



## **Which Role for Rural Development in Euro-Mediterranean Relations? Reflections from ENPARD in Tunisia**

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### Abstract

The so-called Arab Spring has inspired institutional and academic reflections on the gaps of the European Union's (EU) approach to its Southern neighbourhood and on its overall scope for improvement. This thesis contributes to the strand of literature addressing this question through the analysis of the stratification of multidimensional, convergent and divergent themes within Arab politics and societies. Since this complexity requires an interdisciplinary analysis of specific challenges, this work focuses on rural populations as the immediate subjects of resource policies which affect the neighbours' welfare and stability. Tunisia's post-revolution special relations with the EU provide a unique case study for the potential of the European Neighbourhood Policy and the negotiations for a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) to address these issues.

In this context, the thesis inquires why rural development is a crucial issue for Euro-Tunisian relations and whether the post-2011 European Neighbourhood Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development (ENPARD) has the potential to contribute to the Tunisian response to agricultural and rural threats. By adapting its concepts to the 'outside-in perspective' inherent to these questions, this work establishes a framework for impact analysis based on the conceptualisation of structural foreign policy and on development cooperation concepts for rural areas and urban-rural divides. The statistics, agro-economic studies, surveys, original interviews and programme evaluations on which the findings are based are all focused on the societal and individual structural levels.

The main finding challenges previous academic conceptualisations of the programme, by highlighting that ENPARD has the concrete potential to address usually neglected structures and levels, and that Euro-Tunisian cooperation and trade discussions would benefit from the mainstreaming of such an approach. However, limited funding and low visibility risk to annul the impact of a judiciously designed mechanism and to leave European policies towards the country structurally unsustainable. These results show that more research is needed on the ground, concerning the challenges and the scope for Euro-Tunisian cooperation in sectoral policies and governance, and on the negotiation table, concerning the potential value of the DCFTA vis-à-vis Tunisian rural political economy.