lack of engagement of the society which has proved unsustainable. Such conditions have led to the breakup of the social contract pre-Tunisian uprisings¹⁸. In the second situation – unstable sustainability – the Tunisian Revolution and the ensuing democratic transition enhanced the sustainability of the State, by ensuring representation and participation of the different segments of the population in the policy-making process, but this achievement is put at risk in the short run by the destabilisation of the country's economy, internal political conflicts, social unrest and the overall geopolitical instability in the region.

¹⁸ For a discussion on the underlying unsustainability of Ben Ali's authoritarian regime see Paciello, M.C. (2011), *Tunisia: Changes and Challenges of Political Transition*, MEDPRO Technical Report, No 3.

The bottom line concerning the understanding of the changes in the EU approach and policies developed herewith, is that the Tunisian Revolution brought new opportunities for enhanced cooperation because, based on those **democratic norms and values**, which the EU is advocating in neighbouring countries, but this also brought new challenges related to the emergence of multiple participants in policy dialogue. Plus, the **exceptional economic difficulties** the country is facing, and the fundamental regional geopolitical challenges brought about by the regional wars in Libya and Syria, **call for an exceptional response**, further reinforcing the position of the EU as a key partner in support of the democratic transition and to support achieving long term sustainability which is beneficial for both partners.



4.1 Impact of EU policies before the Tunisian Revolution

The signature of an Association Agreement in 1995 brought a substantial change in the EU support for Tunisia, passing from a trade versus aid formula consisting of obtaining tariff waiving for a more comprehensive approach while negotiating increased financial aid to fund local structural adjustment programmes. These combined measures of political, economic and socio-cultural cooperation were to foster stability and prosperity in the neighbourhood. This shift in the EU approach to cooperation, resulting from the progressive enlargement of the EU and the geopolitical readjustments having followed the dismantlement of the Soviet Union in 1991, has been further reinforced with the launching of the ENP in 2004 and the signature of the ENP Action Plan in 2005. The **ENP rooted political, economic and socio-cultural cooperation into common interests and shared values unilaterally defined**, yet inspired from internationally recognised norms and best practices.

The whole point of rooting cooperation into common interest and shared values was to create some sort of a democratic level-playing field between EU Member States and neighbouring countries, following the **assumption that consolidating democracy** and the rule of law **was the better strategy to foster stability in the region**. The renewed focus on democratic norms and values, good governance and sustainable development has been retained as the basis for conditionality in the provision of aid, with the explicit intent to better trigger reforms in countries such as Tunisia and set the ground for stronger cooperation and integration with the EU.

That being said, evidence shows that, when put to the test, the rhetoric of the **EU did not achieve the creation of the proper incentives for Mediterranean partner countries to embark upon the reforms** deemed necessary for the achievement of the ambitious objectives laid down in the partnership. In fact, whereas the EU considered the promotion of principles of democracy and market economy as the fertile soil for stability and prosperity in the region, the autocratic governments in Mediterranean countries were focused on the perpetuation of their control over the economy and the society. This de facto brought EU relations with Mediterranean partner countries in general and, more particularly with the autocratic government of Ben Ali, down to an **exchange of commercial, financial and strategic interests**, in line with most development aid programmes across the world [Ayadi and Gadi, 2013: 4]. The relationship between the EU and Tunisia before the Revolution was based on a series of trade-offs and, notwithstanding that cooperation has been stepped up beyond the mere trade versus aid and security versus silence formulae of the previous decades, it suffered from the same constraints.

The strategic and commercial interests of the EU back then, consisted of increasing trade with the region and, in particular with Tunisia, and the attempt to control the flow of migrants pointing towards its European southern shores, even more so after the terrorist attacks of 2001, 2003 and 2004 in New York, Casablanca and Madrid respectively. During 2004-10, trade in goods between EU and Tunisia increased from EUR 7.6 billion in exports and EUR 6.7 billion in imports in 2004, to EUR 11 billion in exports and EUR 9.9 billion in imports in 2011, resulting in an increasing positive commercial balance for the benefit of the EU¹⁹. The same trend has continued after the Tunisian Revolution. On the other hand, the strategic and commercial interests of Ben Ali consisted of getting more financial resources in the form of official financial assistance and in legitimising his regime and the related stronghold on Tunisia's society and economy through enhanced relations with international partners, instead of fair, sound and free democratic elections. However, the overall financial assistance commitments by the EU and the key members states (France, Germany, Italy and Spain) all together to the Southern and Eastern

¹⁹ See the descriptive statistics on EU-Tunisia trade published by the EC Directorate General for Trade and available at: http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2006/september/tradoc_122002.pdf.

Mediterranean countries, excluding Turkey, from 1995 to 2009 amounted to an approximate value of EUR 39 billion, which accounts for less than 180 euros per capita for the overall period. From this amount, Tunisia received financial assistance of EUR 1.4 billion during the same period which was allocated to all sectors of cooperation including economic, security, social and justice and home affairs²⁰. In this context, the cooperation between EU and Tunisia brought limited results, especially in its regional component, since it was seemingly more difficult to impose its interests in a multilateral framework of cooperation. The results obtained in bilateral cooperation were more mitigated, with some advances in those areas of cooperation where the EU interests laid, such as trade and security related matters, and a virtual stall in others, above all in the promotion of democratic governance²¹.

In this study, it is considered that **EU policies implemented** before the Tunisian Revolution relied on and **were limited by three fundamental trade-offs** resulting from an exchange of interests with the incumbent repressive regime before the Revolution. The three generic trade-offs retained in the analysis correspond to the three main axis of cooperation – political, economic and socio-cultural – and are herewith defined as trade versus aid, benefits versus freedoms and security versus silence.

The formula '**trade versus aid**' stands for the amount of financial assistance provided to Tunisia to encourage the liberalisation and openness of its economy²² in preparation for the establishment of a FTA and the relative neglect of other important aspects of economic development aimed at counterbalancing the negative effects of liberalisation and openness, such as the lack of domestic private sector development, social exclusion and youth unemployment. The formula '**benefits versus freedoms**' stands for the rather narrow focus on economic value added and governance aspects and the neglect of the political dimension of social development that de facto hampers the impact of the economic policies implemented. The formula '**security versus silence**' stands for the almost exclusive focus on security-related matters under political cooperation in the years preceding the Tunisian Revolution and the silence of EU authorities on the scarce progress, if not the actual deterioration of the democratic situation in the country, this notwithstanding the accent on democratic norms and values put explicitly by the ENP.

Economic cooperation: trade liberalisation without market economy?

The **main aim of economic cooperation** before the Revolution was to **set the ground for the establishment and operationalization of a FTA, in force since 1998, for industrial goods and selected agricultural products**, to enhance liberalisation and openness of the economy and, at the same time, to modernise industry and increase its competitiveness in international markets. The measures, concretely implemented, consisted of tariff and non-tariff measures aimed at opening up the economy to foreign companies and investments, while supporting the production and export facilities of given industries and enhancing competition in the market via targeted programmes and associated financial resources and technical assistance. However, with the **economy being dominated by large companies more or less linked with the authorities** and to the family of Ben Ali, these measures resulted, to a certain extent, in comforting the monopolistic position of incumbent companies rather than enhancing competition, developing the private sector, in particular, the small and medium sized sector, and promoting the inclusion of the population into a freer and fairer market economy beneficial to all. In fact, the opportunities for economic growth brought by the progressive opening and liberalisation of the economy did not benefit vast segments of the economy and the population,

²⁰ See Ayadi and Gadi (2013).

²¹ For a more comprehensive assessment see Ayadi and Gadi (2013).

²² According to the Heritage Foundation's Index of Trade Freedom, the evolution from 2000 and 2009 shows an increase in the index suggesting an increased level of trade liberalisation in the region.

especially the youth and the underprivileged regions, which continued to suffer from precarious conditions and high levels of unemployment. This was reflected in the improvement of the Heritage Foundation index of trade freedom over the period, but the **persistently high unemployment rates, in particular among the youth, which reached double digits before the Revolution**²³.

The EU policies in the country did not succeed in creating the necessary incentives for the conditionality principle to work and, therefore, only achieved mitigated results in creating the conditions for a healthy market economy through targeted socio-economic reforms. Important questions did not receive the required attention, such as the extent of the role of the State in the economy and its potential detrimental effects on SMEs development and related employment creation, the enhancement of those freedoms necessary to ensure sound competition in the market as well as governance related matters. In this sense, **economic cooperation triggered some improvements in terms of openness and liberalisation, but failed to bring substantial change in the system of crony capitalism** set up under the Ben Ali regime, which might have been even reinforced through the increasingly dominant position of some industries and large companies in the economy²⁴. These results have been widely discussed in an exhaustive assessment of economic integration in the Euro-Mediterranean region, commissioned by the European Commission a couple of years before the Tunisian Revolution²⁵. The authors argued that, while the progressive liberalisation of trade under the Association Agreement proved effective in reducing tariffs for industrial products, albeit at a slower pace than expected, it brought little improvements, if any, concerning non-tariff barriers and the business environment, as well as more structural reforms aimed at laying the ground for beneficial trade liberalisation.

To conclude, it could be argued that the policies implemented, provided incumbent participants in the Tunisian economy with prospects for economic growth through trade liberalisation and progressive integration with the EU markets, but failed in appropriately laying the foundations for a sustainable economic development model and social inclusion. This was because it subjected large companies to the pressures of internationalisation without creating concrete incentives or opportunities for local development, underpinned in equal opportunities for all and, hence, in the creation of employment. This is further attested by economic data for the period preceding the Tunisian Revolution, showing **sustained economic growth (averaging 4% per year) but also a substantial increase in unemployment and inequalities between segments of the population and across regions of the country**²⁶. This contradictory process could have contributed in creating hidden tensions in the Tunisian economy which, exacerbated by the global financial crisis of 2008, the subsequent economic crisis in Europe and the fall of international prices for agricultural products, might have led to the outbreak of social unrest in 2011²⁷.

Socio-cultural cooperation: a narrow focus on efficiency and approximation

The **deterioration of economic conditions** in the years preceding the Revolution was mostly due to the financial and economic crisis that hit the developing countries and, in particular, the EU and the structural weaknesses in the Tunisian labour market. This was particularly evident in the insufficient creation of adequate jobs compatible with the skill sets of the rising working age population. Such deterioration was further **exacerbated, rather than counterbalanced, by ineffective social policies** implemented by the

²³ For a discussion on unemployment and the challenges of youth inclusion in Tunisia, see: http://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/MNA/tunisia/breaking_the_barriers_to_youth_inclusion_eng_c_hap3.pdf.

²⁴ See Ayadi and Gadi (2013), Youngs (2005), Youngs (2006) and IEMED (2010).

²⁵ See De Wulf, L., Maliszewska, M. et al (2009).

²⁶ See El Laithy (2012).

²⁷ See Ayadi et al (2013).

autocratic government of Ben Ali, which served as a window dressing instead of a social valve to help the population in underprivileged areas. The social contract with the population, on the basis of which the regime's legitimacy lied, consisted of enjoying wide economic benefits shared by a handful of incumbent politically-linked economic exponents, which was exchanged for contained and controlled political freedoms and the welfare system was subsequently subordinated to that purpose. Two specificities of the Tunisian situation must, therefore, be taken into consideration when evaluating the impact and the evolution of EU socio-economic policies in the country, namely the high unemployment of high-skilled youth²⁸ and the social contract tying the population to the regime of Ben Ali, rather unique among authoritarian governments in the region.

The withdrawal of social support for opponents was one of the repressive measures most commonly used by the regime and this **misuse of social policies, upstream, limited the potential impact of policies promoted by the EU in this area of cooperation**. In this context, it is not surprising that socio-cultural cooperation between the EU and Tunisia in the years preceding the Tunisian Revolution placed a strong focus on economic governance of education, health institutions and approximation of labour norms to EU standards, rather than addressing more politically-sensitive measures such as use of subsidies, role of the informal economy, addressing the fundamental problem of youth unemployment to name a few, as well as pushing for greater reforms.

The policies implemented mainly focused on improving the quantitative performance of the education sector, with notable advances made in rates of enrolment, pupil-teacher ratios and expenditures in education, as well as enhancing the efficiency of the health sector²⁹. The development of partnerships and exchanges in the education sector and, to a certain extent also in the health sector, in particular under the TEMPUS and Erasmus Mundus programmes concerning education, fostered the internationalisation of Tunisian scientists, researchers and professionals and enabled the transfer of knowledge and enhanced people to people relations. Notable progress has been also registered in the participation of women in the education sector and the approximation of labour norms to EU standards, with the explicit aim of favouring FDI in the country and better managing the flow of migrant workers. Nonetheless, socio-cultural cooperation with the **EU did not achieve the necessary incentivisation of the government of Ben Ali to implement more substantial social reforms** and, therefore, failed in triggering the qualitative improvements required to tackle the skills mismatch between the education system and the labour market and in improving the sustainability of the welfare system³⁰. In that sense, **neither the causes nor the consequences of unemployment, especially for youth, have been effectively addressed**.

To conclude, the socio-cultural cooperation in the years preceding the Revolution has proven beneficial in enhancing effectiveness in the education and health sectors, as well as approximating labour norms to international requirements, but has failed to enhance inclusiveness in the labour market and, thus, to effectively address the problem of unemployment in general and amongst the youth sector, in particular. Plus, it did not achieve the promotion of reforms to the welfare system or improve its sustainability and outreach to the unprivileged areas, while ensuring the respect of those basic rights, which a welfare system should supposedly protect. Putting this altogether, the conditions for the socio-economic situation to deteriorate and the outbreak of the mass protests of 2011 were united. It is emblematic that the spark having ignited, the latter was fuelled by a young fruit seller who immolated himself after repeated abuse of his basic rights by the authorities who prevented him from making a modest living by

²⁸ For further discussion on the peculiarity of Tunisia's unemployment situation see Ayadi and El Mahdi (2013) and Ayari, C., Reiffers, J.L., Mouley, S. et al (2015).

²⁹ Ayadi and Gadi (2013) and El Mehdi (2013).

³⁰ See Ayadi and El Mehdi (2013).

selling fruits outside the organised retail system, while asking for an end to bribery that perpetuated coercion.

Political cooperation: the rise and fall of cooperation based on trade-offs

In the relations between EU and Tunisia before the Revolution, political cooperation has been by far the **less prolific area in terms of achieving expected results**, due to limited funding allocated to this area and a **strong bias towards security-related matters** at an operational level, compared to the focus put on democratic reforms in the rhetoric of the Association Agreement and the ENP Action Plan. The strong willingness of the EU to secure the collaboration of partner countries in the fight against terrorism, illegal migration and other forms of trafficking after the terrorist attacks of the early 2000s and the related frenzy about migration flows, limited its room for manoeuvre in holding accountable autocratic governments to their undemocratic behaviour and non-respect of fundamental rights. This prevented EU political cooperation from achieving concrete results in terms of democratic governance, rule of law and promotion of human rights, sacrificing de facto these advances on the altar of security cooperation. In fact, security cooperation has been increasingly used by the regime pre-Revolution in Tunisia, like other countries in the region, as a leverage to secure the silence, if not the complacency of the EU, over autocratic rule and repressive measures. This has progressively eroded the legitimacy of the EU as an active participant in pushing towards democratic reforms.

The EU policies in the area of **political cooperation brought consistent progress in security cooperation, but had no impact in terms of democratic reforms**. It is even possible that the EU policies implemented had a detrimental effect in terms of democracy, all the time that the focus on security aspects enabled Ben Ali to reinforce his security apparatus and further legitimise the government given the strong partnership with the EU in mainly combatting terrorism and organised crime. The EU encountered many difficulties in implementing projects under the political component of the MEDA programme, but the ENP Action Plan signed in 2005, did not bring any substantial change, the exception being for some programmes of technical cooperation in the judicial sector. Important issues, such as the endemic corruption gangrening the intermeshed political and economic systems in the country, or the negation of political freedoms and human rights through repressive measures, were not even addressed in the rhetoric developed by the EU around the partnership and this notwithstanding the focus put on such matters in the framework of the ENP. This **silence eroded the legitimacy of the EU, while the autocratic government of Ben Ali reinforced its stronghold on society, drawing a veil of stability over the unsustainability of its policies**.

These arguments are widely discussed by Durac and Cavatorta (2009) in their article *Strengthening Authoritarian Rule through Democracy Promotion? Examining the Paradox of the US and EU Security Strategies: The Case of Ben Ali's Tunisia*. The authors warned at the time that the contradictions and inconsistencies of the EU approach to political cooperation, namely subordinating the promotion of democracy in order to maintain the status quo in the name of stability, was unsustainable and could bring profound negative implications. The situation eventually became progressively more unsustainable with the growing youth population being increasingly aware and more exigent in terms of existing opportunities for political and social development, whether it be thanks to the web, social media or the perspective given by the EU through economic integration and people-to-people contacts, but at the same time subject to increasing economic difficulties and the regime's repression. This ultimately led to the onset of the Tunisian Revolution, which completely reversed the picture for political cooperation between the EU and Tunisia, as we shall see in the following section.

4.2 Evolution of EU policies since the Tunisian Revolution

The Tunisian Revolution brought two fundamental dynamics – **democratisation and destabilisation** – which had broad repercussions on the relations between Tunisia and the EU. These changes enhanced the probability of more **synergies and complementarities** between EU and Tunisia’s political projects and the **necessity** to strengthen the financial support, which provided the EU with a window of opportunity for enhanced cooperation underlined in a win-win philosophy, co-development and deeper integration, in line with the ambitions of the ENP. On the one hand, the democratisation of the country created a **level-playing field for enhanced partnership with the EU**, provided that the principles on which the ENP was based – democracy, rule of law, good governance, market economy and sustainable development – became the same guiding actions of the Tunisian transition governments after the Revolution. On the other hand, the destabilisation of the country’s economy and a series of political, social and budgetary constraints limiting the room for manoeuvre of the authorities in facing these emergency situations, pushed them to **call for extraordinary financial support** from international donors, namely the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and others to avoid a disaster.

The **EU enacted important changes in its policies** and almost doubled its financial support in the years following the Revolution, **to seize this window of opportunity**³¹. The support was tailored to advances in democratic reforms, with the launching of the SPRING programme and the application of the more-for-more principle, functioning as a reward system to incentivise governments which engaged in democratic transitions to implement the agreed reform agenda. Applying such a principle in Tunisia was anchored in past relations pre-Revolution when there was a doubt about the willingness of the government to engage in meaningful reforms. Since the Revolution and, in view of the democratisation efforts undertaken by the country and the engagement in an ambitious reform agenda, the more-for-more principle should be revisited when dealing with Tunisia.

Missions and visits of EU high-level officials and experts were multiplied to establish good relations with the new Tunisian authorities and to accompany the different stages of the democratic transition, such as the creation of control authorities, the drafting of the constitution and the conduction of elections. The **EU de facto positioned itself as the main sponsor of the country’s democratisation**, while the newly born democratic authorities took advantage of such sponsorship to legitimise their position in regional and international fora. This enhanced political association between the EU and Tunisia led to the launching of a Privileged Partnership in 2012 and brought considerable advances in key dossiers, such as the negotiations for the DCFTA or the establishment of a Mobility Partnership following the political declaration of March 2014, notwithstanding an initial period of relative political stall and institutional adjustment.

Tunisia’s new government, elected in 2014, expressed its commitment to further advance economic integration with the EU and strengthen collaboration in every domain. The EU, in turn, engaged in enhanced support for the country, unlocking an additional EUR 150 million to consolidate democratic institutions and stabilise the economy. In this sense, the country’s transition to democracy created the conditions for fully-fledged political, economic and socio-cultural cooperation. The EU is now in the position to fulfil the ambitious objectives formulated in the ENP. This development is a first step in line

³¹ As stated in Tocci (2011) “There are important elements in this review that represent a step forward compared to EU policy over the past decade(s). Yet, in light of the momentous developments unfolding in the region, the ENP review runs the risk of being too little too late. By failing to offer sufficiently valuable benefits, to engage in meaningful conditionality, to account for the multipolar reality of the region (and of the world), and to appropriately revise the broader multilateral framework of its policies, the EU risks falling behind the curve of events”.

with the green transition towards sustainable development in a scenario of an enlarged EU-MED Union, underlined in Ayadi and Sessa (2013)³².

Political cooperation: from trade-offs to synergies and complementarities

With the Tunisian Revolution, the political cooperation between the EU and Tunisia shifted from being an Achilles heel to a real feather in the cap as far as EU policies in the country were concerned. After the Revolution, the **EU positioned itself as the main sponsor of the country's democratic transition by playing a constructive role in advancing the process**. It provided fully-fledged support towards building and consolidating democratic institutions and the rule of law, in an attempt to **reinforce its credibility and legitimacy** which had been eroded by the passive posture towards the undemocratic actions of the regime, notwithstanding the pro-democracy rhetoric underlying the ENP. The Revolution brought broad convergence between the aspirations for democracy of Tunisians and the goals pursued by the EU through political cooperation in the region, as expressed in the ENP, de facto creating a level-playing field for deepened political dialogue and enhanced co-ownership.

In line with such development, the **EU advocated the protection of basic human rights from the very beginning of the country's transition** and pushed for the recognition of freedom of expression as a crucial element of any healthy democracy. Notable advances in this field were achieved quickly after the fall of the oppressive regime, for example with the adoption of a new regulatory framework protecting the independence of civil society organisations.

The **possibility for a wide number of participants to express their political views and influence the country's decision-making is another major development** brought by the Revolution, which comes as both a challenge and an opportunity for the EU. The many criticisms expressed by the Tunisian media and, more broadly, civil society concerning key dossiers such as the Mobility Partnership and the negotiations for a DCFTA, can be seen either as a threat to the conclusion and the effective enforcement of the agreements, or as an opportunity to make relations with Tunisia more inclusive and participative. In the rhetoric accompanying the ENP, a strong focus is put on common values and shared interests as preconditions for co-ownership of the policies implemented and, ultimately, their effectiveness. There is now an opportunity EU policy-makers can seize upon in that respect, with much to gain and little to lose in carefully integrating aspirations, having led the Tunisian population to overthrow the authoritarian regime of Ben Ali within the definition of EU policies to be implemented³³.

That being said, there are still substantial **discrepancies between the rhetoric and the practice of EU policies on the ground**, notwithstanding the **substantial change in scope and magnitude of the EU's relations with Tunisia**. The evolution of cooperation in security matters after the Tunisian Revolution is emblematic of this very fact and provides an interesting case study to assess the consequences of such discrepancies.

The EU and Tunisia started dialoguing on security matters and migration-related issues from the very beginning of the democratic transition and notable advances in this field have been achieved, notwithstanding the general situation of political stall and related slowdown in the implementation of reforms. The EU allocated a considerable amount of resources to programmes of judicial and police cooperation, with limited results, especially in the early years of the transition, and maintained a strong focus on border management and control of migration flows. This eventually led to the signature of a

³² See <http://www.medpro-foresight.eu/publication/scenarios-assessment-and-transitions-towards-sustainable-euro-mediterranean-2030>.

³³ In a FEMISE report laying down a series of key elements for a socio-economic development strategy for the post-transition period, Ayari, C., Reiffers, J.L., Mouley, S. et al (2015) underline the broad inclusion into EU policies of the aspirations of Tunisians as a precondition for any successful approach to cooperation with the country.

far-reaching, although rather controversial³⁴, Mobility Partnership in 2014. On the other hand, cooperation concerning the recovery of misappropriated assets and modernisation of the security sector – the priorities expressed by the Tunisian government – have not yet brought substantial results. In fact, the EU's rhetoric concerning security matters shifted from an almost exclusive focus on police cooperation and border management to counter illegal migrations and terrorist threats under the repressive regime pre Revolution, to a broader discourse on the importance of consolidating the rule of law and ensuring the protection of the rights and freedoms acquired as a result of the Revolution. However, in practice cooperation on security matters remains very much focused on controlling migration flows and combatting terrorism.

This discrepancy between the rhetoric and the practice fuelled **criticisms in the Tunisian media and civil society concerning the Mobility Partnership**, signed in 2014, which aims to facilitate the movement of people between the EU and Tunisia and to promote a common and responsible management of existing migratory flows. It foresees simplified procedures for granting visas along with the de facto externalisation of EU borders in Tunisia and the automatic repatriation of illegal migrants coming from or having transited in Tunisia. Many officials pointed out that such far-reaching measures were not in the interest of Tunisia, provided that the simplification of procedures for granting visas remains subject to further negotiations and availability of opportunities in the EU, while the measures engaging Tunisia in the management of migratory flows are meant to be implemented on shorter delays and without particular conditions. Furthermore, the joint political declaration for a Mobility Partnership was made at a time when Tunisia had no clear migration policy formulated, in contrast with the EU claims that relations with partner countries were based on national reform agendas and policy frameworks. In the consultation some respondents argued that the Mobility Partnership results from the **EU prioritising and imposing its own interests at a very delicate moment for Tunisia**. Others pointed out that whether the democratic transition favoured convergence between the values and interests of the EU and Tunisia, the **different perception of key issues, such as migration, undermine trust between the partners**. The difficulties encountered in obtaining visas stand out as an example of such a problem, in contrast with the promises made by the EU under the Mobility Partnership.

Several lessons can be learned from the debates around the signature of a Mobility Partnership. Tunisia's **democratic transition is forcing the EU to take more into account the stakeholders of its policies in the dialogue** with the country's authorities and build ties on the basis of synergies between the respective interests, rather than a trade-off between them. This is a result of the numbers of active participants and range of views emerging in Tunisian society and the influence this is having on national policy-makers. The criticisms formulated by some interested parties concerning the Mobility Partnership are more related to questions of **timing and prioritisation of the reforms** discussed, rather than their actual contents. It is also in the interest of Tunisia to have effective systems for the management of migration flows and the prevention of terrorist threats, especially given in a context of regional turbulence, but in the current delicate phase of transition the priority undoubtedly concerns reforming the security sector and building capacity for the management of internal affairs. The Tunisian government actually asked the EU for support in dealing with internal instability and democratic consolidation and an ambitious programme for the reform and modernisation of the sector is foreseen in the Annual Action Plan for 2015. Nonetheless, at least when it comes to the perception of the EU in the country, it is crucial to **foster understanding and to create consensus** around the reforms advocated by the EU and, in that sense, the measures foreseen should be wisely prioritised and the respective interests

³⁴ Several civil society organisations have criticised the readmission of irregular migrants under the partnership.

of the parts better taken into consideration. Otherwise the risk is to compromise the 'sympathy capital' acquired by the EU, with its strong support for the democratic transition.

In his article *Channelled Policy Transfers: EU-Tunisia Interactions on Migration Matters*, Cassarino (2014) scrutinises EU-Tunisia relations over security and migration, showing that the prioritisation of security related matters in the mobility negotiations, instrumentalised by the former president Ben Ali for his own purposes, did not really change after the Tunisian Revolution. He then argues that the resilience of such prioritisation is threatened by the emergence of certain individuals with influence from within the civilian population and the related criticisms and risk to hamper, or at least complicate, the policy dialogue. These findings attest to the importance of both enhancing participation of stakeholders in the formulation and prioritisation of EU policies, so as to avoid there being a stronger focus on security related matters which will de facto lead to a deterioration of the policy dialogue on migration and prevent solutions to the ongoing crisis.

In contrast with the evolution of cooperation on security matters, an area in which the interests and priorities of the two partners do not necessarily coincide, the **EU's fully-fledged support for the building and consolidation of democracy** in Tunisia contributed to a change in perception of the EU, from an image of complacency with a repressive regime to one of a watchdog of the Revolution. The continuous monitoring of progress made in democratic reforms, the organisation of ad-hoc missions and the preparation of political statements to push for crucial reforms in times of great social turmoil and political stalemate, all contributed to this very fact. However, the results of the consultation surrounding these concerns shows mixed results, with all respondents seemingly agreeing on the importance that the EU could have in supporting the democratic transition, but with some pointing out the scarcity of concrete actions being implemented to do so. These results attest to the **importance of preventing a discrepancy between the rhetoric and the practice** of EU policies and programmes.

Of more substance, the EU provided support for the democratic transition along **three main axes**. First, it **accompanied the transition** in each one of its fundamental steps, closely monitoring the advances made in the reform agenda through annual progress reports, in which recommendations are formulated to provide guidance to the newly elected authorities. This was accompanied by missions of EU officials and experts advocating the adoption of key reforms, to support the drafting of the constitution and to monitor the conduct of democratic elections through Election Observation Missions (EOM). Second, the EU contributed to **building capacity in democratic institutions** and introducing good governance practices with targeted TWINNING and TAIEX programmes, for example in support of the justice sector, with the aim of ensuring its independence from executive and legislative powers. Third, it **promoted democratic norms and values** in the country, in particular the respect of basic human rights, such as gender equality and freedom of expression, through advocating the adoption of international treaties and the organisation of targeted awareness events within the civilian society.

The EU played an important role in supporting Tunisia's post-revolutionary authorities in facing the challenges of the transition and, by so doing seized the window of opportunity for enhanced cooperation presented by the Tunisian Revolution. This eventually led to the launching of a Privileged Partnership in 2012, the completion of the preparatory work for the negotiations of a DCFTA and, as previously mentioned, a joint declaration for a Mobility Partnership in 2014. In the ENP Annual Action Plan for 2015, the consolidation of democracy is retained as the overarching priority, de facto placing political cooperation, and not negotiations on trade-related matters, at the forefront of EU relations with Tunisia.

To conclude, the **evolution of political cooperation** between the EU and Tunisia after the Revolution is characterised by a **wide convergence of norms and values** but also the **emergence of new criticisms and related challenges**. On the one hand, in the areas of cooperation in which the EU and Tunisia have common values and shared interests, such as the building and consolidation of democratic institutions,

political dialogue could be substantially deepened and this is already bringing some positive results; above all the success of the democratic transition itself, which would have been even more delicate without the support of the EU. On the other hand, in the areas of cooperation in which the EU is battling with its own demons and tends to reflect its own interests in the agreements, like in the case of migration-related matters, the number of interested parties expressing their views in the public domain, is forcing the EU to reconsider the way political dialogue is held. These criticisms, often very critical, are exacerbated by the post-revolutionary climate which remains very tense and risk undermining trust in the EU as a key partner.

Overall, the risk of not **building political dialogue and cooperation on synergies between respective interests, rather than supposedly shared priorities**, is to remain in a position of trade-offs which has already proved it has flaws and limitations in respect of social unrest. In this section, the importance of ensuring effective co-ownership of the policy dialogue by improving the understanding of EU policies among the society at large and enhancing stakeholders' participation in the formulation of such policies, has been pointed out. More particularly, **ensuring consistency between rhetoric and practice of EU policies** would reinforce trust in its actions among the population, while **enhancing transversal coordination between areas of cooperation**, to better take into consideration the priorities of Tunisia and would serve the objective of stabilisation actively pursued by the EU in the country. In the emblematic case of the Mobility Partnership, some commentators, both in the EU and in Tunisia, argued that blocking or repatriating migrants on Tunisian territory, including migrants who are not Tunisians, would further stress an already very unstable socio-economic situation, while building the partnership of potential synergies between the European and Tunisian economies could be mutually beneficial³⁵. These commentators, including some political figures at the left end of the political spectrum in the European Parliament, proposed to substantially increase legal migrations to provide the Tunisian youth with economic opportunities in the aging European economy, in exchange for tightened control of illegal flows at the Tunisian borders. Their voice received quite some attention in Tunisian civilian society.

Economic cooperation: stabilisation as a prerequisite for integration

The question of taking into account Tunisia's priorities, not only in the formulation of policies and programmes but also in the prioritisation of such policies and programmes in the cooperation agenda, is particularly important in the field of economic cooperation. Tunisia's **top priority**, as expressed by the elected government, remains to **create employment and to counterbalance the rising inequalities** between coastal and interior regions³⁶. A persistently high rate of youth unemployment, 30 % in average over the last twenty years according to World Bank data, is a structural element of socio-economic instability which can be argued as the main determinant of social unrest that led to the Revolution of 2011 and now compromises its outcomes. It is a matter of fact that a large number of youngsters, disillusioned by a Revolution they started but which failed to bring them new economic opportunities, are radicalising. A report recently published by the UN expert group on the use of mercenaries, pointed out that up to 6000 thousands Tunisians have joined battlegrounds as foreign fighters in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Mali or neighbouring Libya. In this context, to stabilise the country's economy through **socio-economic reforms aimed at maximising employment creation should be considered not only a priority but also a precondition to trade liberalisation**, taking into account that, in the short run,

³⁵ For a discussion see the series of articles and editorials published on Nawaat (<http://nawaat.org/portail/>) concerning the Mobility Partnership and more broadly the management of the refugee crisis in the region by the EU.

³⁶ In a recent visit to Tunisia, Jim Yong Kim, the President of the World Bank Group, called for a sharper focus of international support on these two key priorities for the country. See the press release available at: <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2016/03/28/world-bank-international-support-political-economic-transition-tunisia>.

opening up the economy further could provoke sectorial adjustments, with negative implications in terms of employment and social inclusion.

This hypothesis is softened by the results of several studies³⁷ on the impact of trade liberalisation measures implemented in the past and the assessment of the potential implications of the DCFTA currently under negotiation. These studies highlighted that while **trade liberalisation is beneficial in the mid-to-long term, it can be costly in the short run**, especially for some specific sectors of the economy, such as agriculture where there is a high disproportion between the country's producers and their counterparts in EU member states³⁸. In a JRC report exploring the growth prospects of Euro-Mediterranean trade integration in the agricultural sector and the implications in terms of employment, it is shown that the DCFTA is likely to entail an expansion of Tunisia's agricultural sector, mostly the purveyor of low-skilled jobs, but also deteriorating conditions in the services sector, where the biggest potential for high-skilled job creation lies³⁹.

In fact, data shows that since the launch of the ENP in 2004 and, more particularly the establishment of a free trade area for industrial products in 2008, Tunisia has seen both its trade and fiscal balances deteriorate, partly as a result of the reduction of tariffs and the related increase in imports from the EU, which has not been compensated for by an increase in exports⁴⁰. Some unpublished studies also suggested that the establishment of a free trade area for manufactured products and the related programmes supporting the competitiveness of Tunisian industries, favoured the reinforcement of large national firms, at the expense of smaller businesses, notwithstanding SMEs are the main purveyors of employment in the private sector of countries such as Tunisia. These rather mitigated results must be put into context. The free trade agreement on manufactured products was signed right before the 2008 global financial crisis, which had negative repercussions on the imports of the EU, the main commercial partner of Tunisia⁴¹. The Tunisian Revolution two years later had broad negative implications on the economic and budgetary situation, substantially contributing to the deterioration of the above-mentioned indicators.

That being said, these negative trends and the **lack of tangible benefits for Tunisia of past trade agreements fuel the scepticism of many in the country concerning the negotiations for a DCFTA**. The trade sustainability impact assessment of a DCFTA between the EU and Tunisia, commissioned by the former to set the ground for forthcoming negotiations, highlights that, whether the DCFTA is expected to have broad benefits on the mid-to-long term for the Tunisian economy, it is most likely that there will be

³⁷ Mattoo, Rathindran and Subramanian (2002) stipulate that the impact of services liberalization on the employment of national factors of production is ambiguous. On one hand, employment will decline if the country is a net importer of the service being liberalized, if this sector was initially competitive within the country itself. On the other hand, if the sector had domestic restrictions to entry before the liberalization process, national employment might expand after the liberalization. The ILO (2013) highlights that developing countries tend to have undiversified exports, and as they grow tend to diversify further, before re-specializing. While the intensive margin (volumes) dominates in terms of export growth, the extensive margin (new products) dominates in terms of diversification. So, if the policy makers are concerned with higher export related employment, the intensive margin may seem appealing, at least in the short/medium run, since SM countries have a comparative competitive advantage in the production of agricultural where a strong unexploited trade potential exists. However, Weisbrot and Baker (2005) suggest that a similar ambiguity prevails when agricultural liberalization takes place. If the transition process goes too fast, it is likely that many workers will lose their jobs and experience substantial spells of unemployment, instead of being rapidly re-employed as the theory suggests. If worker displacement is substantial enough, and generates social instability, then the needed investments will not be forthcoming, rendering those previously employed in the inefficient protected domestic sectors into unemployed.

³⁸ See the conclusions of the trade sustainability impact assessment in support of the negotiations for the DCFTA commissioned by the European Commission and available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/policy-making/analysis/sustainability-impact-assessments/assessments/>.

³⁹ See Joint Research Centre (2013).

⁴⁰ These arguments are based on trade data published by the EU Directorate General for Trade and the Tunisian Central Bank.

⁴¹ See Ayadi (2013).

a 7 % GDP increase and a 20 % increase in exports towards the EU, on the short run several readjustments at the sectorial level and that there will be an expected shift between sectors of up to 8 % of skilled labour and 11 % of unskilled labour. These **short-term adjustments**, given the current situation of persistently high employment and related socio-economic instability, **might not be sustainable for Tunisia**. Langan (2015) argues this view and highlights that the DCFTA runs the risk of exacerbating poverty and fuelling further social unrest, on top of an already very delicate situation, notwithstanding the good intentions underlying the negotiations.

Many economists both in the EU and in Tunisia have argued that further opening the Tunisian economy, without first mobilising the necessary investments to further modernise the country's productive structures and boost the competitiveness of local producers, could have broad negative implications, above all in the agricultural sector. These arguments led to harsh criticisms against the DCFTA formulated in the Tunisian media and, to a minor extent, in civilian society, which in turn asked to be more involved in the forthcoming negotiations and, with that in mind, formulated specific recommendations⁴². The **EU proved to be responsive to the criticisms formulated and stressed the importance of asymmetric liberalisation**, as a means to counterbalance the negative effects of the DCFTA in the short run and leave time for the socio-economic reforms, aimed at preparing the Tunisian economy for further liberalisation, to bring the expected outcomes. The crucial question is whether ensuring asymmetrical liberalisation is enough to enable Tunisia to absorb the sectorial shocks foreseen in the short run, or if the current situation is too delicate even for that.

In the consultation, all the respondents argued that the DCFTA provides an opportunity for the economic development of the country, but some highlighted the need to have an open dialogue on its effects in the short and long term and for consultations at the sectorial level to ensure that the short-term adjustments are indeed sustainable. Interestingly enough, one respondent pointed out that the democratically elected government is the only legitimate body to negotiate the DCFTA and criticisms formulated by civilian society organisations should be carefully considered because they could well be politically motivated against the government.

The current situation of **exceptional economic difficulties** facing Tunisia has an **economic, social and a budgetary dimension**. On the one hand, youth unemployment and territorial inequalities worsened with the prolonged instability and uncertainty of the transition period. On the other hand, the chaotic situation within the country's public administration and the related institutional failures, quite substantially reduced the budgetary room for manoeuvre of the Tunisian authorities, further complicating the task of stimulating the economy.

The EU response to these challenges is twofold and economic cooperation in the years following the Revolution addressed both the socio-economic and the budgetary dimension. 80 % and 40 % of the resources allocated to Tunisia for the periods 2011-2013 and 2014-2020 respectively are aimed at supporting socio-economic reforms, designed to stimulate inclusive growth, mainly through private sector and Micro, small and medium sized enterprises (MSMEs) development and employment creation. 10 % and 30 % of the resources allocated over the two periods are aimed at supporting employment and social cohesion. In respect of the budgetary dimension, the EU initially allocated EUR 300 million in macro-financial assistance, then increased this to EUR 500 million, aimed at complementing the adjustment plan of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and thus supporting the Tunisian government in meeting its financial obligations. Hence, the **EU substantially reinforced its position as main economic partner for Tunisia**, providing crucial support to the newly elected authorities to face the

⁴² For further information see <http://ftdes.net/2016/02/declaration-sur-laleca/>.

socio-economic challenges of the transition period and building upon this enhanced cooperation to further advance the preparatory work in the negotiations of the DCFTA.

This reinforced role translated into greater **economic cooperation and more comprehensive support**. The measures implemented so far included bilateral and regional programmes for the development of the private sector and the establishment of specific partnerships for sectorial cooperation (ICTs, aerial transport and water management). The EU has supported private sector development since the early days of the FEMIP instrument, but the gap to promote socio-economic reforms widened with the launching of the Privileged Partnership in 2012, as attested by the implementation of the Small Business Act or the launching of the Med4Jobs programme promoted by the UfM. In addition, one of the key priorities under the Single Support Framework for the period 2014-2020 is the support to regional and local development, something which anticipates new opportunities for enhanced cooperation, considering the EU's long standing expertise in the field under the Cohesion Policy and raises the question as to whether Tunisia should be prepared to access the structural funds in the medium run.

All these **measures are crucial for the consolidation of Tunisia's economy, in view of deepened economic integration** with the EU, eventually through the establishment of the much-debated DCFTA. The programmes implemented contributed to accelerate approximation of Tunisian legislative and regulatory frameworks to EU norms and standards, as illustrated by the signature of an Agreement on Conformity Assessment and Acceptance (ACAA) on industrial products. Moreover, the support for socio-economic reforms and, most particularly, the initiatives launched to develop the private sector, have been acclaimed with positive feedback in the Tunisian media and among civil society organisations, in sharp contrast to the sometimes harsh criticisms directed towards negotiations of a DCFTA.

To conclude, the room for **manoeuvre to push for socio-economic reforms**, aimed at developing the private sector and improving market conditions, is broader now than before the Revolution, paving the way for greater economic integration and the establishment of a DCFTA. Economic cooperation passed from being rather narrowly focused on fostering openness of the economy and liberalising trade to a more comprehensive approach, in which trade negotiations are complemented with support for measures aimed at laying the foundations for trade liberalisation and limiting its detrimental effects on the short run. At the same time, **persistent socio-economic and budgetary difficulties**, related to the instability and uncertainty of the transition period, remain a substantial challenge for Tunisia and the promotion of those structural socio-economic reforms, most likely to bring wide results in terms of employment creation in the short-to-mid-term, should be unambiguously prioritised.

In this context, the **risk of moving forward too fast with much-debated negotiations of the DCFTA is to compromise the broad room for manoeuvre in pushing for socio-economic reforms** now enjoyed by the EU, especially if the perception in the eyes of the public opinion is that it is getting progressively eroded. Here again, the quality of policy dialogue concerning the negotiations of the DCFTA is a crucial issue, to the extent that the negotiations will then comfort, rather than put at risk, the position of the EU as a key partner of Tunisia. Furthermore, all respondents in the consultation highlighted the importance of EU support measures to seize the opportunity represented by the DCFTA, adding further weight to the hypothesis that it would be preferable to wait for tangible results of support programmes before embarking on further trade liberalisation.

Socio-cultural cooperation: from intergovernmental dialogue to society-wide support

In the years preceding the Tunisian Revolution, only limited advances were achieved in the area of socio-cultural cooperation, the exception being for the education and health sectors. The regime used social policies to maintain its grip over the population and most of the policies that were foreseen as being implemented by the EU were considered too intrusive. It has been previously highlighted how the lack of socio-economic reforms and concrete measures addressing important issues, such as the sustainability of

the welfare state or the protection of workers, contributed to the outbreak of mass protests and, eventually, the fall of the regime. The picture changed quite substantially with the Revolution and the partial **shift in the attention of the EU from the government to the society at large**, resulting in comprehensive support for the building and consolidation of a democratic society, based on the respect of individual rights and freedoms.

More significantly, three **main developments** in socio-cultural cooperation can be highlighted. First, the EU now considers **civil society support** as a priority in the formulation and implementation of its policies in Tunisia, following the basic assumption that in a well-functioning democracy civil society has a monitoring function over the actions of the government in charge. Second, **culture sector development** is considered as a crucial vector of citizenship, social cohesion and, more broadly, socio-economic development and is mainstreamed in measures aimed at consolidating democracy in the country, which is one of the main areas of socio-cultural cooperation retained in the Single Support Framework for the period 2014-2020. Third, **people-to-people contacts** continue to be developed, with the explicit aim of creating mutual understanding and building ties between Europeans and Tunisians, as was already the case before the Revolution, but with a much tighter leeway. More particularly, measures in support of the action of the diaspora have been announced, broadening the horizons of socio-cultural cooperation beyond the borders of Tunisia itself. In this sense, the EU passed from dealing exclusively with representatives of the regime to engage directly with virtually all parts of Tunisian society, increasingly supporting a variety of participants beyond the boundaries of the country's government.

In what concerns Tunisian **civil society organisations**, two distinct although closely interrelated dimensions, must be considered, namely their **emergence in the public sphere** and their **participation into the decision-making process**. On the one hand, the number of civil society organisations increased exponentially since the Revolution, building on the aspirations for political, social and economic development of society at large, freed from the oppression of the Ben Ali regime. On the other hand, the democratic transition entails substantial changes in the formal and informal institutions of the country and the reorganisation of the public administration, meaning that the necessary structures and frameworks for civil society organisations to be included in the decision-making process are yet to build. These factors have broad implications on the **civil society landscape, highly fragmented and rather politicised, lacking the resources to develop into a more coherent whole**. A UNDP study, published in 2014, highlights that a large number of organisations are linked to political activism, or underline as their main objective to act as counter powers to the government authorities, notwithstanding their usually small size and the limited youth participation in their activities. In this context, it is crucial to create the necessary legal frameworks and funding mechanisms to **ensure autonomy for and independence of civil society organisations** and, at the same time, to **improve the conditions for dialogue** with the authorities at any level of public administration.

In a report aimed at preparing the formulation and implementation of the EU programme in support of civil society organisations, a SWOT analysis was developed to understand the main strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing Tunisian civil society⁴³. The authors argue that the enthusiasm shown by the participants involved, their broad knowledge of the field and their capacity to mobilise human and social capitals, are important assets for the emerging civil society. On the other hand, insufficient management skills and related inefficient internal governance structures, limited resources, as well as difficult relations with the government authorities, are all important barriers to overcome for the development of civil society organisations and their enhanced participation in policy-

⁴³ See EU Delegation to Tunisia (2012).

making. Moreover, few organisations are sufficiently developed to have a substantial impact in the field or to have influence in policy dialogue and networking between organisations remains rather limited.

The EU launched several **instruments to support the emergence of civil society organisations and to enhance their participation in policy dialogue**. The Civil Society Facility (CSF) was created to facilitate access to resources for those organisations aiming to reinforce their advocacy, networking and monitoring capacities. The European Endowment for Democracy (EED) was set-up to help those wanting political change who were facing obstacles in accessing donor funding, while the Anna Lindh Foundation (ALF) was provided with additional funding to promote intercultural dialogue. In particular, EUR 3 million went to the programme 'Citizens for Dialogue', aimed at building capacity in civil society organisations for dialogue, exchange and networking. On the road map for EU support for civil society over the period 2014-2017, three priorities are retained; namely creating an enabling environment for civil society organisations; enhancing participation in the policy-making process; and building the capacity of local organisations to participate in socio-economic development. The EU also engaged in including civil society organisations in the programming and implementation of its policies in the country.

It has been highlighted before in this study that **including the stakeholders of EU policies in their programming and implementation can be beneficial** for the EU, not only in terms of image, but also in terms of the effectiveness of the policies themselves. The **organisation of events and consultations**, most notably in the framework of the negotiations for the 2013-2017 Action Plan and the preparatory work for the DCFTA, is an important step in that direction. However, several criticisms have been formulated by the participants themselves in these events themselves, who pointed out the rather closed-ended format of the consultation and the limited time at their disposal to formulate proposals and recommendations. This led a number of civil society organisations to team up and ask to be included in the negotiations of the DCFTA on a more continuous basis, and also in the monitoring of independent studies commissioned in support of the negotiations. On the other hand, the importance of depoliticising civil society organisations and developing a culture of citizenship, has been highlighted by some respondents in the consultation, which showed a certain degree of scepticism about streamlining the contribution of civil society in policy dialogue under the current conditions.

In this respect, some lessons can be learnt from the regional conferences on the contribution of civil society to the democratic transition organised by the UNDP. In these conferences, development priorities in eight different areas have been discussed with the representatives of various civil society organisations whilst a number of policy recommendations have been formulated following a bottom-up approach. The participatory methodology used in the conferences contrasts with the top-down approach adopted by the EU in its consultations and this received a positive feedback. Furthermore, the participants stressed the importance of awareness and information campaigns, attesting to the importance of building understanding and 'sympathy capital' around the reforms which are expected to be supported and implemented. To conclude, the scope of socio-cultural cooperation between the EU and Tunisia widened substantially after the Revolution, with the attention of the EU shifting from the government to society at large, highlighted by new policies, programmes and related instruments in support of civil society and the culture sector. In parallel, **cooperation and partnerships in the education and health sectors continued to play an important role** in bilateral and regional relations, building on the successes of the TEMPUS and Erasmus Mundus programmes. These two programmes enabled Tunisian students, professors and staff to exchange knowledge and experiences and provided the country's researchers with new opportunities for funding and scientific collaboration. In this sense, these programmes

contributed substantially to leading the way towards economic integration between the EU and Tunisia and creating fundamental ties between their respective academic communities⁴⁴.

That being said, several criticisms on the margin of the debates on the Mobility Partnership have raised the **crucial question of brain drain**, pointing out that while the EU creates barriers for the migration of low-skilled labourers, it facilitates mobility for the most promising talents. This very fact contributes to the general scepticism about the intentions of the EU when cooperating with Tunisia, eroding the legitimising basis for enhanced co-ownership of EU policies implemented in the country. On the other hand, considering the Tunisian specific issue of particularly high unemployment for high-skilled workers, the question of brain drain does not appear particularly pressing in the short-term.

⁴⁴ Refer to section 3.3 of this report for some figures on the TEMPUS and ERASMUS programmes.

5 Conclusions and policy recommendations

This study investigates and assesses the evolution and potential impacts of EU policies in Tunisia before and after the Revolution using an innovative analytical framework developed for this purpose. To conduct this assessment, the most important milestones in the frameworks of cooperation agreed between the EU and Tunisia and the policies implemented under such frameworks, are described. Next, the impact of such policies before the Revolution and their subsequent evolution, are analysed to highlight the causes and the consequences of the shifting approach of the EU towards Tunisia and the added value this shift brought to the cooperation between the two partners. Finally, the analysis is complemented with inputs collected via a consultation from key participants across the Tunisian political and civil society landscape.

The analysis used a dynamic analytical framework, which considers two **interrelated dimensions**, the **changing situation in Tunisia** and the **shifting approach of the EU** towards the country – a transition from a situation of ‘unsustainable stability’ to one of ‘unstable sustainability’.

In the pre-Revolution period, EU relations with Mediterranean partner countries in general and, more particularly with the autocratic government of Ben Ali, were narrowed down to an **exchange of commercial, financial and strategic interests**, in line with most development aid programmes across the world. The rhetoric of the EU, based on the promotion of principles of democracy and market economy as the fertile soil for stability and prosperity in the region, **did not succeed in creating the proper incentives to set Mediterranean partner countries on the road to the reforms** deemed necessary for the achievement of the ambitious objectives laid down in the partnership. The discrepancies between the rhetoric and the practice of EU policies on the ground were instrumentalised by autocratic governments, such as the one of Ben Ali, to perpetuate their control over the economy and society. The analysis hence shows that **EU policies implemented before the Tunisian Revolution** relied on and **were limited by three fundamental trade-offs** resulting from an exchange of interests with the incumbent regime. The three generic trade-offs retained in the analysis correspond to the three main axis of cooperation – political, economic and socio-cultural – and are herewith defined as trade versus aid, benefits versus freedoms and security versus silence.

The Tunisian Revolution brought two fundamental dynamics – **democratisation and destabilisation** – which had broad repercussions on the relations between Tunisia and the EU. These dynamics enhanced the probability of more **synergies and complementarities** between the two partners’ political projects and the **necessity** to strengthen financial support, providing the EU with a **window of opportunity for enhanced cooperation**, underlined in a **win-win philosophy, co-development and deeper integration**, in line with the ambitions of the ENP. The **EU enacted important changes in its policies** and almost doubled its financial support in the years following the Revolution **to seize this window of opportunity** in the three dimensions of cooperation.

The **evolution of political cooperation** between the EU and Tunisia after the Revolution is characterised by a **wide convergence of norms and values** but also by the **emergence of new criticisms and related challenges**. In the areas of cooperation in which the EU and Tunisia have common values and shared interests, such as the building and consolidation of democratic institutions, political dialogue could be substantially strengthened. In the areas of cooperation in which the EU tends to reflect its own interests in the agreements, as in the case of migration related matters, the emergence of a plurality of participants expressing their views in the public domain is forcing the EU to reconsider the way political dialogue is held and to enhance the participation of stakeholders in the formulation and prioritisation of its policies in the country.

Two important elements when it comes to enhancing co-ownership of policy dialogue and to fostering better understanding in the civil society, have been highlighted in this study, namely **ensuring consistency between rhetoric and practice of EU policies and enhancing transversal coordination between areas of cooperation**. It is argued that doing so would enhance the EU 'sympathy capital' in the eyes of the stakeholders of its policies and ensure that their aspirations are carefully taken into consideration in the prioritisation of the latter. More broadly, **building political cooperation on synergies between respective interests, rather than supposedly shared priorities**, is to remain in a position of trade-offs which have already proved unsustainable and that would risk, coupled with the current instability, undermining the outcomes of the Revolution.

The room for **manoeuvre in pushing for socio-economic reforms**, aimed at developing the private sector and improving market conditions, broadened with the Revolution, paving the way for greater economic integration and the establishment of a DCFTA. Economic cooperation passed from being rather narrowly focused on fostering economic openness and liberalising trade, to a more comprehensive approach, in which trade negotiations are complemented with more effective support for structural reforms, aimed at laying the ground for trade liberalisation and limiting its detrimental effects in the short run. On the other hand, **persistent socio-economic and budgetary difficulties**, related to the instability and uncertainty of the transition period, remain a substantial challenge for Tunisia which substantially complicates the adoption of structural reforms which might entail delicate adjustments.

In this context, this study argues that the promotion of socio-economic reforms that are most likely to bring tangible results in terms of employment creation, should be unambiguously prioritised and the **risks of moving forward too fast with much debated DCFTA negotiations** should be acknowledged. Further liberalising trade might lead to sectorial shocks, impossible to absorb in such a delicate situation for the country, and fuel the fire of social discontent, while it is important that structural economic reforms receive wide acceptance.

The scope of **socio-cultural cooperation between the EU and Tunisia** widened substantially after the Revolution, with the EU's attention shifting from the government to society at large, highlighted by new policies, programmes and related instruments. In parallel, **cooperation and partnerships in the education and health sectors continued to play an important role** in bilateral and regional relations, building on the successes of the TEMPUS and Erasmus Mundus programmes.

This completely renewed approach to socio-cultural cooperation entails the **direct engagement of the EU with a variety of participants** ranging from civil society organisations to cultural institutions or even individuals, in the form of some specific programmes within the area of people-to-people contacts. This crucial development provides new opportunities but also new challenges, most particularly related to the discrepancies between the rhetoric and the practice of EU policies and the related criticisms coming from a lively and exigent emerging civil society.

Policy recommendations

- The EU should mind the gap between the perception and the realities on the ground when exporting its normative approach and adapt it to the broad convergence of norms and values with post Revolution countries such as Tunisia. The persistent discrepancies between the rhetoric accompanying its neighbourhood policy in pre-Revolution countries progressively eroded its legitimacy in the eyes of a variety of participants now engaging in policy dialogue. A renewed approach based on complementarities, synergies win-win and co-development should progressively emerge. A fully-fledged political, economic and social assessment conducted, whenever possible, with the stakeholders themselves is needed to maximise the impact of EU policies on the ground.

- The one-size-fits-all approach of the EU neighbourhood policy, under which the support provided to partner countries is implemented on the basis of a rather limited differentiation principle, should be reviewed for the case of Tunisia. The country fully embarked upon a democratisation process, entailing a number of destabilising effects, which requires ad-hoc measures of support and a much more tailored prioritisation of such measures, necessitating an enhancement of transversal coordination between areas of cooperation and more flexible planning in terms of timing. These changes in the cooperation approach to Tunisia would be in line with the political declaration for a Privileged Partnership, formulated in 2012. A new prospect should be provided to the country. The more for more principle could be lifted when Tunisia would complete a list of requirements related to realised political, economic and social reforms to ensure convergence to what can be called 'modern democracies' to benefit from such a lift. This would render the partnership symmetric and would give positive prospects to other south Mediterranean countries that would embark in similar processes.
- The EU should be decisive in stepping up its action in terms of financial support and technical assistance to Tunisia, to cope with the political, economic and social needs stemming from the emergency, so as to maximise the chances for a successful democratisation and progressive stabilisation of the country. Such action should be done in collaboration and close coordination with international partners. Tunisia hangs in the balance between being, on one hand, an example of successful auto-determination for the whole South Mediterranean region and, on the other, falling under the pressure of radicalisation (the country is, as of today, the main purveyor of foreign fighters) and a neighbour of instable Libya. It is in the interest of the EU to further step-up its support and tip the scale towards democratisation and stabilisation as this is key for the security and stability for Europe.
- **On the political front**, the EU should better exploit the existing synergies between the Tunisian political project and its own, enhancing co-ownership of the policy dialogue, most particularly by dedicating more funds to create better understanding and to foster consensus over future policies that need to be implemented in the society at large. A unilateral, normative approach not reflecting the different existing views within the Tunisian political spectrum, could prevent the EU from turning the window of opportunity for enhanced cooperation brought by the Tunisian Revolution into concrete steps forward in the association with Tunisia. Concrete actions encompass the development and the implementation of a comprehensive support approach to democracy to which technical and financial means are allocated and carefully prioritised; Moreover a clear support action must target the judicial and the security sectors via more cooperation with EU institutions to achieve tangible progresses.
- **On the economic front**, the EU should review its approach to economic integration via the DFTCA and leave more leeway for a step-by-step approach, emphasising local priorities and economic needs. Partial and sectorial liberalisation should be explored, in line with the anticipated outcomes and tangible results of structural economic reforms, which will enable the Tunisian economy to cope with further trade openness, without perishing during the adjustment phase in particular in terms of the potential detrimental consequences on already fragile employment; Moreover, concrete actions should target 1) regional development and the reduction of inequality for example allowing Tunisia to benefit from the EU regional policy and structural funds; 2) micro-small and medium sized enterprises development and their financing beyond an ailed banking sector, for example by supporting the enhancement of the role of credit guarantees organisations nationally and regionally, microcredit, cooperative finance...

- **On the social front**, the EU should focus on consolidating the civil society landscape, allocating an adequate amount of funds to the development of governance and networking skills of civil society organisations, while promoting a civic rather than politicised approach to their activities. This is a prerequisite to much needed, but also a possible limitation in greater participation of civil society in the policy dialogue between EU and Tunisia. Hence a full-fledged independent assessment is needed to ensure that the supported organisations are truly engaged in the democratisation and stabilisation process of the country. In addition, the mobility partnership must be implemented without delay. Actions such as visa waiver for Tunisia must be explored, facilitation of visas to entrepreneurs, researchers, scientists, professors... should be granted. In the field of science, technology and innovation, an EU-Tunisia comprehensive action plan must be devised between both partners to agree on the priorities of the country in this field. More support to students and researchers should be given under the Erasmus programmes and others.

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Annex: Questionnaire

INTRODUCTION

Tunisia has been a key partner of the EU since the very beginning of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership in 1995 and the cooperation between the two has been stepped up throughout the subsequent revisions of the EU frameworks of cooperation with its neighbouring countries. These revisions consisted, among other aspects, in enhancing the capability of the EU in promoting democratic norms and values in its immediate neighbourhood.

The Tunisian Revolution brought the country onto the path of democratisation and, in that sense, created a window of opportunity for enhanced cooperation with the EU. The substantial increase of funding allocated to Tunisia, not only channelled into supporting the building of institutions and the emergence of a lively civil society, but also in addressing urgent needs related to the destabilisation of the country's economy, attests to the willingness of the EU to seize these opportunities.

The aim of this data assembly is to bring together the individual perceptions of political and civil society participants in Tunisia in respect of EU cooperation, so as to provide EU policy-makers with a better understanding of the issues at stake for the future of the partnership between EU and Tunisia.

The questionnaire was directed via email to a selected sample of government officials, political and civil society organisations, who are informed about EU policies in Tunisia and who benefited from its programmes. The responses are collected and integrated in section 4.2 of this study.

It should be noted that the rate of answers was low because of the little time allocated to the consultation.

SECTION A – CONTACT INFORMATION

A1 – Name?		
A2 – Organisation?		
A3 – Position within the organisation?		
A4 – Time spent within the organisation?		
A5 – How long the organisation has been operating with the current mission and mode of functioning?	1) before the Revolution	
	2) after the Revolution	
A6 – What are the main <u>challenges</u> related to the democratic transition for the mission and activities of your organisation?		

<p>A7 – What are the main <u>opportunities</u> related to the democratic transition for the mission and activities of your organisation?</p>	<p>Open question</p>	
<p>SECTION B – BENEFITS FROM THE EU-TUNISIA PARTNERSHIP</p>		
<p>B1 – Has your organisation received or is now receiving support from the EU?</p>	<p>0) yes</p>	
	<p>1) no</p>	
<p>B1a – If yes, under which programme has your organisation received or is now receiving such support?</p>	<p>Open question</p>	
<p>B1b – If yes, how satisfied are you with the support your organisation is receiving?</p> <p><i>Please note that this evaluation, like every other answer provided in this questionnaire, concerns only you and not necessarily the organisation for which you are working.</i></p>	<p>0) very unsatisfied</p>	
	<p>1) unsatisfied</p>	
	<p>2) neutral</p>	
	<p>3) satisfied</p>	
	<p>4) very satisfied</p>	
<p>B2 – The support received by the EU has been essential to manage the changes and challenges related to the transition to democracy and the related economic difficulties.</p>	<p>0) strongly disagree</p>	
	<p>1) disagree</p>	
	<p>2) neutral</p>	
	<p>3) agree</p>	
	<p>4) strongly agree</p>	
<p>B3 – Do you consider that the EU could play a role in supporting you to face the challenges or seize the opportunities related to the undergoing transition process?</p>	<p>1) yes</p>	
	<p>2) no</p>	
<p>B3a – If yes, do you have an idea through which programme the EU could provide you with effective support?</p> <p><i>Here are intended short-to-medium term programmes in relation with the transition period.</i></p>	<p>Open question</p>	

SECTION C – OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCED COOPERATION		
<p><i>This section is subdivided in three distinct sub-sections addressing the perspectives for enhanced political, economic and socio-cultural cooperation respectively. In the interviews it is advised to focus on one sub-section or the other according to the participant interviewed: political institution (C1), economic agent (C2) or civil society organisation (C3).</i></p>		
SECTION C1 – PERCEPTIONS OF THE EU-TUNISIA POLITICAL PARTNERSHIP		
C1.1 – In your understanding throughout the country's democratic transition the EU:	1) has been an obstacle to democratisation	
	2) did not have a substantial role	
	3) acted as a watchdog	
	4) actively engaged in the transition	
C1.2 – The EU played a substantial role in the institutionalisation and internationalisation of the country's authorities originated from the democratic transition.	1) strongly disagree	
	2) disagree	
	3) neutral	
	4) agree	
	5) strongly agree	
C1.3 – The partnership between EU and Tunisia in its current formulation is rooted in common values and shared interests.	1) strongly disagree	
	2) disagree	
	3) neutral	
	4) agree	
	5) strongly agree	
C1.4 – Could you specify in which fields you consider that the values and interests of the EU and Tunisia cannot converge?	Open question	
C1.5 – More particularly, do you consider that the values and interests of the EU and Tunisia converge in the Mobility Partnership signed in 2014?	1) yes	
	2) no	
C1.6 – If no, could you specify why?	Open question	

<p>C1.7 – In your understanding of the future developments in the country, you consider the political association with the EU to be:</p>	1) not strategic at all	
	2) not that strategic	
	3) neutral	
	4) somewhat strategic	
	5) highly strategic	
<p>C1.8 – What could be done to make the political association between the EU and Tunisia more strategic for the development of the latter?</p> <p><i>In terms of consolidation of democracy but also the country's role in regional and international forums.</i></p>	Open question	
<p>SECTION C2 – OPPORTUNITIES RELATED TO ECONOMIC INTEGRATION WITH THE EU</p>		
<p>C2.1 – Progressive integration with the EU is beneficial for the economic development of the country.</p> <p><i>Economic integration with the EU entails gradual approximation of Tunisian norms and standards to EU ones, further opening and liberalisation of the country's economy and the conclusion of both a DCFTA and a Mobility Partnership.</i></p>	1) strongly disagree	
	2) disagree	
	3) neutral	
	4) agree	
	5) strongly agree	
<p>C2.2 – Do you consider that the perspectives for economic integration with the EU increased with the country's democratic transition?</p>	1) yes	
	2) no	
<p>C2.3 – In what concerns the development of the activities of your organisation, you consider the signature of a DCFTA with the EU to be:</p>	1) a threat	
	2) an opportunity	
	3) both	
<p>C2.3a – If you consider the signature of a DCFTA to be a threat, could you specify the reasons?</p>	Open question	
<p>C2.4 – Do you count on the support of the EU to cope with the challenges and seize the opportunities coming with the signature of a DCFTA?</p>	1) yes	
	2) no	

<p>C2.4a – If yes, do you have an idea of which programmes of the EU could provide you with effective support?</p> <p><i>Here are intended programmes for mid-to-long term support to socio-economic development.</i></p>	Open question	
SECTION C3 – EU ROLE IN THE EMERGENCE OF TUNISIAN CIVIL SOCIETY		
<p>C3.1 – The EU played a substantial role in the emergence of civil society participants during the democratic transition.</p>	1) strongly disagree	
	2) disagree	
	3) neutral	
	4) agree	
	5) strongly agree	
<p>C3.2 – Do you consider that as someone representing the civil society your voice is sufficiently taken into account in the deliberation between political actors in the country?</p>	1) yes	
	2) no	
<p>C3.2a – If not, could you specify what could be done to support not only the emergence but also the participation of civil society organisations in the country’s decision-making?</p>	Open question	
<p>C3.3 – Do you consider that as someone representing the civil society your voice is sufficiently taken into account in the deliberation between the EU and Tunisia?</p>	1) yes	
	2) no	
<p>C3.3a – If not, could you specify what could be done to support not only the emergence but also the participation of civil society organisations in the policy dialogue with the EU?</p>	Open question	
CONCLUSION		
Thank you for having dedicated some of your precious time to fill this questionnaire.		

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PHOTO CREDIT: iStock International Inc

ISBN 978-92-823-9144-0 (print)
ISBN 978-92-823-9145-7 (pdf)
doi:10.2861/504368 (print)
doi:10.2861/859618 (pdf)

