

PRESS RELEASE

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Joint press statement on the occasion of the 14th meeting of the EU-Tunisia Association Council

The 14th meeting of the EU-Tunisia Association Council was held in Brussels on 15 May 2018. It was co-chaired by Federica Mogherini, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the Commission, and Khémaies Jhinaoui, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tunisia. Johannes Hahn, European Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, also took part in the meeting.

On this occasion, we welcome President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker's forthcoming visit to Tunisia on 23 and 24 July 2018, in response to the invitation extended to him by the President of the Republic of Tunisia.

This session has allowed us to take stock of our common objectives and to acknowledge the many achievements made since the previous meeting on 11 May 2017. We have stepped up cooperation in particular on key issues such as youth employability and reforms, democratic consolidation and promotion of good governance (in which civil society continues to play a central role), the response to shared security challenges and the coordinated management of migration. Today we committed to setting even more ambitious objectives for the future.

The strategic priorities which we have agreed on for 2018-2020 reflect our determination to strengthen our partnership, targeting tangible and visible results to the benefit of citizens. The priorities will be targeted at sustainable and inclusive socio-economic development; democracy, good governance and human rights, bringing peoples together, mobility and migration; and security and the fight against terrorism.

Both partners aim to continue strengthening their relations beyond 2020 and have agreed to reflect further on the future vision for the partnership before the next meeting of the Association Council in 2019.

Both partners have agreed on the implementation of an early warning mechanism so that they can cooperate more efficiently and improve their working methods. Given the positive results achieved in many areas, we will further strengthen the impact and visibility of our joint efforts.

The EU's announcement of additional funding for 2018, in the form of grants amounting once again to up to €300 million, shows how important this privileged partnership is to the EU.

Broadening young people's prospects for the future will be an important element in our endeavours. On top of the €25 million programme supporting the creation of 1 000 Tunisian start-ups, benefiting young people in particular, the EU will fund a new programme dedicated to young people and focused on employment, employability and the innovative initiatives of young Tunisians for the social and economic recovery of the country.

The EU welcomes the success of the municipal elections held in Tunisia on 6 May 2018, and undertakes to support Tunisia in completing the establishment of local democracy and the process of decentralisation as an important driver of regional development. In addition to the ongoing programmes, we will work on strengthening the capacities of newly created municipalities and on regional development. Additional funding will be allocated to this aspect of cooperation.

We welcome the support programmes announced for disadvantaged regions and for the development of tourism with stronger local economic benefits. In addition to the priority sectors like agriculture and tourism, there will be support for modernisation of the economy, with a particular emphasis on innovation, the digital economy, renewable energy, research and smart specialisation, which will be covered by a specific agreement to be concluded in the near future.

The roadmap which was recently adopted by the Tunisian Council of Ministers, and presented to the EU during Head of Government Youssef Chahed's visit to Brussels, sets out the most urgent (legislative, strategic and operational) measures necessary for the country's social and economic recovery and will serve as an operational tool to ensure their swift implementation, including for EU-funded support measures.

Mr Johannes Hahn, Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, will conduct a mission to Tunisia with the financial institutions during the course of 2018 to discuss the ongoing reforms and what support is needed to accompany them.

The deep and comprehensive free trade agreement (DCFTA) will contribute structurally to securing Tunisia's integration into the European area and to the modernisation of Tunisia's economy, and we welcome our joint decision to set an ambitious agenda for negotiations on all chapters in order to conclude the negotiations as soon as possible.

Given the opportunities and challenges posed by migration, we have reiterated our commitment to make progress in the negotiations on visa facilitation and the readmission agreement in order to conclude them as soon as possible. We discussed the possible synergies between the DCFTA and visa facilitation.

We agreed to continue our cooperation on security and counter-terrorism, while promoting full compliance with the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms. In that connection we noted with satisfaction the recovery of economic activity in the tourism sector thanks to Tunisia's continuous efforts to improve the security situation. We are counting on the announced measures to push forward with the implementation of the flagship programme on security sector reform.

We will continue our joint efforts to support the Tunisian reforms towards international and European standards for tax governance and combating money laundering and the financing of terrorism.

Our shared objective is for Tunisia to swiftly fulfil its commitments under the action plan agreed with the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), and to be removed from the FATF's list and from the European Union's list as soon as possible.

The launch of a diplomatic exchange and cooperation programme between the European External Action Service and the Tunisian Ministry of Foreign Affairs will allow them to share their expertise and improve their knowledge of each other's working methods. In that connection, we welcome the signing of the administrative agreement on work placements for diplomats.

Cooperation on harnessing in particular the economic potential of Tunisia's cultural heritage and on cultural diplomacy is another unprecedented area of cooperation illustrating the place culture occupies in the Tunisia-EU partnership, with the aim of eventually establishing a national cultural diplomacy strategy in Tunisia.

We also highlighted the importance we attach to the parliamentary dimension of our privileged partnership.

We continued our discussions on regional matters of mutual interest, in particular the situation in Libya, Syria, the Middle East and the Sahel.

The Tunisian Minister for Foreign Affairs reiterated Tunisia's thanks for the EU's support for the democratic transition as well as for its support in achieving the economic reforms. The High Representative renewed the EU's commitment to continue and strengthen its support for Tunisia.

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