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A TRANSATLANTIC STRATEGY FOR A DEMOCRATIC TUNISIA

By Frances G. Burwell, Amy Hawthorne,
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Cover photo: REUTERS/Zoubeir Souissi. A girl waves a Tunisian flags during celebrations marking the fifth anniversary of Tunisia's 2011 revolution, in Habib Bourguiba Avenue in Tunis, Tunisia January 14, 2016.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Tunisia's 2011 revolution ousted longtime authoritarian ruler Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and put the country on the path towards democracy. In response, the United States, European Union (EU), and key EU member states—namely France, Germany, and the United Kingdom—substantially boosted their assistance to the country. But simply increasing support has not proven to be effective—today Tunisia's democratic and economic development seems stalled as challenges mount. To help Tunisia as it moves away from the immediate post-revolutionary period, the United States and the EU must develop a joint transatlantic strategy that recognizes Tunisia as a priority for Western engagement with the Arab world.

Since 2011, Tunisia has held three free and fair elections and the country's main political parties have demonstrated a crucial willingness to compromise and govern inclusively. But five years after the revolution, democratic reform in Tunisia is shaky and the public mood is darkening.

Tunisia faces major challenges in three key areas: economic development, security, and democratic development. The government has failed to undertake needed economic reforms; growth remains low, and high unemployment—particularly among youth—persists. Socioeconomic discontent, exacerbated by continued marginalization of the interior regions, was a major driver of the revolution. A tenuous security situation has also contributed to economic stagnation. Following major terror attacks in 2015 by the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), the tourism industry has deteriorated, threatening the livelihood of hundreds of thousands of Tunisians.¹ Western donors, in recognition of the threat that ISIS in neighboring Libya poses to Tunisia, have increased assistance for Tunisia's security forces and border protection. Yet in the absence of substantial reforms to the security sector since the revolution, the ability of Tunisia's security forces to both maintain stability and respect basic citizens' rights remains uncertain.

The United States, the EU, and key EU member states can take clear steps as part of a renewed transatlantic strategy to boost Tunisia's economy, improve security,

and support democratic development. On the economic front, the United States and Europe should take these steps:

- Increase support considerably by pledging a joint package in aid, investment, and trade benefits worth at least \$2 billion a year for the next five years.
- Measure all initiatives and support against whether they will have a direct impact on youth unemployment and regional economic disparities. Along these lines, the United States and Europe should organize a high-profile conference on economic development in one of Tunisia's impoverished governorates.
- Adopt an approach that helps Tunisia's macroeconomic stability by linking significant budget support to the implementation of reforms that open up the economy and create a more level economic playing field.
- Work with the International Monetary Fund and other multilateral financial institutions to increase support for a social safety net for Tunisians.
- Increase European and US market access for Tunisian goods and services, even as trade negotiations continue.
- Create a division of labor among donors that will allow for the consolidation and coordination of economic assistance.

Tunisia's security is a top concern for the United States and Europe, as is preventing the country from becoming a hub for ISIS. Their assistance should focus on bolstering the capabilities of Tunisia's security actors, while also supporting critical reforms in the security sector that will enhance the effectiveness and legitimacy of state institutions among citizens. The United States and Europe should do the following to promote common diplomatic engagement around these themes:

- Hold a major conference and other consultations with Tunisian officials, stakeholders in parliament, and reform advocates from civil society to identify and agree on security sector reform benchmarks that could be met in exchange for equipment and other material support.

¹ About four hundred thousand of Tunisia's ten million people work in the tourism industry, according to the Tunisian Ministry of Tourism. Thessa Lageman, "Tunisia's Tourism Struggling One Month after Massacre," Al Jazeera, July 29, 2015, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/07/tunisia-tourism-struggling-month-massacre-150727080510954.html>.

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- Support key actors outside of the security agencies, such as nongovernmental and civil society organizations promoting good governance and accountability, while simultaneously working closely with the government on key issues such as border security.
- Be more transparent in communicating with the Tunisian public about security assistance.
- Ensure that aid for the Tunisian military (which since the revolution has played a much larger internal security role) and the National Guard adhere to internationally recognized human rights standards, as should aid for the Ministry of Interior.

Finally, a joint US-European strategy should recognize that the long-term success of Tunisia's democracy will depend on the depth of political progress rather than on tightened security measures. Democracy assistance should go beyond support for elections and focus on helping Tunisia build effective democratic institutions of government. In this arena, Western donors should do the following:

- Foster Tunisia's engagement in the global community of democracies, including in multilateral institutions, as a way to solidify the country's democratic gains and raise its international visibility as a new democracy.
- Be more vigilant and outspoken about human rights abuses in Tunisia by using both public and private diplomacy to urge Tunisia to respect its domestic and international human rights obligations.
- Encourage donors to focus their efforts on areas of comparative advantage and relative competencies in order to maximize the efficiency of assistance.
- Focus on institutions where assistance has the potential to address crucial policy issues and

demonstrate to Tunisians that democracy can improve their lives. As part of this, donors should connect Tunisians with experts in other recently democratized countries who have overcome similar institution-building challenges.

- Undertake a joint assessment of their support to civil society to develop a more effective way forward.

The United States and Europe must engage in a joint transatlantic approach to support Tunisia's democratization. They should work to avoid duplication of assistance efforts through information-sharing, strategic coordination, and programmatic transparency. In order to better ensure the effectiveness of their assistance the United States and Europe should:

- Establish a high-level transatlantic framework for regular discussions on Tunisia that will be managed by Western capitals in order to elevate Tunisia as a policy priority. The task force should coordinate with the government in Tunis and other local stakeholders to monitor progress and adjust priorities.

The West must match its strong rhetorical support for Tunisia's future with an increase in targeted, coordinated assistance that makes clear Tunisia's priority status. While the ultimate responsibility for reform lies with Tunisia, the international community, and especially the United States and Europe, can play a much more effective role in helping the country achieve greater stability and democracy. Not to do so would be a waste of an opportunity because a democratic Tunisia is critical to advancing the West's goal of a more stable and moderate Middle East. But without action soon, Tunisia may succumb to the many challenges it faces. Time is running out.

THE CASE FOR TRANSATLANTIC COOPERATION

Tunisia, the only positive story to emerge from the 2011 “Arab Spring” uprisings, could become the first consolidated democracy in the Arab world. This outcome would powerfully advance the West’s long-term hopes for a more stable, moderate Middle East. The United States and Europe should make a successful democratic transition in Tunisia a much higher priority on the transatlantic agenda and forge a joint strategy to advance this goal.

Five years after Tunisia’s pro-democracy revolution, the democratic transition is shaky and the public mood is darkening. The Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) and other radical groups have appeal among thousands of Tunisian youth. In addition, chaos from neighboring Libya has spilled across the border into Tunisia in the form of security threats and displaced individuals. Tunisia faces widespread economic and social discontent, while crucial economic and political reforms are trapped in government gridlock and face stiff resistance from powerful interest groups. New institutions of democracy are weak. Fighting terrorism now dominates the government’s agenda at the expense of reforms, and many officials and citizens prioritize security over civil liberties. Discontent in the deprived interior regions—where the uprising began in late 2010—continues unabated, as seen by widespread protests by unemployed youth in January 2016. A recent poll found that 83 percent of Tunisians believe the country is heading in the wrong direction and 52 percent do not see democracy as the best system for Tunisia.² It is time for the international community to approach Tunisia with more urgency and to deliver more expedient, tangible support. The United States and Europe have a large stake in a democratic Tunisia, and failing to do all that is possible now would constitute an immense missed opportunity.

It is time for the international community to approach Tunisia with more urgency and to deliver more expedient, tangible support.

Of course, a successful democratic transition in Tunisia will not trigger an immediate wave of positive change elsewhere in the Arab world. Tunisia is a small country and an outlier in regional politics. The current violent turmoil across the Middle East will blunt any democratic demonstration effect in the short run. But over the longer term, Tunisia could serve as proof, especially for the region’s young people, that democracy in the region *is* achievable. In Tunisia, democracy could gain a foothold in a part of the world where it has been absent. For the United States and Europe, forging a strong partnership with a democratic Arab ally could change how the West operates in the Arab world and help build more just, accountable, and representative

governance in the Middle East. A democracy in Tunisia would provide a living counterexample to the two prevailing regional governance models: anti-systemic radical Islam as represented by ISIS, and the traditional authoritarian security states that have failed in development and have bred popular discontent.

If Tunisia does fail in its democratic experiment, it will severely weaken the idea of a third way between these two choices. Indeed, such a failure could be just the “victory”

on which ISIS and other radicals are counting. The West would be implicated in this failure, because of its strong rhetorical support for Tunisian democracy and because, in many ways, its own values would have been defeated. State collapse or a return to autocratic repression in Tunisia could also have serious security implications for North Africa, the United States, and especially for Europe.

Of course, even with the best of efforts, Europe and the United States cannot create a democratic outcome in Tunisia. Tunisians, not outsiders, launched the 2010-2011 revolution and they will be the ones to drive it forward or bring it to an end. However, external influence can serve as a tipping factor when change hangs in the balance. Tunisia’s economic and cultural links to Europe also create a relatively receptive environment for the promotion of democratic values and present a greater incentive for Tunisia’s leaders to improve relations by responding to US and European

² “Tunisians Believe Country Is Headed in Wrong Direction; Pessimistic on Economy, Concerned over Terrorism,” International Replication Institute, January 13, 2016, <http://www.iri.org/resource/iri-center-insights-poll-tunisians-believe-country-headed-wrong-direction-pessimistic>.



A Tunisian man holds a sign during demonstrations after the March 2015 attack on the Bardo Museum that reads, 'I am Tunisian. . . I am against terrorism.' Photo credit: Amine Ghrabi/Flickr.

encouragement. Additionally, because Tunisia is not a top security priority for Europe or the United States (compared to Saudi Arabia or Egypt), and because there is a genuine pro-democracy constituency in Tunisia, there should be less concern that vigorously promoting democracy will antagonize a security relationship on which the United States or Europe believe they depend or give rise to allegations that the West is “forcing” democracy on the country.³

To achieve anything significant in Tunisia, however, the United States and Europe—the European Union (EU) and France, Germany, and the United Kingdom (UK), the three member states most influential and active in Tunisia—must work together. In recent years, Western powers have seen their influence diminish in the Middle East and their foreign aid budgets become

more constrained. Therefore, Europe and the United States should pool their efforts to maximize their influence and have a real impact.

Shared transatlantic values and core interests in the Middle East and North Africa provide a strong foundation for such cooperation. Moreover, since 2011, Europe and the United States have had a common stance on crucial issues in Tunisia—strongly backing democratic change, stressing the importance of Islamist inclusion in politics, and economic reform—so there is no need to hammer out a common policy to facilitate cooperation. At a time when US and European policy in the Middle East and North Africa is dominated by countering threats and mitigating crises, Tunisia represents a rare chance to leverage transatlantic ties and shared values to advance a positive goal in a deeply troubled region.

³ Kristina Kausch, “Tunisia’s Blessed Scarcity,” FRIDE, October 2014.

BUILDING A TRANSATLANTIC STRATEGY

Forging a joint strategy does not mean aligning every European and US initiative in Tunisia, conducting all aid programs together, or constantly coordinating diplomatic messaging. The United States and its European partners have very different histories and styles of engagement in Tunisia, and in some arenas, distinct interests. What is possible, and needed, is an agreement on a few crucial overarching shared priorities and a joint diplomatic and aid strategy to pursue them.

This new transatlantic strategy for Tunisia as it enters a make-or-break phase for democratic consolidation would have four planks:

- **First, the United States and Europe should increase their support considerably by pledging a significant joint package in aid, investment, and trade benefits—worth at least \$2 billion a year for the next five years.** This would substantially increase the current annual total of US and European assistance. Such stepped-up support would be invaluable for Tunisia, as it faces a deteriorating economic situation and fiscal crisis. It would also provide an incentive to make difficult but needed reforms, and demonstrate that there is a significant reward from Western democracies for staying on a democratic path.⁴

To manage this enhanced support, the United States and Europe should forge a reform platform with Tunisia based on wide consultation with Tunisian officials, the business community, civil society, and other stakeholders. Agreed-upon reforms should reflect Tunisia's own commitments

and the ambitions of its citizens. To date, European and US conditionality has been light, or absent altogether, in order to not push Tunisia's fragile new systems and overwhelmed officials too hard. Some will argue that Tunisia's needs are too urgent to wait for the passage of controversial reforms, and that holding back aid could be seen as problematic for a country that is fragile and passing through a difficult period. But providing major new support to Tunisia without a link to reforms would, in effect, subsidize the current stagnation, reinforce those who want to turn back the clock on democracy, and fail to take advantage of European and US leverage. Without reforms, Tunisia will simply not be able to create economic and social opportunities, fight terrorism effectively while protecting citizens' rights and security, or make deeper democratic progress.

- **Second, the United States and Europe should coordinate their aid and other support much more closely and focus their shared aid and diplomatic efforts on a few key areas.** This does not mean simply sharing information about projects or creating a massive aid database. It requires following a strategy that involves working together in some cases (such as on a large signature aid project) and doing other projects in parallel when donors have clear comparative advantages in one region or on a particular issue. The United States and its European partners must avoid duplicating efforts on the ground, as happened for example during Tunisia's 2011 and 2014 elections. Both the United States and the EU funded technical assistance for Tunisia's electoral commission and separate election observation missions by four international organizations and dozens of local groups. In such a small country, these observers were bumping into one another constantly at the polling stations. There has also been considerable overlap in entrepreneurship and vocational training, civil society aid, and other sectors, which should all be re-examined.
- **Third, the United States, the EU, and key EU member states must increase their attention to democracy building in Tunisia.** The overarching strategic goal in Tunisia should be to help the country strengthen security without eroding rights and democratic practices. As important as

⁴ Some Western officials may argue that such a large aid package should be provided by multilateral development banks, not by the governments' own foreign aid budgets. Indeed, post-2011, aid for Tunisia from the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and African Development Bank has far outstripped what Europe and the United States have given bilaterally. But the EU, its member states, and the United States have a distinct role to play. They are not technocratic institutions but fellow democracies helping a new democracy. Unlike multilateral donor institutions whose mandate is limited to promoting macroeconomic stability and human development, they can look at Tunisia through a wider strategic lens. Specifically, they can push democratic development, human rights, and other political concerns through diplomacy and aid and can stress Tunisia's value as a democracy, not just as another aid recipient. They can also provide grant aid, as opposed to the loan-heavy programs of the international financial institutions.

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improving security—and growing the economy—are, without crucial political reforms, democratic institution-building, and the deepening of democratic norms and values among the population, Tunisia’s attempted transition will not succeed. Efforts to support democracy should be broadened beyond assistance for elections. Therefore, Europe and the United States should focus much more on protecting human rights; helping to develop institutions that can promote citizen input, accountability, and pluralism; and supporting effective Tunisian civil society across the country.

- **Fourth, Europe and the United States should engage with Tunisia in visibly different ways than they do with non-democratic Arab states.** For instance, they should consult widely with Tunisians in designing and evaluating assistance and be much more transparent about their aid programs (where the money is going and the programs’ results), in order to model the type of governance

that they hope will emerge in Tunisia. They should intensify efforts to feature civil society leaders, entrepreneurs, youth activists, reform advocates, and others who represent the “new Tunisia” prominently in strategic dialogues and other high-level forums, along with elected leaders. Finally, they should look for more opportunities to spotlight Tunisia’s democratic progress on the international stage, such as by including Tunisia in G-7 summits (as was done in 2015), the Community of Democracies, the United Nations Human Rights Council, and other such platforms.

Successful US and European efforts to end the civil war in Libya and to stabilize that country would also have a hugely positive effect on Tunisia’s democratic transition. The chaos in Libya has spurred terrorism and caused other security spillovers in Tunisia, added strains on Tunisia’s economy, and caused up to about one million displaced Libyans—almost 10 percent of Tunisia’s population—to flee to the country since 2011.

TAKING STOCK: TUNISIA'S TRANSITION TO DATE

In the five years since nationwide citizen protests led to the ouster of autocratic President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and ended six decades of authoritarian rule, Tunisia has made genuine democratic gains against a backdrop of domestic and regional turmoil. Tunisia has held three free elections. The major opposition party, the Islamist Al-Nahda movement that was ruthlessly repressed under the Ben Ali regime, has rotated into and out of power peacefully. Tunisia wrote a new democratic constitution through a highly consensual and inclusive process, and civil society organizations and other citizen initiatives have flourished in the more open environment. And as the Nobel Prize Committee recognized in October 2015, leading Tunisian political actors, Islamist and secular, wisely chose inclusion and compromise over exclusion and violence to resolve conflicts that threatened to derail the transition.⁵ In one example, the winner of the 2014 elections, the secular Nidaa Tounes party, dominated by staunch anti-Islamist figures from the old regime, invited its rival Al-Nahda into the new government that took office in February 2015.

Tunisia's transition has been facilitated by several factors: relatively high levels of socioeconomic development, a sizeable educated middle class and a political elite with a strong preference for pragmatism and moderation, a homogenous population, longstanding economic and cultural ties to European democracies, a small military that has not aspired for a political role, a strong national identity, several robust citizen organizations, and well-established state institutions. But these factors are not enough to guarantee success; Tunisia has far to go and gains are fragile. Since the 2014 elections, which brought many old-guard figures back to power, the pace of reforms has slowed greatly.

Perhaps the top challenge is the weak economy. Demands for economic fairness and opportunity, especially by young people, were at the center of the revolution, but the economy has gotten worse since Ben Ali fell. Gross domestic product (GDP) growth has been under 3 percent each year since 2011. GDP growth for 2016 is projected (probably optimistically)

at 2.5 percent, following on 2015 growth of only 0.8 percent.⁶ Post-revolution shocks, including large drops in domestic and foreign investment, slowdowns in productivity due to labor strikes and political instability, and the economic downturn in Europe, Tunisia's main trading partner, have hit Tunisia hard. Terrorism and other security problems have ravaged the tourism industry, a backbone of the economy. All this has created intense fiscal pressures. The budget deficit stood at more than 4 percent in 2015, and Finance Minister Slim Chaker stated that Tunisia needs 3 billion Tunisian dinars (TND/US\$1.53 billion) in external financing in 2016.⁷ The country's total debt may reach TND 8 billion by 2017.⁸ Unemployment, especially among recent university graduates and other youth, has gotten even worse since 2011. Overall unemployment stood officially at 15 percent in 2015 (above pre-revolutionary levels) and may reach 35 percent among university-educated young job seekers.⁹ Conditions in the marginalized and long-underdeveloped interior regions, where the uprising began in 2010, are even worse.¹⁰ Corruption continues (albeit not on the scale of the massive theft of public resources that reportedly took place under Ben Ali) and few corrupt figures from the old regime have been held accountable. The static, exclusionary economic system characterized by networks of privilege, low job creation, and low pay continues amid widespread disillusionment with the democratic experiment as a means to deliver social justice and economic opportunity.

5 The Tunisian National Dialogue Quartet, a civil society group comprising the Tunisian General Labor Union; the Tunisian Union of Industry, Trade, and Handicrafts; the Tunisian Human Rights League; and the Tunisian Order of Lawyers, was awarded the 2015 Nobel Peace Prize on October 9, 2015.

6 "UPDATE 1-Tunisia Sees 2016 Economic Growth Rising to 2.5 Pct," Reuters, September 29, 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/09/29/tunisia-economy-idUSL5N11Z35S20150929>; "Tunisia Economic Growth Slows to 0.8% in 2015," Agence France-Presse via Yahoo! News, February 17, 2016, <http://news.yahoo.com/tunisia-economic-growth-slows-0-8-2015-194531367.html>.

7 Tarek Amara, "Tunisia Expects Economy to Grow 2.5 Pct in 2016, Deficit to Shrink," Reuters, October 17, 2015, <http://af.reuters.com/article/investingNews/idAFKCNOSB08B20151017>.

8 Zeineb Marzouk, "Tunisia: Borrowing Its Way to Success?," Tunisia Live, December 8, 2015, <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2015/12/08/tunisia-borrowing-its-way-to-success/>.

9 "Tunisia, Overview," World Bank, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/tunisia/overview>; Jeremy Fryd, "OECD Report: Youth Unemployment in Tunisia 'A True Social Tragedy,'" Tunisia Live, March 12, 2015, <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2015/03/12/oecd-report-youth-unemployment-in-tunisia-a-true-social-tragedy/>.

10 Amy Hawthorne, "Trip Report from Tunisia's 'Dark Regions,'" POMED Backgrounder, December 2015, <http://pomed.org/pomed-publications/backgrounder-a-trip-report-from-tunisias-dark-regions/>.

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Since 2011 the Tunisian authorities have implemented some macroeconomic reforms to improve fiscal stability and secure foreign aid. However, while officials have paid frequent lip service to reforms, none of the post-revolution cabinets has begun an overhaul of the system, which involves significant state control (according to a 2014 World Bank study, about 50 percent of the economy is subject to extensive government regulation).¹¹ Productivity is low, in part due to vast red tape and stringent labor laws. Businesses generally remain small and informal, unable to grow and create enough jobs, especially those suited for the educated young workforce. Many positions in both the formal and informal sectors (the latter estimated to include as much as half of the overall economy) offer lower pay and less job security than the state, which remains the top preferred employer, especially for recent graduates. Tunisia has an export-oriented economy (mainly to Europe); however, few exports have much value added, which keeps jobs low-paying.

Most experts believe the economy cannot take off and create enough good jobs, let alone recover from the post-revolution shocks, without deep and urgent reforms to open up competition, attract investment, and create room for a non-crony-dominated private sector to grow.¹² Why then have so few economic reforms happened? Reasons include natural caution and conservatism on the part of Tunisia's economic policymakers and its private sector; a strong attachment among many officials to the idea of a state-dominated economy due to nostalgia about the progress achieved under founding President Habib Bourguiba, and especially heavy political backing from the *Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail* (UGTT), Tunisia's powerful labor union; worries about triggering social unrest; bureaucratic gridlock; and the persistent influence of an old guard that rejects far-reaching reform. The past five years have seen the political elite focus more on democracy building, where more consensus exists, and, more recently, on security. There have been some incremental changes to allow borrowing from international lenders to avoid fiscal crisis, but at the same time hiring in the bloated public sector has been expanded further to maintain social peace.

Tunisia also faces a far more volatile region and difficult domestic security environment than it did under Ben Ali, whose police state ruthlessly repressed threats—along with nearly all political activity. Since the collapse of Ben Ali's police state, jihadi groups linked to al-Qaeda and ISIS have established a foothold, including on the Algerian border where they have been waging a small but persistent insurgency against the security forces. Extremist propaganda has found fertile ground among young, disillusioned, and marginalized Tunisians. More Tunisians reportedly have gone to Syria to fight with ISIS and other jihadi groups than any other nationality of foreign fighters.¹³ Neighboring Libya, mired in civil war, offers a safe haven for terrorist training and plotting, as weapons and people can pass across the insecure border. Three major terrorist attacks in 2015 increased political polarization, drove away tourism and investment, and led the government to reimpose some repressive measures.

Tunisian security agencies are not particularly capable of or efficient in fighting terrorism or maintaining public order. They still frequently commit abuses against citizens.¹⁴ The lead security agency, the Ministry of Interior, was a focus of much public anger during the revolution and is still in dire need of an overhaul to improve its professionalism and adherence to human rights standards. So far, however, it has managed to avoid any significant reforms. Despite some success in thwarting terrorist attacks,¹⁵ the police often continue to operate according to the former regime's way of doing business—relying on heavy-handed methods of crowd control and on fear, corruption, and even torture¹⁶ to deal with terrorism suspects, with no accountability.¹⁷ There is a genuine

11 *The Unfinished Revolution: Bringing Opportunity, Good Jobs, and Greater Wealth to All Tunisians*, World Bank, May 2014, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/tunisia/publication/unfinished-revolution>.

12 Mohsin Khan and Karim Mezran, "Tunisia: The Last Arab Spring Country," Atlantic Council, October 2015, http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/images/publications/Tunisia_Last_Arab_Spring_Country.pdf.

13 "More than 7,000 Tunisians Said to Have Joined Islamic State," McClatchy, March 17, 2015, <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/news/nation-world/world/article24781867.html>. Also see: George Packer, "Exporting Jihad," *New Yorker*, March 28, 2016, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/03/28/tunisia-and-the-fall-after-the-arab-spring>.

14 "Tunisia: Crackdown on Peaceful Protests," Human Rights Watch, September 10, 2015, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/09/10/tunisia-crackdown-peaceful-protests>.

15 "Tunisia: Police, Army Thwart Terrorist Attack in Kasserine," AllAfrica, March 9, 2015, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201503092207.html>; Zen Adra, "Tunisian Security Forces Thwart Second Terror Attack on Tourists," Masdar News, November 7, 2015, <http://www.almasdarnews.com/article/tunisian-security-forces-thwart-second-terror-attack-on-tourists/>.

16 "Septembre: Triste record du nombre de cas de tortures," Kapitalis, October 2, 2015, <http://kapitalis.com/tunisie/2015/10/02/septembre-triste-record-du-nombre-de-cas-de-tortures/> (in French).

17 Yezid Sayigh, "Missed Opportunity: The Politics of Police Reform in Egypt and Tunisia," Carnegie Middle East Center, March 17, 2015, <http://carnegie-mec.org/2015/03/17/missed->



A child holds a sign that reads, in Arabic, 'Together we defeat terrorism,' and in French, 'I am Bardo,' after the attack on the Bardo Museum in March 2015. *Photo credit: Amine Ghrabi/Flickr.*

risk that further crackdowns in the name of security will violate the rights and freedoms for which Tunisians fought so hard in the new constitution. The July 2015 counterterrorism law, which was passed with little debate following an attack on a resort in Sousse the month before, includes some worrisome measures that may increase discontent with the government and favor radicalization and violence.¹⁸ Newer actors in domestic security, such as the military and National Guard, are also not operating according to clear rule-of-law procedures and are similarly free from civilian oversight. Yet the narrative of Tunisia's security authorities—that harsh measures are required to maintain order—appears for now to resonate among a public that is weary of tumultuous change and fearful of more terrorism.¹⁹

On the political front, Tunisia lacks a strong opposition that can push back against authoritarian backsliding. The “deep state” of the Ben Ali era has not been

dismantled, and the 2014 elections brought to power many members of parliament who came directly from the pre-2011 repressive system, and whose enthusiasm for democratic reform appears less than robust.²⁰ Old-guard networks are present throughout the political system, the business world, and security institutions. Al-Nahda, which appears to have the most grassroots support, seems to have joined the government to protect itself from being crushed in an anti-Islamist security crackdown, as happened from 1989 to 1991, and its leadership so far has supported most of the current government's policies. Many civil society advocates of democracy have become marginalized and disillusioned, while elites, both Islamist and secular, dominate the political system. Increasingly, a security-first discourse, and even nostalgia for the Ben Ali era, are drowning out calls for respect for human rights and deeper political reform.²¹

opportunity-politics-of-police-reform-in-egypt-and-tunisia.

18 “Tunisia Adopts Tougher Counter-Terrorism Law in Wake of Attacks,” Agence France-Presse via *Guardian*, July 24, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jul/25/tunisia-adopts-tougher-counter-terrorism-law-in-wake-of-attacks>.

19 “Reform and Security Strategy in Tunisia,” International Crisis Group, July 2015, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/tunisia/161-reform-and-security-strategy-in-tunisia.aspx>, says, “reform seen as weakening and destabilizing, a false antithesis between order and liberty.”

20 For example, in a speech at the US Institute of Peace during his Washington visit in May 2015, President Essebsi strongly suggested that human rights were not his priority when he said, “We must fight for . . . human rights, but we have people who don't eat . . . who don't have work. I think it is primary to respond to that.” See USIP staff, “Tunisian President: US Is Key to Arab Political Futures,” United States Institute of Peace, May 21, 2015, <http://www.usip.org/publications/2015/05/21/tunisian-president-us-key-arab-political-futures>.

21 Amel Boubekeur, “Islamists, Secularists, and Old Regime Elites in Tunisia: Bargained Competition,” *Mediterranean Politics*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2015, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/13629395.2015.1081449>.

EUROPEAN AND US SUPPORT FOR POST-REVOLUTION TUNISIA

The United States and Europe, longtime backers of Ben Ali caught off guard by the uprising, quickly pivoted in January 2011 to become enthusiastic champions of the democratization process. They showered Tunisia with praise and offered more aid—although nowhere near as much as Tunisians had hoped for. US and European attention has waxed and waned since then, but since 2015 there has been a clear uptick in interest. The successful 2014 elections and the formation in February 2015 of a new coalition government bolstered transatlantic optimism and spurred a flurry of high-level visits to build ties with the new leaders. The terrorist attacks against European tourists at the Bardo Museum in March 2015 and in Sousse in June, the attack in November on a bus carrying presidential guards in Tunis, and concerns about the expanding presence of ISIS in neighboring Libya raised alarms in Western capitals and prompted numerous security visits and promises of stepped-up counterterrorism cooperation.²²

US and EU officials' rhetoric has generally emphasized the importance of democracy. In May 2015, on the occasion of President Beji Caid Essebsi's visit to Washington, US President Barack Obama asserted that "Tunisia shows that democracy is not only possible but also necessary in North Africa and the Middle East."²³ Secretary of State John Kerry echoed

similar sentiments in his November 2015 visit for the US-Tunisia Strategic Dialogue.²⁴ In July 2015, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini declared that "a strong and democratic Tunisia is vital for the stability of Europe's neighborhood."²⁵ In November, she said the EU "will spare no effort to ensure that the Tunisian people's aspiration for a democratic transition is fulfilled."²⁶

European rhetoric in support of Tunisia's democracy has also increased amid growing insecurity. During Essebsi's April 2015 trip to Paris, President François Hollande promised "exemplary cooperation" on security, trade, and cultural issues.²⁷ Months later, in January 2016 during Tunisian Prime Minister Habib Essid's visit to Paris, a statement from Hollande's office said, "Tunisia, like France, is threatened and has been seriously affected by terrorism, because it made a choice for democracy."²⁸ In June 2015, while in Tunisia, German Defense Minister Ursula von der Leyen emphasized support for Tunisia's national security. In February 2016, she said it was crucial "to make every effort to support countries struggling with democracy such as Tunisia."²⁹ In his May 2015 visit to Tunis, UK Minister for the Middle East and North Africa Tobias Ellwood expressed his desire to "deepen" the UK-Tunisia relationship.³⁰ During a visit in November

22 In 2015, nine senior US officials visited Tunisia: Secretary of State John Kerry; Commerce Secretary Penny Pritzker; Deputy Secretary of State Antony Blinken; Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL) Tom Malinowski; Deputy Assistant Secretary for DRL Dafna Rand; Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs Anne Patterson; Assistant Secretary of State for Economic and Business Affairs Charles H. Rivkin; Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism Ira Forman; and USAID Assistant Administrator for the Middle East Paige Alexander. Also in 2015, Ambassador Daniel Rubinstein was nominated and sworn in as the new US Ambassador to Tunisia. In February 2016, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Thomas Shannon visited Tunis to meet with government officials and civil society leaders. EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini visited Tunisia three times in 2015, twice following the Bardo attack. French President François Hollande visited Tunisia following the Bardo attack, as did German President Joachim Gauck. German Defense Minister Ursula von der Leyen and Interior Minister Thomas de Maizière visited Tunisia following the Sousse attack. UK Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond visited Tunisia a number of times in 2015. Tunisian Prime Minister Habib Essid visited Brussels multiple times in 2015, and US President Barack Obama hosted Essebsi in Washington in May.

23 Barack Obama and Béji Caid Essebsi, "Helping Tunisia Realize Its Democratic Promise," *Washington Post*, May 20, 2015,

https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/us-helping-tunisia-to-make-sure-democracy-delivers/2015/05/20/05b029e4-fe75-11e4-833c-a2de05b6b2a4_story.html?hpid=z3.

- 24 "Press Availability with Tunisian Foreign Minister Taieb Baccouche," US Department of State, November 13, 2015, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2015/11/249487.htm>.
- 25 "New EU Funding to Strengthen Security Sector and Support Socio-Economic and Regional Development in Tunisia," press release, European Commission, July 31, 2015, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-15-5461_en.htm.
- 26 "Statement by the High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini on the Attack Carried Out in Tunis on 24 November," European Union External Action, November 24, 2015, http://eeas.europa.eu/statements-eeas/2015/151124_02_en.htm.
- 27 Mike Woods, "Franco-Tunisian Ties on the Mend as Essebsi Visits Paris," RFI, April 7, 2015, <http://www.english.rfi.fr/africa/20150407-franco-tunisian-ties-mend-essebsi-visits-paris>.
- 28 "France Pledges One Billion Euros Aid to Troubled Tunisia as Essid Meets Hollande," RFI, January 22, 2016, <http://www.english.rfi.fr/africa/20160122-france-pledges-one-billion-euros-aid-troubled-tunisia-essid-meets-hollande>.
- 29 "Germany Mulling Military Training Mission in Tunisia," Agence France Presse via Defense News, February 21, 2016, <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/2016/02/21/report-germany-mulling-military-training-mission-tunisia/80708480/>.
- 30 "Tunisia: FCO Minister Visit to Tunisia," PR Newswire

following the November bus attack in Tunis that same month, UK Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond highlighted Tunisia's "new democracy."³¹

Since 2011, the EU as a whole, France, Germany, the United Kingdom bilaterally, and the United States all have increased their aid to Tunisia. The amounts of aid, modes of assistance (loans, grants, or investments), and styles of engagement vary considerably, but three overlapping priorities are evident: helping Tunisia's economy, strengthening security, and promoting democratic institutions and practices.³² This aid has been significant, but it also demonstrates that Tunisia is not a top regional priority for the United States or the EU. Tunisia ranked far behind Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria (humanitarian relief), and the West Bank and Gaza in President Obama's fiscal year (FY) 2016 and 2017 bilateral assistance requests. These are largely the same rank orderings as prior to the Tunisian revolution.³³ With regard to EU assistance, Tunisia fell behind Morocco, Palestine, and Syria in European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) funding in 2014 and 2015. Some US and European officials contend that because Tunisia is a small country with a population of just eleven million, its per capita aid share is much larger than Egypt's or Morocco's.³⁴ But the undeniable

optics are that Tunisia, despite its unique status as the region's only emerging democracy, remains only a middle-range interest for the West.

THE EUROPEAN UNION

Most of the EU's engagement is organized around the 1995 EU-Tunisia Association Agreement, which aims to harmonize Tunisian laws, regulations, and practices in key areas of governance with those of the EU in return for grant aid, technical assistance, and other support.³⁵ The EU's aid is entirely civilian, or non-military, and is delivered primarily through ENI,³⁶ which provides aid to Tunisia to implement a jointly agreed-upon, detailed, multiyear Action Plan.³⁷

Immediately following the revolution the EU doubled its ENI aid from 2011 to 2013, ultimately providing over €1 billion in grants and other aid from 2011 to 2015.³⁸ Between €725 and €886 million is budgeted for ENI from 2014 to 2020, compared to the €637.6 million³⁹ in actual disbursements from 2007 to 2013 (the EU budgets foreign aid in seven-year cycles). The EU's priorities are to encourage inclusive economic growth and strengthen the fundamentals of democracy through aid for elections, human rights, civil society, security sector reform (SSR)—the EU granted Tunisia €23 million in November 2015 for reform and modernization of the security sector and capacity-building for security forces—and regional and local development.⁴⁰

via AllAfrica, May 22, 2015, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201505252385.html>.

31 "British Foreign Secretary Meets Tunisian Leader after Third Major Attack Claimed by IS," Associated Press via US News, November 27, 2015, <http://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2015/11/27/british-foreign-secretary-meets-tunisian-leader-after-attack>.

32 More significant assistance in the form of loans and some grants is also provided by international financial institutions. From 2011 through 2015, the World Bank committed nearly \$2 billion in loans to Tunisia. Assistance in 2016 is expected to reach more than \$700 million. See "Tunisia: Commitments by Fiscal Year," World Bank, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/tunisia/projects>. In 2013, the IMF approved a two-year stand-by agreement worth \$1.61 billion to support Tunisia that was later extended for seven months. See "IMF Executive Board Completes Sixth Review under Stand-By Arrangement for Tunisia," International Monetary Fund, <https://www.imf.org/external/np/sec/pr/2015/pr15448.htm>. In April 2016, the IMF and Tunisia reached an agreement with Tunisia on a four-year \$2.8 billion extended fund facility. See "IMF Reaches Staff-Level Agreement with Tunisia on a Four-Year US\$2.8 Billion Extended Fund Facility," <https://www.imf.org/external/np/sec/pr/2016/pr16168.htm> Funding from the African Development Bank (AFDB) for Tunisia from 2014 to 2015 was \$2.1 billion for sixteen projects and twenty-four technical assistance operations. In 2011 and 2012, the AFDB allocated \$1 billion to the Tunisian government for two budget support operations. See "Tunisia Interim Country Strategy Paper 2014-2015," African Development Bank, http://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Project-and-Operations/2014-2015_-_Tunisia_Interim_Country_Strategy_Paper.pdf.

33 Stephen McInerney and Cole Bockenfeld, *The Federal Budget and Appropriations for Fiscal Year 2017*, Project on Middle East Democracy, April 2016, http://pomed.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/POMED_BudgetReport_FY17_Final-Web.pdf.

34 Compared to Tunisia, Egypt and Morocco rank as higher assistance priorities for the United States and the EU,

respectively. For both FY2016 and FY2017, the US administration requested \$150 million in ESF and \$1.3 billion in FMF for Egypt. From 2014 to 2017, the EU's bilateral assistance to Morocco through ENI could range between €728 million and €890 million. In terms of French assistance in the MENA region, Morocco ranks first in volume, but Tunisia stands first in per capita ranking. Tunisia also ranks highest in per capita assistance in terms of German aid in the region.

35 Tunisia was the first Mediterranean country to sign an Association Agreement with the EU on July 17, 1995.

36 Until 2013, the ENI was called the ENPI (The European Neighbourhood Partnership Initiative).

37 *EU/Tunisia Action Plan*, European External Action Service, http://eeas.europa.eu/enp/pdf/pdf/action_plans/tunisia_enp_ap_final_en.pdf, accessed March 24, 2016.

38 *Tunisia Financial Assistance Fiche*, European Commission, 2016, <http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/neighbourhood/pdf/key-documents/tunisia/20160201-tunisia-financial-assistance-fiche.pdf>.

39 Ibid.

40 Tunisia's battle against militants and terror groups is of growing concern to the EU. In addition to the new SSR project, on July 20, 2015, the European Council expressed willingness to launch programs through the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP) and Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) to assist Tunisia in its fight against terrorism. Security and counterterrorism have also been the main focus on several bilateral and regional meetings held between Tunisia and the EU. See "Council Conclusions on Tunisia," European Council, July 20, 2015, <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2015/07/20-tunisie-con/>. On regional and local development, the EU adopted two programs in July

A TRANSATLANTIC STRATEGY FOR A DEMOCRATIC TUNISIA

In 2014, the EU allocated €169 million in ENI aid,⁴¹ €50 million of which came from the Umbrella Fund (formerly called “SPRING”), set up in 2011 to reward Arab countries for democratic progress.⁴² In 2015, the EU allocated €186.8 million to Tunisia under ENI,⁴³ including €71.8 million through the Umbrella Fund.⁴⁴ About half of these funds were for used for budget support through transfers to Tunisian ministries to help stabilize the economy and carry out reforms. A smaller portion was allocated for technical assistance to government agencies, direct support for projects benefiting Tunisian citizens, and grants to civil society organizations.⁴⁵

The EU has also provided concessionary loans, including a €300 million loan for macro-financial assistance

disbursed in 2014 and 2015,⁴⁶ and more than €1.3 billion in investment from the European Investment Bank from 2011 to 2015.⁴⁷ In February 2016, the EU announced an additional loan for macro-financial assistance of up to €500 million following a request from Tunisia.⁴⁸

EU engagement also focuses heavily on trade. In October 2015, Tunisia and the EU began long-awaited negotiations on a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA); Morocco is the only Middle East and North Africa country to have a DCFTA to date.⁴⁹

LEADING MEMBER STATES

The bilateral aid portfolios of France, Germany, and the United Kingdom were typically smaller than those of the EU and the United States in the years immediately following Tunisia’s revolution, although some member states recently significantly increased their aid packages for the country. A significant amount of their aid is weighted toward soft loans over grants.

France

France’s priorities are economic development,⁵⁰ governance-related technical cooperation, civil society and cultural ties, and security cooperation. Prior to the 2011 revolution, French assistance to Tunisia was mainly relayed through the French Development

2015 that focus on development in eight regions: Bizerte, Jendouba, Sidi Bouzid, Sfax, Gabes, Médenine, Gafsa, and Kasserine. See *Décision d'exécution de la commission* (Brussels: European Commission, 2015), <http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/ neighbourhood/pdf/key-documents/tunisia/20150731-aap-2015-tunisia-financing-commission-decision-20150730.pdf>; Another component of EU development assistance is higher education. The EU provides scholarships for Tunisian students to study in Europe through the Erasmus program. In 2014, 422 Tunisian students were granted Erasmus scholarships.

41 The breakdown of 2014 bilateral assistance was as follows: €100 million for economic recovery, €15 million for justice sector reform, €10 million to strengthen the media sector, €7 million to promote gender equality, €28 million for neighborhood development, €3 million for border management, and €6 million to support the association agreement.

42 Tunisia was the first recipient of Umbrella Funds in 2014 and of SPRING funds, the precursor program to Umbrella, in 2011. From 2011 to 2015, Tunisia received a total of €276.8 million from the funds.

43 “New EU Funding to Strengthen Security Sector and Support Socio-economic and Regional Development in Tunisia,” European Commission, July 31, 2015, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-15-5461_ro.htm.

44 The first segment of bilateral assistance in 2015, adopted on July 30, 2015, was allocated for five programs that totaled €116.8 million. The funding breakdown is as follows: €32 million for support to the private sector, vocational training, and employment; €23 million for security sector reform; €43 million for decentralization and regional development; €12.8 million to support the EU-Tunisia Association Agreement; and €6 million to support the cultural sector. The second segment of bilateral assistance in 2015, adopted on December 21, 2015, allocated €70 million to support socioeconomic reforms and tourism. See “EU Provides €70 Million to Support Socio-economic Reforms and Tourism in Tunisia,” European Commission via New Europe, December 21, 2015, <http://neurope.eu/wires/eu-provides-e70-million-to-support-socio-economic-reforms-and-tourism-in-tunisia/>.

45 From 2011 to 2013, 62 percent of ENI funding was committed for budget support programs aimed at stabilizing the economy. In 2014, about 60 percent of ENI funds was for budget support (the rest was channeled to projects benefiting Tunisian citizens). About 50 percent of ENI funds for 2015 were allocated for budget support operations. From 2011 to 2014, the EU gave Tunisia an additional €24.8 million in grants through other funding mechanisms including the Instrument for Development Cooperation, the Instrument for Stability, and the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights. See *Tunisia Financial Assistance Fiche*, European Commission, op. cit.

46 The first of three tranches of €100 million was released in May 2015. The second tranche was released in December 2015. The third is expected in 2016. The loan supports a two-year, comprehensive economic adjustment and reform program agreed to by Tunisia and the IMF. See “The European Union Disburses €100 Million in Aid to Tunisia,” European Commission, May 7, 2015, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-15-4933_en.htm; “The European Union Disburses €100 Million in Aid to Tunisia,” European Commission, December 1, 2015, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-15-6085_en.htm.

47 EIB investments have supported areas including energy, small and medium-sized enterprises, urban and transport infrastructure, education, social housing, and micro-credit. See “Finance Contracts Signed: Mediterranean Countries,” European Investment Bank, last updated March 20, 2016, <http://www.eib.org/projects/loans/regions/mediterranean-countries/index.htm?start=2015&end=2011>; “More than EUR 1 Bn in New Finance from EIB for Investment in Tunisia since January 2011,” European Investment Bank, September 8, 2014, <http://www.eib.org/infocentre/press/releases/all/2014/2014-188-bei-plus-dun-milliard-deuros-de-financements-nouveaux-pour-les-investissements-en-tunisie-depuis-janvier-2011.htm>.

48 *Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council Providing Further Macro-financial Assistance to Tunisia*, European Commission, 2016, http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/eu_borrower/documents/20160212_com_proposal_mfa_tunisia_en.pdf.

49 A Free Trade Area was established between the EU and Tunisia in 2008, the first between the EU and a Mediterranean partner.

50 France is focusing on development in Tunisia’s interiors governorates, in particular Gafsa, Sidi Bouzid, and Siliana. Conversation (via email) with official from French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, August 2015.

Agency.⁵¹ Following the 2011 revolution, France supplemented this assistance with a €185 million cash transfer for budget support and €350 million in loans for infrastructure projects. About 85 percent of French economic assistance from 2011 to 2015 was in the form of soft loans.⁵² In February 2016, France announced a five-year €1 billion economic support program for Tunisia, focusing on youth unemployment and development in the country's interior regions. An agreement was also signed to convert €60 million of Tunisia's pre-revolution debt into development projects.⁵³

France organized an investment conference in 2014⁵⁴ and partnership forum in 2015⁵⁵ to spur investment in Tunisia. According to French Ambassador to Tunisia François Gouyette, investment reached €100 million in 2014.⁵⁶ Since 2011, France has financed more than 130 civil society projects, held four annual French-Tunisian "Civil Society Forums," and launched a multiyear €1 million program on democratic governance and human rights and decentralization.⁵⁷ France also grants Tunisians more than a thousand scholarships to its universities every year and finances hundreds of scholarly research projects.

Close military ties and security cooperation remain a focal point of French policy in Tunisia, as has been the case for decades. Following the Bardo and Sousse attacks, French Minister of the Interior Bernard Cazeneuve said France would step up cooperation and train police and assault teams, supply criminal

analysts and border security personnel, and coordinate intelligence with border and airport security.⁵⁸ France has also trained hundreds of Tunisian soldiers and officers and has helped open a military training center in Gafsa. In October 2015, French Minister of Defense Jean-Yves Le Drian announced €20 million in military assistance for Tunisia to enhance special forces and intelligence cooperation.⁵⁹

Germany

Following the 2011 revolution, Germany made Tunisia the flagship of its post-Arab Spring Arab Transformation Partnership, boosting loans, grants, and cooperative projects and converting €60 million of Tunisia's debt into investment projects. German priorities are economic development (mainly through vocational training), regional development, and, increasingly, security. Prior to the revolution, Germany's total aid to Tunisia stood at €37.5 million.⁶⁰ In 2014, Germany provided Tunisia with €119 million in loans and €26 million in grants. In January 2015, Germany signed two agreements for €99.9 million in grants and loans for projects on microfinance, decentralization, and energy.⁶¹ Last May, Germany said it would disburse €1 billion to Tunisia in the form of donations and preferential loans.⁶²

Tunisia also remains an important destination for German companies abroad. Germany has about 150 companies operating in Tunisia with some fifty-five thousand employees⁶³ and has sponsored meetings between German and Tunisian firms to boost bilateral

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid.

53 "Tunisia: France Pledges One Billion Euros to Support Tunisia," AllAfrica, January 22, 2016, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201601251394.html>.

54 On September 9, 2014, the French and Tunisian governments organized a day-long conference entitled, "Invest in Tunisia: Startup Democracy." Attendees included representatives from international economic institutions, politicians, and businessmen from thirty countries. Investors were presented with twenty-two projects totaling about €6 billion.

55 The France-Tunisia Partnership Forum was held in Tunis from June 9 to 10, 2015. A delegation of thirty French companies visited Tunisia to develop strategic business partnerships with Tunisian firms.

56 This marks a 10 percent increase in investment since 2013. See M. Tiss, "François Gouyette: En 2014, la France a investi en Tunisie 100 millions d'euros," *L'Economiste Maghrébin*, March 13, 2015, <http://www.leconomistemaghrebin.com/2015/05/13/francois-gouyette-en-2014-la-france-investit-en-tunisie-100-millions-deuros/> (in French).

57 This includes €400,000 for governance and human rights and €600,000 for decentralization through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Priority Solidarity Fund. See "La France appui la décentralisation en Tunisie par un don de 600000 euros," *Le Mag*, November 14, 2013, http://www.lemag.ma/La-France-appui-la-decentralisation-en-Tunisie-par-un-don-de-600000-euros_a77095.html (in French).

58 "La France met à la disposition de la Tunisie une unité cynophile de détection des explosifs," *L'Economiste Maghrébin*, July 30, 2015, <http://www.leconomistemaghrebin.com/2015/07/30/la-france-met-la-disposition-de-la-tunisie-une-unite-de-detection-des-explosifs/> (in French).

59 "Tunisia, France Set Co-operation in Special Forces and Intelligence as Priorities," Agence Tunis Afrique Presse, October 5, 2015, <http://www.tap.info.tn/en/index.php/politics2/30021-tunisia-france-set-co-operation-in-special-forces-and-intelligence-as-priorities>.

60 Conversation (via email) with official from the German Federal Foreign office, September 2015.

61 €26.9 million of this amount was in grants. See Imen Zine, "Tunisie - Allemagne: Signature de deux accords de financement," *L'Economiste Maghrébin*, January 19, 2015, <http://www.leconomistemaghrebin.com/2015/01/19/tunisie-allemande-signature-de-deux-accords-de-financement-de-99-9-millions-deuros/> (in French).

62 "Germany to Disburse Euro 1 Billion to Tunisia under Form of Donations and Preferential Loans (Andreas Reinicke)," Agence Tunis Afrique Presse, May 29, 2015, <http://www.tap.info.tn/en/index.php/politics2/27341-germany-to-disburse-euro-1-billion-to-tunisia-under-form-of-donations-and-preferential-loans-andreas-reinicke>.

63 "'L'Allemagne se félicite de la stratégie de la Tunisie en matière des énergies renouvelables' (Thomas Silberhorn)," Babnet Tunisie, August 25, 2015, <http://www.babnet.net/cadredetail-110701.asp> (in French).



Tunisian President Beji Caid Essebsi with EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini during her visit to Tunisia in February 2015. *Photo credit:* European External Action Service/Flickr.

investment, particularly in renewable energy.⁶⁴ In addition, the German-Tunisian Mobility Pact has helped Tunisian young professionals identify career prospects in Germany.⁶⁵ Germany is also seeking to foster cooperation between Tunisia's parliament and the German Bundestag through visits and expert exchanges. German foreign aid does not directly fund democratic development projects in Tunisia, although all of Germany's political foundations (*stiftungs*) operate on the ground in Tunis and carry out many democracy-promotion activities.

Currently, Germany's priority is security, in particular border security and SSR, and it provides Tunisia equipment and conducts training.⁶⁶ Following the

Sousse attack, German Defense Minister Ursula von der Leyen pledged additional security aid and equipment⁶⁷ and the German federal police opened a permanent office in Tunis to work more closely with Tunisian security forces.⁶⁸ In February 2016, Germany said it was considering sending troops to Tunisia to train soldiers to fight ISIS, which was backed by Tunisia.⁶⁹ Germany—along with the United States—is also set to help Tunisia install electronic surveillance equipment as part of a newly built barrier along the border with Libya to keep out terrorists.⁷⁰

64 Imen Zine, "Tunisie-Allemagne: Vers plus d'investissements prometteurs," *L'Economiste Maghrébin*, December 17, 2014, <http://www.leconomistemaghrebin.com/2014/12/17/tunisie-allemagne-investissements-prometteurs/> (in French).

65 The program runs from 2014 to 2016 and is part of Germany's Transformation Partnership.

66 Chairman of the defense committee of Germany's Bundestag Wolfgang Hellmich said in October 2015 he expects unmanned aerial vehicles to be delivered to Tunisia as part of a recently adopted €100 million fund to support the security of regional partners. In November, Tunisia announced that an electronic surveillance system would be installed along the Tunisian-Libyan border in cooperation with Germany. See Lars Hoffmann, "Germany Sets €100M Security Fund for Africa, Mideast Partners," *Defense News*, October 8, 2015, <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/policy-budget/>

[policy/2015/10/08/germany-sets-100m-security-fund-africa-mideast-partners/73583664/](http://www.tap.info.tn/en/index.php/politics2/30905-electronic-surveillance-system-to-be-installed-along-tunisian-libyan-borders-defence-minister); "Electronic Surveillance System to Be Installed along Tunisian-Libyan Border (Defence Minister)," *Agence Tunis Afrique Presse*, November 6, 2015, <http://www.tap.info.tn/en/index.php/politics2/30905-electronic-surveillance-system-to-be-installed-along-tunisian-libyan-borders-defence-minister>.

67 Udo Bauer, "German Defense Minister Asks What She Can Do for Tunisia," *Deutsche Welle*, July 30, 2015, <http://www.dw.com/en/german-defense-minister-asks-what-she-can-do-for-tunisia/a-18619137>.

68 "La police fédérale allemande ouvre un bureau en Tunisie," *Mosaïque FM*, August 28, 2015, <http://www.mosaïquefm.net/fr/index/a/ActuDetail/Element/56604-la-police-federale-allemande-ouvre-un-bureau-en-tunisie> (in French).

69 "Tunisia Backs Plan to Host German Troops to Train Libyan Army," *Reuters*, March 1, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-tunisia-security-libya-idUSKCNOW34LW>.

70 "Tunisia Builds Anti-terror Barrier along Libya Border," *BBC News*, February 7, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world->

United Kingdom

British priorities in Tunisia are threefold: ensuring the country's security (strengthening regional and border security and combating the return of Tunisian fighters in Syria and Iraq to Europe and Tunisia); promoting economic reform (by improving reforms in the investment, banking, and subsidies sectors); and strengthening Tunisia's democratic transition (with a focus on freedom of expression, transparency, and regional integration). The United Kingdom has stepped up its diplomatic engagement with Tunisia since 2011 and has promoted the country as an investment destination, generating £200 million in new UK private sector investment.

British bilateral aid to Tunisia is modest, however, as the Conservative government prefers to channel most of its aid through multilateral institutions such as the EU, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). UK bilateral assistance totaled some £10 million from 2011 to March 2015, provided through the Arab Partnership Fund, a regional funding mechanism launched in 2011 to support local reform initiatives in the Middle East and North Africa.⁷¹ This assistance has targeted eight key areas: freedom of expression, rule of law and anti-corruption, political participation and electoral processes, border security, SSR, counter-radicalization, human rights, and economic reforms.

The United Kingdom stepped up the provision of counterterrorism training,⁷² and equipment for Tunisia, such as bomb detection gear,⁷³ after the Bardo and Sousse attacks (thirty UK nationals were killed in the latter). Following Bardo, Foreign Minister Philip Hammond said that the United Kingdom would deploy police and counterterrorism experts to assist with investigations and increase training for capacity-building, crisis response, border management, and strategic communications for Tunisia's military and

the Ministry of Interior.⁷⁴ Within the Ministry of Interior, the UK supported the establishment of Strategic Planning Units in order to provide the ministry with special assistance in security planning.⁷⁵ In March 2016, British Defense Minister Michael Fallon said Britain sent a training team of twenty troops to Tunisia to assist authorities in countering illegal cross-border movement.⁷⁶

THE UNITED STATES

The United States has increased its aid for Tunisia significantly since the revolution, providing more than \$700 million, all in the form of grants from 2011 to 2015 (in 2010, US bilateral aid was just \$22 million, most of which was military aid).⁷⁷ For FY2015, the administration allocated \$91 million in bilateral aid, including \$50 million in Economic Support Funds (ESF), for economic and democracy programs; \$30 million in Foreign Military Financing (FMF) for military weapons, equipment, and training; and \$11 million in non-military security assistance for the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Justice. The United States provided an additional \$50 million for extra equipment and capacity-building for the security sector in FY2015.⁷⁸ For FY2016, Congress appropriated \$141.9 million in bilateral aid to Tunisia—composed of \$65 million in FMF, \$60 million in ESF, and \$16.9 million in non-military security and rule-of-law aid—exceeding the Obama administration's FY2016 request for \$134.4 million.⁷⁹ The FY2017 request of \$140 million includes

africa-35515229; "US to Fund Tunisia Border Surveillance," Agence France Presse via Yahoo! News, March 25, 2016, <https://www.yahoo.com/news/us-fund-tunisia-border-surveillance-200227667.html>.

71 "Supporting Tunisia's Democratisation Process," Foreign and Commonwealth Office and British Embassy, Tunis, UK Government, first published March 22, 2013, <https://www.gov.uk/government/priority/supporting-tunisia-democratisation-process>.

72 John Thorne, "Fighting Terror in Tunisia: Domestic and Foreign Response to Bardo," *Terrorism Monitor*, vol. 13, no. 9, May 2, 2015, http://www.jamestown.org/programs/tm/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=43860&cHash=d5485295343f0207e29cb7e587d83ff5#.Vh7Shd9Vikq.

73 Béchir Lakani, "Tunisie-Grande-Bretagne: Don d'équipements pour détecter les explosifs," *L'Economiste Maghrébin*, March 24, 2016, <http://www.leconomistemaghrebin.com/2014/10/22/tunisie-grande-bretagne-don-equipements-explosifs/> (in French).

74 Philip Hammond, "Written Ministerial Statement on the Tunisia Terrorist Attack," Foreign and Commonwealth Office, UK Government, March 20, 2015, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/written-ministerial-statement-on-the-tunisia-terrorist-attack>.

75 British Embassy, "Tunisia: UK Support for the Tunisian Ministry of Interior," AllAfrica, November 6, 2015, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201511091299.html>.

76 "UK to Send Troops to Tunisia to Help Stop ISIS Crossing Libyan Border," Reuters, March 1, 2016, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-britain-tunisia-libya-idUKKCNOW330Y>.

77 Alexis Arief, *Political Transition in Tunisia*, Congressional Research Service, 2011, <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/161570.pdf>.

78 Alexis Arief and Carla E. Humud, *Political Transition in Tunisia* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2015), <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RS21666.pdf>.

79 The \$16.9 million figure includes \$12 million for International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement; \$2.6 million for Nonproliferation, Anti-terrorism, Demining, and Related Programs; and \$2.3 million for International Military Education and Training. See Rules Committee, Print 114-39, Text of House Amendment #1 to the Senate Amendment to H.R. 2029, Military Construction and Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2016, <http://docs.house.gov/billsthisweek/20151214/CPRT-114-HPRT-RU00-SAHR2029-AMNT1final.pdf>; Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2016, <http://docs.house.gov/meetings/RU/RU00/20151216/104298/HMTG-114-RU00-20151216-SD012.pdf>.

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a boost in ESF to \$74 million but a decrease in FMF to \$45 million.⁸⁰

US support focuses on three priorities: enhancing security, promoting inclusive economic growth, and strengthening democratic participation and good governance.⁸¹ Security assistance has focused on bolstering Tunisia's ability to counter internal and regional terrorist threats, building the capacity of the Ministry of Defense, and promoting a more effective and accountable domestic security force and criminal justice system. US-funded programs with the Ministries of Interior and Justice were the first such Western programs to be launched in Tunisia, in 2012. A small program through the State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor focuses on building civil society capacity to engage with the two ministries on security and justice reforms and advocacy. The United States also designated Tunisia a Major Non-NATO Ally in July 2015.⁸²

On the economic front, the United States has helped Tunisia meet immediate fiscal needs through a cash transfer and two sovereign loan guarantees, with a third guarantee expected in 2016.⁸³ About 43

percent (\$155 million) of ESF from 2011 to 2015 was used for budget support. The United States has also sought to foster private-sector-led growth through the Tunisian-American Enterprise Fund; a range of technical assistance for the Tunisian government to implement banking, taxation, and investment reforms; advice to small businesses and entrepreneurs; and vocational training and job-matching for young Tunisians.⁸⁴ In notable non-aid support, the United States has organized investment conferences and roundtables to connect US and Tunisian businesses and has relaunched discussions on expanding the Trade and Investment Framework. In addition, the second US-Tunisia Strategic Dialogue, which was held in Tunis in November 2015, saw the United States and Tunisia reaffirm political, economic, security, and cultural ties.⁸⁵

US democracy support, totaling more than \$80 million from 2011 to 2015, has focused on election-organization assistance and observation and political party strengthening, and to a smaller extent, on civil society development and youth participation.⁸⁶ In the educational realm, the United States launched a scholarship initiative for underprivileged Tunisians to study at US community colleges.⁸⁷

80 *Congressional Budget Justification, Foreign Operations, Appendix 3*, US Department of State, 2016, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/252734.pdf>.

81 "Enduring US-Tunisian Relations," White House Fact Sheet, May 21, 2015, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/05/21/fact-sheet-enduring-us-tunisian-relations>.

82 Major Non-NATO Ally status affords Tunisia with certain security and defense privileges, such as loans of equipment for cooperative research and development, priority over other countries for the delivery of Excess Defense Articles—military equipment granted or sold at a reduced cost to foreign governments—and FMF for commercial leasing of certain defense articles. See Gayatri Oruganti and Todd Ruffner, "US-Tunisia Security Cooperation: What It Means to Be a Major Non-NATO Ally," *Security Assistance Monitor*, July 14, 2015, <http://www.securityassistance.org/blog/us-tunisia-security-cooperation-what-it-means-be-major-non-nato-ally>.

83 US efforts in this area include the provision of a \$100 million cash transfer for budget support and close to \$1 billion in sovereign loan guarantees (\$485 million in 2012 and \$500 million in 2014). In November 2015, the State Department said

the United States is prepared to initiate steps to negotiate another Loan Guarantee Agreement with Tunisia to support Tunisia's political, economic, and social resiliency. See "Joint Statement by the Republic of Tunisia and the United States of America," US Department of State, November 13, 2015, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2015/11/249485.htm>.

84 The United States established the Tunisian-American Enterprise Fund in 2013. It was initially seeded with \$20 million and grew to \$60 million in 2014. The fund expects to receive up to two additional tranches of \$20 million each from Congress.

85 The first US-Tunisia Strategic Dialogue was held in April 2014 in Washington, DC. The second was held in November 2015 in Tunisia. The third Strategic Dialogue is expected to take place in Washington, DC, in 2016.

86 "Enduring US-Tunisian Relations," White House Fact Sheet.

87 Under the Thomas Jefferson Scholarship Program, some four hundred Tunisians have qualified to study at universities and community colleges in the United States for one year.

TOWARD A NEW STRATEGY

Despite their shortcomings, the approaches of the EU, key member states, and the United States made sense during the early years of Tunisia's transition. However, they have not adjusted their strategies to the current, more complicated phase, in which revolutionary optimism has long since evaporated, Tunisian officials' reform ambitions seem lackluster, and the path ahead is filled with painful economic reforms and difficult political steps.

To some extent, this lack of shift in strategy is understandable. Addressing the situation in Tunisia, which is far less urgent than the Syrian civil war and the refugee crisis, Iraq's ongoing turmoil, or even Egypt's instability, has been pushed down the transatlantic priority list. Some officials in both the United States and Europe indicate in private (although they will not say so publicly) that security, not democracy, should be the top Western priority in Tunisia, and that any Tunisian government that is a strong partner in counterterrorism and that stems irregular migration to Europe is acceptable. This is a short-term view, however, and one that is likely to perpetuate the struggle against authoritarianism and radicalization across the region by tipping too much toward the former. The United States and Europe have already invested significant resources in Tunisia, and it is time to follow those with a coordinated strategy that will help set the country on the path to stability, prosperity, and democracy. Central to this strategy will be precise, coordinated efforts focused on boosting the economy, improving security, and encouraging democracy. It will also require the United States and its European partners to develop new mechanisms to work together to build cooperation.

ECONOMY

As described above, since 2011, Europe and the United States have provided budget support to Tunisia's government and have championed Tunisia as an investment and tourism destination. Donors have also sought to promote a more open and competitive economy by providing technical assistance, training, and funding aimed at encouraging crucial structural reforms that will strengthen national banks and make lending policies more sound and equitable, taxation fairer and more efficient, and investment easier and more attractive.⁸⁸ Donors have also sought to

strengthen private sector activity by focusing on trade, entrepreneurship, vocational training, and small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

However, Tunisian officials, economic leaders, and civil society groups have been far more focused on the political transition than on economic matters, where there is less consensus on reforms.⁸⁹ The closed economic structure from the Ben Ali era, in which 50 percent of the economy was protected from competition, remains in place. A restructuring aimed at making the economy more competitive and open would threaten many vested interests in the political class, business elite, and labor movement. In addition, many Tunisians are distrustful of "economic liberalization" due to its association with unpopular Ben Ali-era policies.⁹⁰ Yet economic reform is imperative for growth and to address the deep problems of inequity that fueled the revolution and continue to threaten the country's stability. As one analyst argued, "Without radical [economic] reform, Tunisia will be condemned to a long-term future of low growth."⁹¹

For this reason, the situation in Tunisia calls for a more intensely coordinated effort, much larger-scale assistance, and a stronger collective diplomatic voice on economic reform issues. Many US and European aid initiatives seem too small-bore, short term, and disconnected from one another to make much impact. The array of small-scale, disparate, and seemingly uncoordinated donor projects in some interior regions has frustrated Tunisians in those areas. Diplomatic messaging on the economy could be more focused

Development Bank, 2013, http://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Project-and-Operations/Towards_a_New_Economic_Model_for_Tunisia_-_Identifying_Tunisia_s_Binding_Constraints_to_Broad-Based_Growth.pdf.

89 Mohsin Khan and Karim Mezran, *Tunisia: The Last Arab Spring Country*, op. cit.

90 A study by the National Democratic Institute found that Tunisians believe the government is responsible for Tunisia's economic problems. While most Tunisians believe that the solution requires the state to be more involved in rehabilitating the economy, they view politicians as responsible for the current economic challenges and doubt their ability to resolve them. Citizens in the interior regions in particular don't believe there is political will to address the country's disparities. See *'Make Our Voices Heard': Tunisian Citizens Express Their Views*, National Democratic Institute, 2015, <https://www.ndi.org/files/'Make%20Our%20Voices%20Heard'%20-%20Tunisia%20focus%20group%20report%20-%20May%202015%20-%20English.pdf>.

91 "Tunisia's Economic Challenges," *The Economist*, January 14, 2015, <http://country.eiu.com/article.aspx?articleid=1342653318&Country=Tunisia&topic=Economy>.

88 *The Unfinished Revolution*, World Bank, op. cit., p. 19; *Towards a New Economic Model for Tunisia: Identifying Tunisia's Binding Constraints to Broad-Based Growth*, The African

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and better coordinated. In addition, there appears to be some duplication of aid efforts as donors pursue similar projects, especially in SME funding and vocational training. Meanwhile, some areas of need and disadvantaged regions remain underfunded.

A well-crafted transatlantic diplomatic and aid strategy has the potential to bolster supporters of deep economic change and create incentives for reforms among those who are hesitant. Tunisia has many economic advantages, including its proximity to markets in Europe, sub-Saharan Africa, and the Middle East; its relatively well-educated and young population; its modern infrastructure; and its relatively diversified and export-focused economy. Therefore, it is not difficult to envision how, with the right policies and external support, Tunisia could create a stronger, even thriving, economy.

To this end, the next phase of European and US support should be actively coordinated and include the following steps:

- **All initiatives and other support should be measured against whether they will have a direct impact on two core, underlying problems: youth unemployment and regional economic disparities.**⁹² Tunisia's interior and south lag far behind the coast in development and wealth. Meanwhile, persistent youth unemployment has the ability to contribute to increasing radicalization and alienation.⁹³ If these social justice problems are not addressed, they will hold back Tunisia's economic progress and deepen political unrest, an issue of concern for US and European interest in North African stability.⁹⁴

- **US and European officials need to sharpen their economic message: Tunisia's state should still play an important role in the economy, but reforms that open up the economy and create a more level playing field are the only way to expand opportunity and fulfill the hopes of the revolution.**⁹⁵ They should demonstrate strong solidarity with Tunisia as it undertakes difficult and painful reforms. European and US officials should also heighten their engagement with Tunisian entrepreneurs and businesspeople supportive of reforms by including them in strategic dialogues, roundtables, and other visible events on the economy.⁹⁶
- **To highlight the need for development and economic opportunity in the interior regions, donors should organize a high-profile conference on economic development in one of Tunisia's impoverished governorates.** The conference should bring together officials, potential investors, and citizens to identify needs and priorities. The goal should be to support dialogue and debate among Tunisians on economic policy and encourage a process of consensus-building around an economic agenda.
- **Europe and the United States should adopt an approach in providing budget assistance—cash transfers, loans, loan guarantees, and other forms of budgetary support—that can help Tunisia's macroeconomic stability.** Stronger economic reform benchmarks should be attached to these funds, with an emphasis placed on reforms

92 The most economically disadvantaged governorates are those in the central interior of the country: Kasserine, Sidi Bouzid, and Kairouen. These governorates have the highest poverty rates. They are closely followed by the northwest governorates—Beja, Jendouba, Le Kef, and Siliana—and the southwest governorates—Kbelli, Gafsa, and Tozeu. See Mongi Boughzala and Mohamed Tlili Hamdi, *Promoting Inclusive Growth in Arab Countries: Rural and Regional Development and Inequality in Tunisia*, Brookings, 2014, <http://www.brookings.edu/-/media/research/files/papers/2014/02/promoting-growth-arab-countries/arab-econpaper5boughzala-v3.pdf>.

93 The National Democratic Institute found that citizens in Kasserine cite long-term marginalization and decades of neglect as the reasons behind the region's underdevelopment. See *'Make Our Voices Heard,'* National Democratic Institute, op. cit.

94 A poll by the International Republican Institute following the new Tunisian government's first one hundred days in office found that the majority of Tunisians recognize that investing and developing infrastructure in the interior and southern governorates are among the best options for economic growth. Development of these regions ranked highest among what Tunisians believe priorities should be for government spending. See "IRI Tunisia Poll: Economic Reform Vital to Democratic Success," International Republican Institute, August 17, 2015, <http://www.iri.org/resource/iri-tunisia-poll-economic-reform-vital-democratic-success>.

95 So far, US and EU rhetoric on economic reforms, although emphasizing investment and an economic plan, has been vague. In May 2015, US Secretary of Commerce Penny Pritzker said "Tunisia needs a long-term economic vision that convinces investors that your market will be a smart investment for years to come." She referenced four major sectors that should be reformed—the investment code, the banking sector, tax and customs administration, and public-private partnerships—but did not elaborate on details or how the international community would help Tunisia manage any political turbulence resulting from reforms. See Penny Pritzker, "US Secretary of Commerce Penny Pritzker Discusses Tunisia's Economic and Commercial Future at Business Roundtable Event," US Department of Commerce, May 20, 2015, <https://www.commerce.gov/news/secretary-speeches/2015/05/us-secretary-commerce-penny-pritzker-discusses-tunisia-economic-and>. The EU's Mogherini often speaks publicly of EU support for Tunisia's economic development, but offers little more than generalities.

96 An International Republican Institute poll found that most Tunisians believe the best way to improve Tunisia's economy is to make it easier for Tunisian entrepreneurs to start new businesses, get licenses, and reach new markets. See "IRI Tunisia Poll: Economic Reform Vital to Democratic Success," International Republican Institute, August 17, 2015, <http://www.iri.org/resource/iri-tunisia-poll-economic-reform-vital-democratic-success>.



US Secretary of State John Kerry signs a Memorandum of Understanding with Tunisian Minister for Political Affairs Mohsen Marzouk while Tunisian President Beji Caïd Essebsi looks on in Washington, DC on May 20, 2015. Photo credit: US Department of State/Flickr.

that would improve labor and hiring flexibility (particularly for youth), increase access to finance for SMEs, and improve the accountability and transparency of government economic policies. Leading economic studies have identified such reforms as key to unlocking Tunisia's closed and crony-dominated economy.⁹⁷ While such conditionality has so far been minor, it is worth asking whether providing more cash and loans to the increasingly indebted Tunisian government⁹⁸ without any serious reform commitments is throwing good money after bad.

- **The United States and Europe should focus on economic sectors that provide high growth value and can boost employment among the youth and in underdeveloped regions.** Such reforms will take time to bear fruit but could be transformative over time. High-value sectors include professional services, information technology, international call centers, healthcare, transport and logistics, and agriculture in the interior (as opposed to crops
- **The United States and Europe should work with the IMF and other multilateral financial institutions to increase support for a social safety net for Tunisians who are most affected by the country's recession¹⁰⁰ and who would be displaced by economic reforms.** The United States and Europe should also use their clout in these international financial institutions to push for funding for large-scale infrastructure projects in the country's

⁹⁷ *The Unfinished Revolution*, World Bank, op. cit., p. 19.

⁹⁸ Tunisia's debt reached 53 percent of gross domestic product in 2015. Fitch Ratings Agency expects debt to reach 58.4 percent of GDP by 2017. See "Fitch Revises Outlook on Tunisia to Negative; Affirms at 'BB-'," Fitch Ratings, March 4, 2016, <https://www.fitchratings.com/site/fitch-home/pressrelease?id=1000514>.

⁹⁹ Higher education includes Masters of Business Administration and advanced English-language instruction.

¹⁰⁰ The Central Bank of Tunisia said in August 2015 that Tunisia is in technical recession. See "Tunisia: 'Tunisian Economy Goes into Technical Recession'-BCT," AllAfrica, August 27, 2015, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201508271687.html>.

interior that could employ a large number of Tunisians. Positive steps have already been made; in March 2016, the World Bank announced plans to lend Tunisia \$5 billion over five years to support the country's economy and democratic transition.¹⁰¹

- **The United States and Europe should look for ways to increase market access for Tunisian goods and services, including agricultural exports, even prior to the completion of complicated and lengthy trade negotiations.** The council of the US-Tunisia Trade and Investment Framework Agreement, which promotes bilateral trade and investment, should discuss easing import barriers such as quotas, tariffs, and standard-based rules. Over the longer term, market access should be solidified in formal agreements. The start of negotiations between Tunisia and the EU on the DCFTA marks a major positive step in trade relations. With the United States and EU in negotiations over the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), it may also be time to announce the future launch of a parallel free trade agreement (FTA) between the United States and Tunisia. By announcing its intention to start FTA negotiations with Tunisia in the future, setting up preliminary task forces, and commissioning studies on the potential FTA, the United States could help put Tunisia in a much better place to benefit from a future TTIP. The United States and EU also need to craft a much more resonant public narrative on why free trade agreements will benefit Tunisia. Tunisians are well aware that the US and EU FTAs with Morocco have not boosted that country's economy as predicted, and among Tunisians there is concern regarding the effect of Western competition on their economy.¹⁰²

[The United States and Europe] should also agree to target projects and other aid in different interior regions, with special attention given to areas where radicalization and other social discontent is pertinent.

- **The United States and EU should identify a division of labor on economic assistance that will allow them to consolidate resources and ensure that the most economically struggling geographic regions receive far more attention.** As the largest donors outside international financial and multilateral institutions, the United States and EU should agree to focus on certain sectors of the economy in which they have comparative expertise (perhaps information technology for the United States, and professional services, logistics, and transport for the EU). They should also agree to target projects and other aid in different interior regions, with special attention given to areas where radicalization and other social discontent is pertinent. For example, the US-funded Tunisian-American Enterprise Fund should focus its investments in SMEs in targeted sectors in disadvantaged regions. Germany, France, and the UK should also divide up their aid programs by sector and geography to align with those of either the United States or the EU. This would stimulate healthy competition among donors—there could be an agreement to compare results after three or so years—and produce a more focused and complementary set of programs.

SECURITY

Improving the security situation is a top concern for Tunisians, and should continue to be a key priority for the United States and Europe.¹⁰³ The United States and Europe have direct stakes in improving Tunisia's security, as terrorists have targeted Western tourists and diplomatic facilities in the country, while large numbers of Tunisians have joined anti-Western jihadi groups in Syria and Iraq. If violent extremism gains more ground among Tunisian youth, economic recovery and democratic progress will become even harder to achieve. However, providing *effective* support—assistance that improves Tunisia's security without damaging its democratic progress—is a difficult task, especially when faced with the chaos of

101 Tarek Amara, "World Bank Plans to Lend Tunisia \$5 Billion over Five Years," Reuters, March 25, 2016, <http://af.reuters.com/article/topNews/idAFKCNOWR1OR?sp=true>.

102 The EU's post-2011 policies, such as pursuing DCFTAs, were not necessarily what Tunisia and other countries in the region wanted. Tunisia and other countries in the region were seeking short-term economic support including budgetary support. In addition, because Tunisia would have to comply with European legislation as part of the DCFTA, the case for the agreement is difficult to make to vested interests in Tunisia.

103 According to a poll of Tunisian citizens conducted by the International Republican Institute from May to June 2015, terrorism and security were mentioned as the third- and fourth-highest concerns, respectively, after unemployment and the economic and financial crisis. See "IRI Tunisia Poll: Economic Reform Vital to Democratic Success," International Republican Institute, op. cit.

Libya. The threat from Libya (and from ISIS networks inside Tunisia itself) was clearly highlighted in March 2016 after clashes between Tunisian security forces and extremists left more than fifty people dead near the border with Libya in the town of Ben Guerdane.¹⁰⁴

Due to the developing security threat, Western countries are focused on the immediate goal of helping Tunisia avoid more terrorist attacks. Less altruistically, they are also jockeying for arms deals, intelligence ties, and other influence in the post-Ben Ali power structure. Regrettably, none of the security assistance provided by the United States, the EU, and key European member states, including training programs and weapons and equipment to the Ministry of Interior, is linked to meaningful reforms. Several recent studies have shown that foreign aid for equipment and training to non-reforming security agencies has little positive impact and can be harmful when it strengthens abusive and unaccountable actors.¹⁰⁵ In addition, none of these assistance packages give adequate attention to the role of citizen organizations. For example, while the United States allocated some \$30 million in security aid for the Tunisian government in FY2015, it provided only very minimal funding for a few civil society programs on countering violent extremism.

Tunisia offers the United States and Europe a chance to break bad habits and implement a more effective security assistance approach. The central goal must be to strengthen Tunisia's security without abetting the rise of a new security state. This strategy should include the following:

- **Common diplomatic messaging to the Tunisian authorities and public that emphasizes certain core themes.** These messages could emphasize ongoing Western solidarity with Tunisia during its time of need; the importance of societal resilience in the face of potential future terrorist attacks; and how only a professional, accountable, and rights-respecting security force can work efficiently, gain needed cooperation from local communities, and ultimately keep the public safe.

¹⁰⁴ The death toll included thirty-six extremists, twelve members of Tunisia's security forces, and seven civilians. Bouazza Ben Bouazza, "Tunisia Bloodied: 53 Dead in Clashes Near Libyan Border," AP, March 7, 2016, <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/21edf8e6a88046d18778b186a8269923/tunisia-least-3-dead-clashes-near-libyan-border>.

¹⁰⁵ Stephen Watts, *Identifying and Mitigating Risks in Security Sector Assistance for Africa's Fragile States*, RAND Corporation, 2015, http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR808.html; Gordon Adams and Richard Sokolsky, "Governance and Security Sector Assistance: The Missing Link-Part I," Lawfare, July 12, 2015, <https://www.lawfareblog.com/governance-and-security-sector-assistance-missing-link%E2%80%9494part-i>.

- **A major conference and other consultations with Tunisian officials, stakeholders in parliament, and reform advocates from civil society to identify and agree on SSR benchmarks that could be met in exchange for the provision of equipment and other material support** (training and other professional development could continue in the meantime). The discussions should cover public safety and security from a broad perspective, including counterterrorism, border security, nonviolent crowd control, and fighting crime. Reform benchmarks are likely to be modest, as the opportunity for a top-down overhaul of the security sector may not be possible in the current environment, though incremental but meaningful steps are possible. These would include improving the Ministry of Interior's communication with the public; setting up regular dialogues with human rights and civil society activists; creating ombudsman positions in key security agencies; developing a human rights code of conduct for security agencies; providing greater transparency on budget and personnel matters; and taking steps to enable stronger parliamentary oversight. US and European leverage derives from the desire of Tunisian agencies for equipment and other donor support at a time when the national budget for such purchases is limited. The United States and Europe should forge a united front and coordinate closely on an aid package that targets the most important needs, does not strengthen bad actors, and avoids redundancy.

- **Support to key civilian actors outside of the security agencies, even while working closely with government institutions.** The United States and Europe should support training and study tours for parliamentarians and their staff to strengthen their oversight capabilities.¹⁰⁶ They should provide more robust support to human rights and civil society organizations working on counter-radicalization and SSR. Tunisian nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and other community-based organizations are best placed to understand the societal risk factors for radicalization and to reach those who may turn, or have already turned, toward extremism and violence through ISIS and other groups. Tunisian NGOs also play an important role in monitoring the security forces' performance, developing community-based approaches to policing, and contributing ideas to the debate on reform. The United States and Europe can

¹⁰⁶ Oversight of the security services is part of the parliament's mandate according to the constitution, but remains a wholly new concept in Tunisia.

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assist these organizations by providing technical expertise and material aid, connecting like-minded Tunisian NGOs from different parts of the country, and hosting exchanges with organizations in Europe, Africa, and Asia that are working on similar issues.

- **More transparency by the United States and Europe vis-à-vis the Tunisian public regarding security assistance.** The public should be aware of what is being provided and to what agencies. Donors should welcome efforts by the Tunisian public and NGOs to monitor and evaluate their aid programs.
- **Efforts to improve border security based on an approach that involves both the government and civil society.** Tunisia lacks the manpower to patrol fully its northwestern border with Algeria, its southeastern border with Libya, and its long Mediterranean coastline.¹⁰⁷ Drawing security forces away from inland regions could create new vulnerabilities and, if not carefully managed, lead to confrontations with local communities unaccustomed to a heavy state presence. Populations in these remote and impoverished areas are heavily involved in illegal cross-border trade, in large part due to the absence of other economic opportunities.¹⁰⁸ Europe and the United States should provide more training and technical assistance for security forces guarding the border. Aid for “softer” dimensions, such as customs reform and economic development in the border areas, is also a crucial way to tighten control over illegal elements in the border regions without disrupting local communities’ livelihoods, which would create more unrest and insecurity. Tunisia’s reported plan to establish free-trade zones along

Ultimately, the depth of Tunisia’s political progress, rather than its economic growth rate or counterterrorism success, will determine whether the country transforms into a democracy.

parts of the Libyan and Algerian borders that will link economic development with border security deserves support.¹⁰⁹

- **Efforts to ensure that aid for the Tunisian military, which since 2011 has played an important internal security role, and the National Guard adhere to internationally recognized human rights standards, as should aid for the Ministry of Interior.** Troubling recent experiences of Western governments in Iraq and Afghanistan in building security forces from scratch without regard for human rights concerns, or in Egypt in providing “no strings attached” assistance to a military deeply involved in political repression, provide ample reason for caution in Tunisia. Europe and the United States should take care to ensure that strengthening the military does not inadvertently build a new political force. While Tunisia’s army is politically neutral and relatively weak, its relative competence and professionalism have given it more policing and internal security functions. However, an overly empowered military could seek to play a larger role in politics, which would damage Tunisia’s democratization progress.

DEMOCRACY SUPPORT

The United States and Europe should devote more attention to Tunisia’s democratic development and not take continued progress for granted. Ultimately, the depth of Tunisia’s political progress, rather than its economic growth

rate or counterterrorism success, will determine whether the country transforms into a democracy. Like many post-authoritarian countries that have not undergone deep political reform, Tunisia is at risk of sliding back toward an autocratic system that abuses executive, especially presidential, power and that represses peaceful opposition forces as threats to national unity and security.

While domestic factors, particularly political will and the quality of leadership, are paramount for successful democratization, the United States and Europe can play a role by incentivizing Tunisian leaders’ decision-making in the direction of democratic change,

¹⁰⁷ The Tunisian military is already struggling to quash a small but persistent group of jihadists ensconced in the Chambi Mountain region along the border with Algeria. Weapons and jihadists are reportedly entering the country along this border, as well as along the Libyan border in the southeast.

¹⁰⁸ Marouen Achouri, “Smuggling Costs Tunisia Hundreds of Millions of Dollars,” *Al Monitor*, November 10, 2014, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/security/2014/11/tunisia-smuggling-finance-terrorism.html>.

¹⁰⁹ “Libya: Two Free-Trade Zones with Libya, Algeria to Be Created Soon – Minister,” *AllAfrica*, August 15, 2015, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201508171158.html>.



President of the European Parliament Martin Schulz presents a tribute to the victims of the June 2015 Sousse attacks during a visit to the site of the attack in February 2016. *Photo credit:* Martin Schulz/Flickr.

encouraging them to uphold global democratic norms, and helping to disseminate democratic ideas among the Tunisian body politic. The United States and Europe should focus on four goals crucial to democratic progress: embedding Tunisia in the global community of democracies; protecting human rights; creating functional democratic institutions; and supporting the development of a robust civil society and a competitive political system.

- **Europe and the United States should foster Tunisia's engagement in the global community of democracies, including in multilateral institutions, as a way to solidify the country's democratic gains and raise its international visibility as a new democracy.** This would distinguish US and European engagement with Tunisia from their engagement with the rest of the authoritarian Arab world. Europe and the United States should develop a substantial joint aid package that could be provided to Tunisia based on the fulfillment of key democratic reform benchmarks. They should also look for opportunities to embed Tunisia in international organizations that promote democratic practices. For example, Tunisia could be offered a prominent role in the Community of Democracies (of which the United States is serving as President until 2017) and the United Nations Human Rights Council. A partnership could also

be developed with the Council of Europe or NATO if desired, based on Tunisia's progress in implementing reform benchmarks.

- **The West should be more vigilant and outspoken about human rights abuses in Tunisia, using both public and private diplomacy to urge Tunisia to respect its domestic and international human rights obligations.** They should increase high-level engagement with human rights groups, members of parliament monitoring abuses, and government officials working on accountability and transparency in the justice and prison systems. In recent years, the United States and Europe largely have been silent about rights violations, instead taking leaders' assurances that they will not abuse security powers at face value. The continuation of Ben Ali-era practices, such as corruption, using excessive force against peaceful demonstrators,¹¹⁰ torture,¹¹¹ and other abusive methods against detainees¹¹² are worrisome. If not checked early, these abuses could easily expand.

110 Tunisia: Crackdown on Peaceful Protests," Human Rights Watch, September 10, 2015, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/09/10/tunisia-crackdown-peaceful-protests>.

111 Simon Speakman Cordall, "Amnesty International Report Takes Tunisia's, 'Persistent Use of Torture,' to UN Committee," Tunisia Live, April 19, 2016, <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2016/04/19/amnesty-un-committee/>.

112 Asma Ajroudi, "Claims of Tunisian Police Brutality Continue

A TRANSATLANTIC STRATEGY FOR A DEMOCRATIC TUNISIA

- **Europe and the United States need to cooperate on the long-term task of helping Tunisia develop effective democratic institutions of government.** Effective institution building is a slow process that involves not only reaching consensus on new democratic laws and procedures and securing adequate resources, but also ensuring that institutions can respond to citizens' needs, deliver policy solutions, and peacefully manage political conflict. This entails transforming deeply rooted institutions of authoritarian governance, which for decades served and protected those who ran the Bourguiba and Ben Ali regimes, into a new system with completely different norms, purposes, and beneficiaries. The United States and Europe should take the following lessons into account as they seek to help Tunisia with this vital but long-term process:
 - Donors should focus on institutions where assistance, due to the scale of the institution and the evidence of political will for reform, has the potential to make a difference. For example, judiciaries are famously difficult institutions for donor aid to influence due to their size, complexity, and the conservatism and independence of their judges, and there is little evidence so far of a significant Tunisian commitment to judicial reform. Similarly, in the absence of a top-level directive on civil service reform, attempts to improve the functioning of the civil service through training for bureaucrats is unlikely to make much of a difference, especially in the short term. Furthermore, donors should not continue to dedicate scarce funds to areas where Tunisians have proven highly competent, such as electoral administration. Rather, technical support for the functioning of the parliament, anti-corruption bodies, and media watchdogs may be better utilized.
 - The United States and Europe should concentrate on institutions that have the potential to address crucial policy issues and demonstrate to Tunisians that democracy can improve their lives. A common threat to shaky, new democracies is the failure of democratic processes to deliver better public policies. The United States and Europe may be tempted to devote much of their democracy and governance funds to upcoming local elections that are scheduled for spring 2017 under a new decentralization process.¹¹³ These elections are an important assistance focus, however, only if they lead to more decentralized governance, which is not yet clear. Rather than mostly aiding the electoral process, donors should focus on helping Tunisians implement effective decentralization, identify key issues for their communities at the local level, recruit new candidates and governing talent, and learn about how empowered local government works.
 - A division of labor is crucial; donors should think carefully about relative competencies. For example, the United States possesses useful expertise with parliamentary research and institutions, while France, whose legal system is similar to that of Tunisia, may be best-suited to assist new legal bodies. Similarly, too many donors overloading new institutions with training programs, seminars, and such trips can be unproductive.¹¹⁴
 - Perhaps the most useful action donors can take is to connect Tunisians with experts in other recently democratized countries who have overcome similar institution-building challenges. Donors should focus on knowledge transfer, skill-building, and networking rather than on the provision of funding or equipment until the political will and reform momentum of Tunisian counterparts is clear.
- **Europe and the United States should undertake a joint assessment of their support to civil society to develop a more effective way forward.** Despite a liberal legal framework for NGOs enacted in 2011 and the progressive elements for associational rights of Tunisia's 2014 constitution, there are warning signs that Tunisia's civil society is not as robust as is often assumed. Large amounts and some duplication of donor funding have created what one Tunisian observer described as "our fake civil society, which responds to donor agendas but is not well-rooted in our society."¹¹⁵ Some Tunisian civil society activists have become fatigued and divided over whether the priority should be fighting terrorism or protecting human rights. Following the Bardo and Sousse attacks,

Despite Political Change," Al Arabiya, October 28, 2014, <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/perspective/analysis/2014/10/28/Claims-of-Tunisian-police-brutality-continue-despite-political-change.html>.

113 "Un consensus pour l'organisation des élections municipales en mars 2017 affirme l'ISIE," AFP via Al Huffington Post, April 26, 2016, http://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/2016/04/26/elections-municipales-tun_n_9777370.html (in French).

114 A case of this was international assistance to the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) in the mid-to-late 1990s, when an overload of US and EU training programs and study tours prevented the PLC members and staff from doing their work.

115 Conversation with Tunisian analyst, Tunis, March 2015.

the government displayed less tolerance for civil society by cracking down on “extremist” mosques¹¹⁶ and some charitable organizations¹¹⁷ with little or no due process. Additionally, pro-government newspapers have launched harsh media attacks on civil society organizations for expressing concern regarding Tunisia’s 2015 counterterror law.¹¹⁸ In this environment, the United States and Europe need to better target and coordinate support to the most promising civil society groups and de-conflict duplicative funding. Assistance should focus on organizational sustainability and constituency building, not on short-term projects. In addition, the United States and Europe should consider a division of labor and divide funding and other support for civil society thematically and geographically, taking care to focus on organizations outside of elite Tunis circles. Finally, US and European officials must play a diplomatic role by regularly reinforcing to their Tunisian counterparts the importance of upholding freedom for civil society and ensuring inclusion for all citizens in the political process. The United States and Europe can do this by consistently including leaders from civil society and opposition movements in strategic dialogues and other high-level meetings.

IMPROVING US-EU COORDINATION

The United States, EU, and the three key member states sometimes do work closely together on diplomacy, and to exchange information and coordinate assistance on the ground in Tunis. For example, in 2013, there was robust behind-the-scenes joint diplomacy to press Al-Nahda and secular parties to make compromises to keep the constitution-drafting process moving forward. Since the terrorist attacks in 2015 there has been close coordination on counterterrorism aid through a mechanism launched under the G-7 umbrella and led by the Tunisian Ministries of Interior and Justice. The US Department of State recently began creating

a database of donor activities in counterterrorism and countering violent extremism in Tunisia.

Generally, however, effective information-sharing and strategic coordination have been episodic and at times absent altogether. Two European officials interviewed for this paper said they lacked visibility into the details of US security aid and SSR programs as they were designing their own aid programs following the 2015 attacks. One Tunis-based US official said she had been invited only once to the EU Delegation’s standing coordination meeting, while an EU official in Tunis noted that the delegation’s focus is on coordinating with the World Bank and the African Development Bank, not with the United States. At the semiannual US-EU Middle East dialogue between the State Department and the European External Action Service, Tunisia typically has a very brief place on the agenda, squeezed in between the crises in Iraq, Syria, and Libya. Donor coordination across the board has been hampered by the Tunisian government itself, which, amid frequent cabinet changes and a sluggish bureaucracy, has not been able to play a robust coordination role.

Clearly, more regular information-sharing about aid programs is needed not only in Tunis but also in Western capitals. The Tunisian government could coordinate this process. Some donors, such as the UN Development Programme, are well-suited to help. Yet it is crucial that the US and European governments have a stake in this process. To that end, the United States and Europe should:

- **Establish a high-level transatlantic framework for regular discussions on Tunisia in order to develop and implement a shared strategy.** This new mechanism would help establish Tunisia as a higher priority; keep donor countries in line with a joint strategy aimed at helping Tunisia become more democratic, prosperous, and secure; determine a division of labor; and marshal resources. This mechanism could take the form of a Tunisia task force led by the Foreign Ministers of the EU, France, Germany, Britain, and the United States. The task force should be managed by the Western capitals, where policy is made, not by embassies in Tunis, in order to elevate Tunisia as a policy priority and to ensure accountability from the bureaucracies. The task force should meet occasionally in Tunis to receive input from the Tunisian government and other stakeholders to check progress and adjust priorities.

116 Loulla-Mae Eleftheriou-Smith, “Tunisia Hotel Shooting: Mosques Accused of ‘Extremist Preaching’ to Be Shut Down Amid Security Clampdown,” *Independent*, June 28, 2015, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/tunisia-hotel-shooting-mosques-accused-of-extremist-preaching-to-be-shut-down-amid-security-10350809.html>.

117 Zeineb Marzouk, “Is the Tunisian Government about to Crack Down on Civil Society?” *Tunisia Live*, August 5, 2015, <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2015/08/05/civil-society-crackdown/>.

118 Sarah Mersch, “Tunisia’s Ineffective Counterterrorism Law,” *Sada*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, August 6, 2015, <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/?fa=60958>.

CONCLUSION

Tunisia has made great strides towards democracy since 2011. But many of the country's challenges remain unaddressed and numerous economic, security, and political threats could erode the progress made so far. While much has been achieved in terms of political reform, economic disparities still persist between the wealthy elite and most Tunisians, and marginalization of the interior continues. Youth unemployment remains high and a constant possible trigger of unrest. Meanwhile, the deterioration of the security environment has exacerbated difficult economic conditions, amid flows of irregular migration and attacks from ISIS and other violent groups.

Tunisia must press ahead with economic and security reforms that are crucial for further democratic progress. Tunisia's success or failure will have major consequences for the region, as well as for neighbors

across the Mediterranean in Europe. The ultimate responsibility for reform lies with Tunisia, but the international community—the United States, European Union, and key EU member states—should play a more significant role in helping Tunisia achieve greater stability, prosperity, and democracy. The United States and the EU have so far already provided rhetorical and monetary support for Tunisia, but a more strategic approach is needed. The United States and the EU should make active support for Tunisia's democratic transition a priority in the transatlantic agenda and develop a coordinated, joint strategy to better address Tunisia's assistance needs. A democratic Tunisia is critical to advancing the West's goal of fostering a more stable and moderate Middle East, but time is running out.

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