Joint Communiqué on EU-Tunisia relations: 'For a renewed partnership'

Brussels, 4 June 2021

Visiting Brussels on 4 June 2021, His Excellency Mr Kais Saied, the President of the Republic of Tunisia, held talks with His Excellency Mr Charles Michel, the President of the European Council, Her Excellency Ms Ursula von der Leyen, the President of the European Commission and His Excellency Mr David Maria Sassoli, the President of the European Parliament. These meetings provided an opportunity to underline the depth of historical ties between the European Union and Tunisia dating back almost half a century in a spirit of constantly evolving strategic partnership.

This new phase of bilateral relations is based on shared values and a mutual commitment to strengthening political, economic and cultural ties between the two shores of the Mediterranean.

The talks, which took place in a very cordial atmosphere, focused on young people, education, culture and economic relations, which have been some of the key areas of cooperation between Tunisia and Europe in the last few years. Delivering on the priorities announced in the European Communication on the renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood and confirmed by the Council conclusions of April 2021 was also at the heart of these discussions. The two sides invoked the socio-economic impact of the crisis linked to the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic and social reforms needed to revive economic activity and growth.

Both sides welcomed the celebrations to mark the 10th anniversary of the Revolution. Since then, Tunisia has made progress in consolidating democracy, including by holding municipal, parliamentary and presidential elections and by passing laws which guarantee human rights and fundamental freedoms, demonstrating that democracy has taken root in Tunisian society.

On the subject of cooperation, the Tunisian President thanked the European Union for its consistent support since 2011, noting the European contribution of more than EUR 3 billion to Tunisia's socio-economic recovery. For its part, the EU reiterated its long-term commitment to Tunisia and its determination to support the country's efforts to consolidate its democratic institutions and promote a green, competitive and inclusive economy, in particular by supporting SMEs and promoting foreign investment.

The two sides also discussed the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 health crisis and the economic reforms that should be undertaken to create the right conditions for a sustained recovery of growth. The European Union, one of the largest contributors to the international COVAX mechanism, has undertaken to continue supporting the efforts made by Africa, including Tunisia, to combat the pandemic by facilitating fair access to vaccines and assisting its economic recovery, particularly in the worst affected sectors, such as tourism, services and air transport.

The visit confirmed the commitment of both sides to deepening their strategic and privileged partnership. The two sides discussed the priorities that will shape bilateral cooperation in the years to come. The following broad guidelines were outlined in the course of the discussions:

- The cooperation started in 2016 under the Youth Partnership has already yielded significant results. More than 5 000 Tunisian students and academics have benefited from the Erasmus+ programme and participated in exchanges in all fields with European universities. The European Union has also supported the modernisation of higher education in Tunisia through 50 capacity-building projects under Erasmus+ since 2015.
- Tunisia is also one of the countries on the southern shore of the Mediterranean which has benefited most from its participation in European research programmes since 1 January 2016 and is the only country of the Southern Neighbourhood and Africa associated with the European «Horizon 2020» Framework Programme for Research and Innovation. Tunisian organisations benefited 87 times from 68 grants funded under «Horizon 2020», receiving EUR 11.2 million of direct EU contribution enabling very advanced cooperation with European research centres. The two sides welcomed the success of this venture and discussed at some length the prospects for its future development. Tunisia has formally expressed an interest in joining the new «Horizon Europe» Framework Programme in order to continue this partnership.
in the field of research and innovation.

- In addition, recognising the importance of investing in young people for the future of our countries, both sides reaffirmed their commitment to further intensifying cooperation in the field of education, vocational training and higher education, including through the Erasmus+ programme, and to working together to promote the cultural and cultural heritage sector. Within that context, and in the course of this visit, Tunisia submitted a letter of intent with a view to continued participation in the «Creative Europe» Framework Programme relating to the cultural and creative sectors.

- Both sides agreed to work together on mobility and all aspects of migration, including legal migration, in accordance with the legal migration and mobility remit of the EU and its Member States. They also had a frank discussion on irregular migration, bearing in mind the root causes and taking their respective interests into account. It was agreed to continue joint work on all aspects of migration and its governance, including asylum, border management, the fight against migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings.

- The two sides agreed to intensify cooperation in the fields of security and justice and expressed a wish to make rapid progress in the development of police cooperation. They also agreed to strengthen cooperation on preventing radicalisation, counter-terrorism and combating money laundering.

- Both sides welcomed the feelers that had been put out for an agreement on extending the coverage of the European Geostationary Navigation Overlay Service (EGNOS), which illustrated the success of bilateral cooperation in the space sector. This initiative also has a significant impact on the harmonisation of air transport safety on both sides of the Mediterranean and will benefit the tourism sector too.

- Both parties also stressed the importance of continuing to implement the partnership within the framework of the consultation mechanisms set up by the EU-Tunisia association agreement, including expert discussions on the work of the subcommittees. The EU and Tunisia welcomed the fact that various thematic meetings had been held under the association agreement in 2019 and 2020 in spite of the health constraints. These meetings had allowed fruitful exchanges to take place on the challenges facing both sides and ensured the continuation of dialogue between the Tunisian and European administrations.

- Lastly, the European and Tunisian sides exchanged views on regional and international issues of common interest, including the Middle East peace process. Both sides welcomed the ceasefire which should end the violence, expressing a desire to continue working with international partners to relaunch the political process and reiterating their strong commitment to the two-state solution.

- In the light of Tunisia's participation in the UN Security Council in 2021, both sides agreed to intensify political and diplomatic contacts in order to contribute together to the international community's commitment to multilateralism and UN principles. In that spirit, the EU and Tunisia reiterated their support for the call of 30 March 2021 for an international treaty on pandemic prevention and preparedness.

The EU and Tunisia underlined their joint determination to implement the initiatives referred to above and to continue fruitful exchanges at all levels, in this case technical and political, which are the key to strengthening their privileged partnership.

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