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Did the European Union Light a Beacon of Hope in North Africa? Assessing the Effectiveness of EU Democracy Promotion in Tunisia

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Abstract

This analysis addresses the European Union's (EU) democracy promotion policy in Tunisia, aiming at understanding its evolution and at assessing its effectiveness: how did the EU's approach to democracy promotion evolve overtime? To what extent was it effective in promoting Tunisia's democratic transition? In order to assess the impact of an external actor in the democratic transition, I opted for a two-folded approach: on the one hand, I analysed the EU's declaratory policy regarding democracy promotion and its implementation. On the other hand, I identified several domestic key actors and analysed their perception of the EU's contribution to the transition process. I argue that the EU did not apply a 'democracy promotion' policy, as this concept implies preparing the ground for political change by actively promoting democratic values. In Tunisia, the EU rather applied a 'democracy support' policy: once the regime collapsed, the EU exploited the new 'window of opportunity'. However, the EU did not have a substantial impact on the outcome of Tunisia's democratisation: according to the key players' perception, the EU positively contributed to the success of the transition, but it did not make the difference: Tunisia would have become a democracy with or without the EU's political and financial support.

Introduction: A beacon of hope after the Arab Spring

*When the People want to live,
Destiny shall finally respond,
Oppression shall vanish,
And fetters be broken.*

(National anthem of Tunisia)

In 2010, for the first time, mass movements all over the Arab world questioned the legitimacy of dictators, demanding freedom and better life conditions. The protesters were calling for regime change, they were calling for democracy. The promotion of democratic values ranks first among the European Union's (EU)¹ external relations objectives, according to Art. 21 of the Treaty on European Union. The EU was expected to take action in order to support the democratic aspirations of the Arab people, promoting its core values and fostering stability at its borders. Nonetheless, more than six years later, the Southern neighbourhood is more unstable than ever. The exception is Tunisia, whose successful political transition is the only 'beacon of hope' for democracy in the entire Middle East and North Africa region.

This paper addresses the role played by the EU in Tunisia's democratic transition and aims at answering the following questions: how did the EU's approach to democracy promotion evolve overtime? To what extent was this policy effective in promoting Tunisia's democratic transition?

First, I argue that the commitment of the EU increased over time, adapting to new circumstances. During President Ben Ali's twenty-year-long dictatorship, the EU did not apply any substantial pressure on the regime in order to trigger top-down democratic reforms, nor did it engage with Tunisian civil society in order to stimulate bottom-up political change. When the uprising begun, the EU maintained a cautious 'wait-and-see' stance until the ousting of Ben Ali in early 2011. Only once the regime had fallen, did the EU relaunch its commitment to democracy promotion, expressing political support for the regime change and providing funds to empower Tunisia's civil society. In the consolidation phase, which is still ongoing, the EU is making a genuine effort to ensure the

¹ This paper focuses on the democracy promotion policy implemented by the EU institutions. Hence, I will not take into account similar policies put into effect by the member states. I refer to the EU as the ensemble of the EU institutional actors working both in Brussels and in Tunisia.

success of this young democracy. In other words, the EU did not apply a 'democracy promotion' policy, which would imply preparing the ground for political change by actively promoting democratic values. Instead, the EU applied a 'democracy support' policy in Tunisia: once the regime collapsed, it supported the embryonic democracy throughout the establishment and consolidation process.

Second, I argue that the EU's democracy promotion policy was effective only to a partial extent: Tunisia managed to establish a democratic institutional framework thanks to some peculiarities of its society² and to the contribution of some key domestic players, rather than the EU's support. While positively contributing to the success of the transition, the role played by the EU did not make the difference: Tunisia would have become a democracy with or without the EU's political and financial support.

The next section will present the framework of analysis. Subsequently, a separate section will be consecrated to each phase of Tunisia's democratic transition. Finally, I will draw some conclusions.

Conceptual framework

This section sets out the methodology underpinning the analysis by providing definitions of the core concepts, justifying the selection of Tunisia as a case study and explaining how the elusive concept of effectiveness will be tackled.

Definitions

The concept of effectiveness refers to the capability of producing the desired result. As Drucker argues, it is "the ability to get the right things done"³ in order to reach a certain objective. A policy is therefore effective if it reaches its objective(s). This approach focuses exclusively on the implementation of the policy, while overlooking its declaratory aspects. In this paper, I will take into account both the declaratory dimension and the implementation: an effective policy sets declaratory objectives that are relevant to its

² For a detailed analysis of the characteristics of Tunisia's civil society which contributed to the success of the country's democratic transition, see G. Bassotti, *A 'Black Swan' In North Africa: A Review of the EU's Democracy Promotion Policies in Tunisia*, Master's Thesis, Bruges, College of Europe, 2016.

³ P. Drucker, *The Effective Executive*, New York, Butterworth-Heinemann, 2007, p. 3.

intrinsic purpose (declaratory dimension) and implements measures capable of achieving them (implementation dimension).

Schmitter, O'Donnell and Whitehead refer to transition as the process that starts when a regime collapses and ends when a new one is established:

The 'transition' is the interval between one political regime and another. [...] Transitions are delimited, on the one side, by the launching of the process of dissolution of an authoritarian regime and, on the other, by the installation of some form of democracy.⁴

This process occurs in two phases. The regime collapse phase, from the first turmoil to the collapse of the authoritarian regime (*pars destruens*), and the establishment phase, from the formation of an *ad interim* government to the entering into force of a democratic constitution (*pars construens*).

Although the entering into force of a democratic constitution marks the end of the transition as such, the democratisation process is not over yet. A newly established democracy is vulnerable, and centrifugal forces are likely to challenge its legitimacy. According to Linz and Stepan, the democratic consolidation is the process through which the new institutional framework reaches its maturity.⁵ The institutional framework of a consolidated democracy is unlikely to be reverted to authoritarianism. Hence, a democracy promotion policy aims at triggering political change in authoritarian regimes, fostering the establishment of democratic institutions during a democratic transition and supporting the consolidation of the newly established constitutional framework.

Choice of the case study

I chose Tunisia as a case study due to three features of this Mediterranean country. First, Tunisia is an Islamic Arab country: a vast majority of its population of 11 million is Muslim (99%), and 98% is ethnically Arab.⁶ Second, Tunisia is a consolidating democracy: it is the only Arab Spring country that has successfully completed its democratic transition. Freedom House classified Tunisia as a 'free country' in its 2015 and 2016 reports.⁷ Third,

⁴ G. O'Donnell & P. Schmitter, "Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies", in O'Donnell *et al.* (eds.) *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule*, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986, p. 6.

⁵ J. Linz & A. Stepan, "Towards Consolidated Democracies", *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 7, no. 2, 1996, p. 15.

⁶ *The CIA World Factbook*, "Country Profile: Tunisia", 26 April 2016.

⁷ Freedom House, 2016; "Freedom in the world 2016: Tunisia", Freedom House, 2017.

Tunisia is a neighbouring country of the EU. It was the first country to sign an Association Agreement with the EU in 1995, it is since 2004 part of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and since 2008 a member of the Union for the Mediterranean.

Assessing the evolution of the EU's democracy promotion policy

Based on the aforementioned definition, I identify four main phases in Tunisia's democratic transition (see Table 1). First, the pre-transition phase, from November 1987, when Ben Ali succeeded to Bourghiba, to 17 December 2010, when Mohamed Bouazizi's immolation triggered the turmoil. Second, the transition phase, that I will analyse in two sub-phases: the regime collapse phase, from the beginning of the uprising to the end of Ben Ali's twenty-year-long rule over Tunisia, marked by the dictator's voluntary exile in Saudi Arabia in January 2011; and the establishment phase, from the dictator's ousting to the adoption of the new constitution in January 2014. Fourth, the consolidation phase, which begun with the adoption of the democratic constitution and is still ongoing.

Table 1: Chronology of Tunisia's democratisation

Phases		Start	End
Pre-transition phase		Ben Ali takes power, 7/11/1987	First demonstration in Sidi Bouzid, 17/12/2010
Transition phase	<i>Regime collapse phase</i>	First demonstration in Sidi Bouzid, 17/12/2010	Ben Ali escapes, 14/01/2011
	<i>Establishment phase</i>	First government of national unity, 17/01/2011	Adoption of the new Constitution, 26/01/2014
Consolidation phase		Adoption of the new Constitution, 26/01/2014	Ongoing

Source: author's compilation

A comparative analysis of the EU's declaratory policy and its implementation during each of these four phases will shed light on the evolution of the EU's democracy promotion policy in Tunisia.

Measuring the effectiveness of EU democracy promotion policy

In order to assess the impact of the EU's democracy promotion policy, the concept of effectiveness needs to be operationalised. As mentioned above, both the declaratory aspects and their implementation shall be taken into account in order to measure the

policy's effectiveness. An effective democracy promotion policy sets declaratory objectives that are relevant to its intrinsic purpose and implements them.

The relevance (high/medium/low) of the declaratory policy's objectives will be measured through three indicators, each of which is considered of equal relative weight. First, the frequency (high/medium/low) of the statements released by the EU institutions regarding Tunisia: the more frequently the EU states its position regarding democratic standards in the country, the more relevant the EU considers the declared objectives. Second, the level (high/medium/low) of the source(s) in the EU's institutional hierarchy: the higher the source of a statement, the more relevant the EU considers the declared objectives. Third, the assertiveness (high/medium/low) of the language used, measured through the number of direct references to democracy: the more openly and boldly the EU advocates for democracy, the more committed the EU is to the objectives of democracy promotion.

In order to measure the extent of implementation of the declaratory objectives, the analysis focuses on civil society empowerment, the most crucial dimension of democracy promotion. The nexus between a well-developed and independent civil society and the success of a democratic transition is well established among scholars, from Alexis de Tocqueville to Robert Putnam.⁸ Moreover, Tunisia's civil society enjoyed a certain degree of autonomy and detachment from the regime already before the Jasmine Revolution, which should allow to assess the EU's efforts to promote democracy rather than just please the regime in power.⁹ The extent (large/medium/small) of the implementation of the declaratory objectives in terms of civil society empowerment will be measured through three indicators as well, and each indicator is considered of equal relative weight. First, the nominal amount (large/medium/small) of resources allocated to civil society empowerment, assuming that the more money the EU puts on the table, the more likely it is to reach its declaratory objectives. Second, the relative share (large/medium/

⁸ See P. Zaleski, *Tocqueville on Civilian Society: A Romantic Vision of the Dichotomic Structure of Social Reality*, Hamburg, Felix Meiner Verlag, 2008; G. Almond & S. Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes And Democracy In Five Nations*, Thousand Oaks, Sage, 1989; R. Putnam, R. Leonardi & R. Nanetti, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1994.

⁹ The focus on 'civil society empowerment' is also due to the constraints of this research in terms of time and space. A more comprehensive analysis of the implementation of the declaratory objectives of democracy promotion should include other important sub-sectors, such as reform of the judiciary system; media, culture and information; promotion of human rights.

small) of the overall financial support allocated to civil society empowerment, as the larger this share, the more likely the EU is to reach its declaratory objectives. Third, the number (large/medium/small) of programmes and initiatives funded and put into effect, since the higher the number of active programmes on the ground, the more likely the EU is to reach its declaratory objectives.

This methodology allows to measure the effectiveness of the EU's democracy promotion policy from the perspective of the EU itself, or 'inside-out perspective'.¹⁰ The intrinsic purpose of the policy was indeed achieved, since Tunisia's democracy is currently consolidating, but the relative contribution of the EU to this outcome remains to be determined.

The impact of the EU's contribution cannot be isolated from other (internal and external) factors, but a plausibility probe can be conducted, complementing the analysis with an 'outside-in perspective'¹¹ based on the main Tunisian stakeholders' perception of the impact of the EU's of Tunisia's transition. They can be divided in three categories: civil society organisations, political parties and social clusters. The civil society organisations include the main labour union in Tunisia, *Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail* (UGTT); the main organisation advocating for human rights, *Ligue Tunisienne pour les droits humaines* (LTDH); and the National Dialogue Quartet composed by the two aforementioned organisations, alongside *Ordre National des Avocats Tunisien* (ONAT) and *Union Tunisienne de l'Industrie, du Commerce et de l'Artisanat* (UTICA). The political parties include Nidaa Tounes, a secularist centre-left party founded in 2012 by the current President of the Republic Beji Caid Essebsi; Ennahda, a moderate Islamic party founded by Rachid Ghannouchi in 2011; and *Front Populaire*, a coalition of several left-wing parties, created in 2012 and led by Hama Hammami. The social clusters include the middle class and the *mohamishun*¹² ('disenfranchised' in Arabic), young Tunisians (15-30 years old) with a relatively high level of education, unemployed and with a low income. Frustration and resentment are the defining features of this social cluster.

¹⁰ S. Keukeleire & T. Delreux, *The Foreign Policy of the European Union*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, p. 68.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² F. Merone, "Enduring Class Struggle in Tunisia: The Fight for Identity beyond Political Islam", *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 42, no. 1, 2014, p. 75.

Table 2 illustrates the specific impact of these domestic actor in each phase of Tunisia's democratic transition.¹³

Table 2: Key domestic actors and their relevance

Actor	Pre-transition phase	Regime collapse phase	Establishment phase	Consolidation phase
UGTT	High impact	High impact	High impact	Medium impact
LTDH	High impact	Medium impact	High impact	Medium impact
National Dialogue Quartet	-	-	High impact	-
Nidaa Tounes	-	-	Medium impact	High impact
Ennahda	High impact	Low impact	High impact	High impact
Front Populaire	Low impact	Medium impact	Medium impact	Medium impact
Middle class	Medium impact	High impact	High impact	High impact
Mohamishun	Low impact	High impact	Low impact	Low impact

Source: author's compilation

The stakeholders' perception of the EU's democracy promotion policy will be analysed through interviews conducted with representatives of these key civil society organisations, political parties and social clusters, including: Samir Cheffi, Deputy Secretary General of UGTT; Moktar Trifi, former president of LTDH; Djilani Hammami, Deputy Secretary General of *Front Populaire*; Mohamed Nejieb Gharbi, member of the Political Bureau of Ennahda; Sabrine Gobantini, independent Member of Parliament (MP), former member of Nidaa Tounes; and Sherif Khraifi, founding member of the *Union de Diplomés au Chomage*, a small non-governmental organisation (NGO) that represents the interests of the *mohamishun*.¹⁴

The next section applies this framework to the first phase of Tunisia's democratic transition: the pre-transition phase.

¹³ For a detailed analysis of the role played by each these actors during each phase of Tunisia's democratic transition, see Bassotti, A *'Black Swan' In North Africa*, *op.cit.*

¹⁴ Interview with Sherif Khraifi, founding member of *Union des Diplomés Chomeurs*, Tunis, 19 April 2016.

Pre-transition phase

This section will analyse the EU democracy promotion policy in Tunisia before the Jasmine Revolution. First, I will assess the relevance of the EU's declaratory policy, then I will proceed at assessing its implementation. Third, I will present the domestic actors' perception in order to assess the overall effectiveness.

EU declaratory policy during the pre-transition phase

The frequency of the dedicated official documents¹⁵ regarding Tunisia which the EU issued during the pre-transition phase is low: between 2000 and 2010 the EU institutions¹⁶ only issued 22 such documents (little more than two documents per year on average), and Tunisia was mentioned in 350 official documents.¹⁷ Most of these statements were issued by sources that rank high in the EU's institutional hierarchy, including several Commissioners (Commissioner Patten - external relations; Commissioner Verheugen - Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy; Commissioner Borg - Development and Humanitarian Aid) and the European Investment Bank. Significantly, though, the level of assertiveness of the language used is low: out of the 22 official documents regarding Tunisia, only 3 mention the word 'democracy', for a total of 6 times.¹⁸

By contrast, the EU openly expressed its commitment to democracy promotion in all the major strategic documents. Article 2 of the Association Agreement signed on 17 July 1995 contains a democracy clause as an essential element.¹⁹ Moreover, Tunisia was one of the signatories of the Barcelona Declaration in November 1995 which contains an explicit commitment to democracy: "The participants undertake the following declaration of principles to [...] develop the rule of law and democracy in their political

¹⁵ The term 'official documents' comprises: press releases; statements; fact sheets; memos; speeches; news items; weekly meetings reports, announcements.

¹⁶ The term 'EU institutions' comprises the European Commission; Council of the European Union; European Council; European Investment Bank; European Economic and Social Committee; Court of Justice; Committee of the Regions; Court of Auditors; European Data Protection Supervisor; and European Ombudsman.

¹⁷ European Commission, *Press Releases Database*, Brussels, 24 January 2017.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ "Euro-Mediterranean Agreement establishing an association between the European Communities and their Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of Tunisia, of the other part", Brussels, 17 July 1995.

systems".²⁰ The Barcelona Declaration formed the basis of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, which later evolved into the Union for the Mediterranean. The MEDA (Mesures D'Accompagnement) regulation, the main instrument for financial and economic cooperation in the framework of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership established by the Council Regulation No. 1488/96 of 23 July 1996, also refers to democracy as an essential element in Article 3.²¹ Additionally, the EU-Tunisia ENP Action Plan adopted in 2004 was based on "mutually recognised [...] common values such as democracy, the rule of law, good governance, respect for human rights".²² The first priority identified in the framework of the Action Plan referred again to democracy promotion. These four major documents make use of a highly assertive language and are issued at the highest level, partially making up for the low profile adopted by the EU.

To conclude, the frequency of the EU statements remains low, while the level of the sources is high and the level of assertiveness can be considered medium throughout the long-lasting pre-transition phase. Consequently, the level of relevance of the EU's declaratory objectives in democracy promotion during the pre-transition phase is medium. In the next subsection, the implementation of these objectives shall be analysed.

Implementation during the pre-transition phase

Between 1995 to 2008, very limited support was provided by the EU to Tunisia's civil society, mainly due to the constraints imposed by the government on foreign funding. The amount of resources made available by the EU to empower Tunisia's civil society was small (about € 2 million per year)²³, and so is its relative share compared to the overall financial support that the country received (0,06%).²⁴ With such a shortage of funding, only a small number of programmes was implemented.²⁵

²⁰ "Barcelona Declaration adopted at the Euro-Mediterranean Conference 27-28/11/95", Barcelona, 28 November 1995, p. 2.

²¹ Council of the European Union, "Council Regulation (EC) No 1488/96 of 23 July 1996 on financial and technical measures to accompany (MEDA) the reform of economic and social structures in the framework of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership", *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 189, 30 July 1996.

²² European External Action Service, "European Neighbourhood Policy: EU-Tunisia Action Plan", Brussels, 1 May 2005, p. 1.

²³ European Commission, "Évaluation de la coopération de la Commission Européenne avec la Tunisie 1996-2008", Final Report, Vol. 1, Brussels, May 2011, p. 60.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

From 1995 to 2010, human rights and democratic principles were discussed in the framework of eight meetings of the EU-Tunisia Association Council. In addition, a sub-committee on human rights and democracy was set up, but it convened only three times, as “the discussions about its interior regulation [...] were deteriorating the relations with Tunisia”.²⁶ In the framework of these meetings, the EU ‘takes note’, ‘raises issues’ and ‘regrets’, avoiding any assertive statement.

The declaratory objectives were implemented only to a small extent. Although democracy promotion was a priority to the EU (according, at least, to the Association Agreement, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and the ENP Action Plan 2004), the gap between the EU’s declaratory policy and its implementation during the pre-transition phase is wide.

Table 3: Effectiveness of the EU democracy promotion during the pre-transition phase

DECLARATORY POLICY				IMPLEMENTATION				OVERALL DEGREE of EFFECTIVENESS
Frequency of statements	Level of the source	Assertiveness of language	LEVEL of RELEVANCE	Nominal amount of resources	% of overall support	Number of programmes funded	EXTENT of IMPLEMENTATION	
LOW	HIGH	MEDIUM	MEDIUM	SMALL	SMALL	SMALL	SMALL	LOW

Source: author’s compilation

In conclusion, the overall level of effectiveness of the EU democracy promotion in Tunisia during the pre-transition phase is low: the declaratory objectives, despite their medium level of relevance, were implemented only to a small extent. According to an EU official, “in 2011 the EU swiftly made a *mea culpa* and recognised that they had not promoted [democratic] values strongly enough [under the ENP]”.²⁷

In the next paragraph, I will compare these findings to the perception of the key internal actors.

²⁶ EU Delegation in Tunisia, “Bulletin d’information de la délégation de l’Union européenne en Tunisie”, no. 6, Tunis, September 2009, p. 7.

²⁷ Interview with EEAS Tunisia desk officer, Brussels, 22 April 2016.

Stakeholders' perception of the EU's support during the pre-transition phase

The actors who played a particularly relevant role in the pre-transition phase are UGTT, LTDH and Ennahda. These organisations represented different facets of the opposition to Ben Ali's rule: they had very different ideological frameworks, objectives and narratives, and thus very different perceptions of the role played by the EU in promoting democratic change. Samir Cheffi, Deputy Secretary General of UGTT, emphasised the rigorous stance of UGTT on external influence: "we do not tolerate any form of foreign interference in our internal affairs".²⁸

On the contrary, Moktar Trifi, President of LTDH from 2000 to 2011, said that during the turmoil in Gafsa in 2008 the League attracted the attention of the international community on the violence perpetrated by the regime. In 2008, a delegation of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) was received by Trifi in Tunis and visited Gafsa under the aegis of LTDH. The former president of the League was also invited to deliver a speech to the European Parliament's plenary assembly.²⁹ The EU provided financial support to LTDH starting from 2002, but in 2003 the government cut the funding.³⁰ According to LTDH's former president, the EU was a relevant partner to the League in the pre-transition phase.³¹

Mohamed Nejib Gharbi, member of Ennahda's political bureau, had a much more critical opinion on the EU's commitment to democracy promotion before the revolution: "the EU did not engage at any level with the Islamic movements during the dictatorship".³² The Islamic identity was brutally repressed by Ben Ali and most of Ennahda's leaders were exiled or in jail. In general, the EU had an extremely cautious approach to political Islam before the Arab Spring: "Action on demands for a proactive inclusion of Islamists has been negligible. [...] There [was] no common EU policy line on engagement with moderate Islamist interlocutors".³³

²⁸ Interview with Samir Cheffi, Deputy Secretary General of UGTT, Tunis, 19 April 2016.

²⁹ Interview with Moktar Trifi, former President of LTDH, Tunis, 20 April 2016.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Interview with Mohamed Nejib Gharbi, member of Ennahda's political bureau, Tunis, 20 April 2016.

³³ K. Kausch, *Europe's Engagement with Moderate Islamists*, Fride, 2009, p. 5.

The 'outside-in perspective' is mostly in line with the findings of the analysis above: two out of three key domestic actors consider the EU's democracy promotion during the pre-transition phase as negligible.

Regime collapse phase

This section analyses the regime collapse phase, taking into account the relevance of the EU's declaratory policy and the extent of its implementation, as well as the stakeholders' perception of the EU's support.

EU declaratory policy during the regime collapse phase

The frequency of the statements released by the EU during the short regime collapse phase is medium, and so is the assertiveness of the language used. In the early days of the Jasmine Revolution, the EU expressed its concerns in a diplomatic manner, but the assertiveness of its statements increased sharply after the dictator had left the country. However, the sources rank high in the EU institutional hierarchy.

A first reaction came in the form of a joint statement issued by High Representative (HR) Ashton and European Commissioner Füle on 10 January 2011. They "deplore[d] the violence and the death of civilians".³⁴ However, the statement refers to Ben Ali's government as a partner of the EU: "we hope that our Tunisian partner will meet the ambitions and expectations placed in our relationship".³⁵ On 14 January 2011, a new, brief joint statement was issued by HR Ashton and Commissioner Füle. A few hours after the dictator fled the country, the EU expressed its "support and recognition to the Tunisian people and their democratic aspirations".³⁶

This is all the EU has (officially) stated in the timeframe of the regime collapse phase as such (10/12/2010 - 14/01/2011). For the sake of a more comprehensive analysis of the EU's short-term response, the initiatives launched within the following month shall be taken into account as well. A third, stronger joint statement was issued by HR Ashton and Commissioner Füle on 17 January 2011: "The message from the Tunisian people is loud

³⁴ C. Ashton & S. Füle, "Statement by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton and European Commissioner for Enlargement Štefan Füle on the situation in Tunisia", Brussels, 10 January 2011.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ C. Ashton & S. Füle, "Joint statement by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton and Commissioner Štefan Füle on the events on Tunisia", Brussels, 14 January 2011.

and clear: Tunisia has reached a point of no-return. The EU will stand side by side with Tunisians as they pursue their peaceful and democratic aspirations".³⁷

The Council of the European Union issued its conclusions on Tunisia on 31 January 2011: "The European Union is [...] ready to mobilise every instrument at its disposal to help ease the passage of political, economic and social reform in Tunisia, to strengthen its democratic institutions and to give greater support to civil society in the country."³⁸ The conclusions also envisaged "a freezing of assets owned or controlled by persons deemed to be responsible for the misappropriation of state funds in Tunisia",³⁹ implemented through Regulation 101/2011.⁴⁰

Overall, the level of relevance of the EU declaratory policy during the regime collapse phase is medium. The relevance of the EU's reaction was undermined by its untimeliness: before the dictator's ousting, the EU referred to the authoritarian ruler as its partner, only to drastically change its position four days later. As long as the outcome of the uprising was uncertain, the EU did not take a clear stance in support of one or another party. Only after the dictator had fled the country, did the EU state its support for the democratic aspirations of Tunisian people.⁴¹

Implementation during the regime collapse phase

The nominal amount of resources provided by the EU during the regime collapse phase is small. On 12 February 2011, Lady Ashton visited Tunis and announced an increase in financial assistance to Tunisia. € 17 million were immediately made available as a short-term measure.⁴² The share of funds allocated to civil society empowerment is small as well: the resources mobilised were meant to provide short-term liquidity to the provisional

³⁷ C. Ashton & S. Füle, "Joint statement by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton and Commissioner Štefan Füle on the situation in Tunisia", Brussels, 17 January 2011.

³⁸ Council of the European Union, "Council conclusions on Tunisia", 3065th Foreign Affairs Council meeting, Brussels, 31 January 2011, p. 1.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁴⁰ Council of the European Union, "Council regulation No 101/2011 of 4 February 2011 concerning restrictive measures directed against certain persons, entities and bodies in view of the situation in Tunisia", *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 31/1, Brussels, 4 February 2011, p. 2.

⁴¹ C. Ashton & S. Füle, "Joint statement by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton and Commissioner Štefan Füle on the events on Tunisia", Brussels, 14 January 2011.

⁴² C. Ashton, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the European Commission, "Remarks by HR/VP Catherine Ashton after her meeting with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Tunisia, Mr. Ahmed Ouneies", Brussels, 2 February 2011.

government rather than support Tunisia's NGOs.⁴³ Consequently, no civil society empowerment programme was implemented during this phase.

Table 4: Effectiveness of the EU democracy promotion during the regime collapse phase

DECLARATORY POLICY				IMPLEMENTATION				OVERALL DEGREE of EFFECTIVENESS
Frequency of statements	Level of the source	Assertiveness of language	LEVEL of RELEVANCE	Nominal amount of resources	% of overall support	Number of programmes funded	EXTENT of IMPLEMENTATION	
MEDIUM	HIGH	MEDIUM	MEDIUM	SMALL	SMALL	SMALL	SMALL	LOW

Source: author's compilation

To conclude, the degree of the EU democracy promotion effectiveness during the regime collapse phase is low: the medium relevance of the EU's declarations in support of Tunisia's transition was undermined by the small extent of their implementation. Why did the EU not provide any substantial and swift response to the demands of Tunisia's people? First, the cumbersome Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) decision-making procedure made the process inherently slow. Second, the EU opted for a cautious 'wait-and-see' approach, as openly supporting the uprising would have irreparably deteriorated its relations with Ben Ali, an outcome to be avoided should the regime have survived the turmoil. Third, and most importantly, actively contributing to a revolutionary process does not correspond to the practices nor to the values of the EU.

In the next paragraph, I will compare these findings to the perception of the key internal actors.

Stakeholders' perception of the EU's support during the regime collapse phase

The actors who played a major role in the regime collapse phase were the social cluster defined as *mohamishun* and the UGTT. The *Union des Diplomés Chomeurs* (UDC), an NGO based in Sidi Bouzid, represents a part of the 'disenfranchised' social cluster.⁴⁴ The organisation, founded in 2004, played a role in mobilising Sidi Bouzid's population and was instrumental in spreading the turmoil to the rest of the region.⁴⁵ Khraifi recognises the

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Interview with Sherif Khraifi, founding member of *Union des Diplomés Chomeurs*, Tunis, 19 April 2016.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

importance of the EU's political support provided after the regime collapse, but he affirms that Ben Ali's regime was overthrown thanks to the efforts of a "dynamic and strong civil society rather than [thanks to] foreign support".⁴⁶

Deputy Secretary General Cheffi identified the UGTT as the main actor in the clash with the regime, as it provided organisational resources and a political dimension to the uprising. Once again, the vibrant Tunisian civil society claims the revolution as its own success, achieved without any substantial external support (or interference, as Cheffi defined it).⁴⁷

The perception of the domestic actors who played a major role during the regime collapse phase is in line with the outcome of the previous analysis: the EU is perceived as a marginal actor during the Jasmine Revolution.

The following section will shed light on the EU contribution to the third phase in Tunisia's democratic transition: the establishment phase.

Establishment phase

This section analyses the relevance of the EU's declaratory policy, the extent of its implementation and the perception of the key internal actors with regard to the role played by the EU in the crucial years between the fall of Ben Ali's regime in 2011 and the adoption of the new democratic constitution in early 2014.

EU declaratory policy during the establishment phase

During the establishment phase, the frequency of the official dedicated documents is high: the EU institutions issued 38 official documents regarding Tunisia in this three-years period (around 13 documents per year on average – more than one per month), and mentioned the country in 337 official documents.⁴⁸ The level of the sources is high as well, as a vast majority of these documents was issued by HR Ashton, Commissioner Füle and Kristalina Georgieva, Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Interview with Samir Cheffi, Deputy Secretary General of UGTT, Tunis, 19 April 2016.

⁴⁸ European Commission, *Press Releases Database*, *op.cit.*

Crisis Response. The assertiveness of the language used is high: the word 'democracy' and its derivatives were repeated 66 times in the 38 statements about Tunisia.⁴⁹

Moreover, the EU stated its declaratory policy in two key strategic documents. First, on 8 March 2011, the HR presented the Commission's 'Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean'. Democratic transformation and institution-building were identified as the first priority. In this framework, the EU introduced the 'more for more' approach: "an incentive-based approach based on differentiation: those that go further and faster with reforms will be able to count on greater support from the EU".⁵⁰ The second strategic document was published on 25 May 2011 and consists of a review of the ENP, significantly called 'A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood'. The new ENP strategy was based "on [...] a shared commitment to the universal values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law",⁵¹ and its first aim was to "provide greater support to partners engaged in building deep democracy".⁵²

Overall, the EU reaffirmed its commitment to democratic values as the backbone of its relations with Tunisia: during the establishment phase, the relevance of the EU's declaratory democracy promotion policy is high.

Implementation during the establishment phase

The establishment phase covers a three-year period from early 2011 to early 2014. The EU institutions mobilised a large nominal amount of resources in this period: the overall extent of the EU's financial support to Tunisia was € 160 million in 2011, € 160 million in 2012 and € 135 million in 2013. The EU made available € 475 million during the establishment phase.⁵³

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ European Commission and High Representative, "A partnership for democracy and shared prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean", COM(2011) 200, Brussels, 8 March 2011, p. 5.

⁵¹ European Commission and High Representative "A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood: A Review of European Neighbourhood Policy", COM(2011) 303, Brussels, 25 May 2011, p. 2.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ European Commission and High Representative, "Joint staff working document: Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in Tunisia Progress in 2011 and recommendations for action", SWD(2012) 123, Brussels, 15 May 2012, p. 2; European Commission and High Representative, "Joint staff working document: Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in Tunisia Progress in 2012 and recommendations for action", SWD(2013) 83, Brussels, 20 March 2013, p. 3; European Commission and High Representative, "Joint staff working document: Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in Tunisia Progress in 2013 and recommendations for action", SWD(2014) 97, Brussels, 27 March 2014, p. 2.

A relevant share of this support was provided in the framework of the Support to Partnership, Reform and Inclusive Growth (SPRING) programme, a financial programme set up on 27 September 2011 to respond to the events of the Arab Spring and funded through the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI). The sector-specific financial support for civil society empowerment amounted to € 7.956.500, accounting for a medium share of the overall financial support (1,7%).⁵⁴ A large number (17) of civil society empowerment projects were funded by the EU and implemented by its partners during the establishment phase (see Annex I).⁵⁵

The highly relevant democracy promotion declaratory objectives were implemented to a large extent. In budgetary terms, the extent of the EU's commitment increased sharply in the establishment phase. Moreover, an intense political dialogue was conducted and a number of high-level meetings took place.⁵⁶ The Association Council was re-launched and the opening of negotiations for a Privileged Partnership was announced in February 2012.

Table 5: Effectiveness of the EU democracy promotion during the establishment phase

DECLARATORY POLICY				IMPLEMENTATION				OVERALL DEGREE of EFFECTIVENESS
Frequency of statements	Level of the source	Assertiveness of language	LEVEL of RELEVANCE	Nominal amount of resources	% of overall support	Number of programmes funded	EXTENT of IMPLEMENTATION	
HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	LARGE	MEDIUM	LARGE	LARGE	HIGH

Source: author's compilation

In conclusion, the degree of the EU's effectiveness in promoting democracy in Tunisia during the establishment phase is high. The highly relevant declaratory objectives were implemented to a large extent. In line with the 'more-for-more' approach, Tunisia was rewarded for its achievements.

Is the perception of the key internal actors in line with these findings?

⁵⁴ EU Delegation in Tunisia, *Cooperation Report EU-Tunisia 2012*, Tunis, 23 March 2013, pp. 173-206; EU Delegation in Tunisia, *Cooperation Report EU-Tunisia 2013*, Tunis, 2014, pp. 55-73.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

Stakeholders' perception of the EU's support during the establishment phase

The actors who played a major role in the establishment phase are UGTT and LTDH for their contribution to the National Dialogue process, alongside the main political parties (Ennahda, Nidaa Tounes and *Front Populaire*).

The representatives of the two main civil society organisations have contrasting perceptions of the role played by the EU. The UGTT has a rather critical view of the EU's contribution to Tunisia's democratisation during the establishment phase: "we received a number of statements of political support, but these declarations did not correspond to the concrete needs of Tunisian people".⁵⁷ The UGTT refused foreign financial assistance, and it never received any kind of support from the EU. However, the Union "would be ready to consider a cooperation in terms of training and know-how, according to the needs and principles of the UGTT".⁵⁸ When asked about the support provided by the EU to the rest of Tunisian civil society, Cheffi defined it as a "positive but partial and limited contribution".⁵⁹ There were two main limits to the EU's support: first, the funds were made available through a complex and rigid application procedure, which required know-how and the fulfilment of a number of bureaucratic requirements. Most of the local organisations did not satisfy these requirements. According to Cheffi, the EU should have emphasised its capacity-building efforts. Second, the follow up on the implementation was reportedly rather poor. A number of NGOs were created with the only purpose of acceding to EU funding, and some projects were never implemented.⁶⁰

The LTDH was the main partner of the EU in Tunisian civil society in the establishment phase. It received funding for its domestic electoral observation activity in October 2011 (€ 300.000) and for the reorganisation of its structure from 2011 to 2013 (€ 300.000).⁶¹ Moktar Trifi, President of LTDH at the time, has a positive perception of the support offered by the EU: "the EU gave a quite substantial contribution. The support of the European Commission to the civil society and the democratic transition was extremely important".⁶²

⁵⁷ Interview with Samir Cheffi, *op.cit.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Interview with Samir Cheffi, *op.cit.*

⁶¹ EU Delegation in Tunisia, Cooperation Report EU-Tunisia 2013, *op. cit.*

⁶² Interview with Moktar Trifi, *op. cit.*

Nonetheless, Trifi also pointed at the complex access procedures as the main limit to the EU's support.

Among the main political forces, opinions are also quite contrasting. Gharbi, member of Ennahda's political bureau, argued that the EU did not develop any strategic approach to Tunisia: "Tunisia was treated as a *laissé-pour-compte* by the European Union".⁶³ According to Ennahda's representative, the promises made during Deauville's G8 summit were an illusion and the lack of structural support contributed to the worsening of the political, social and economic situation throughout the establishment phase. The financial support from the EU came mainly in the form of market-price loans, argues Gharbi: "Ennahda is tired of knocking on Europe's door".⁶⁴

By contrast, Sabrine Goubantini (Nidaa Tounes) said: "the EU and other foreign actors supported the democratisation process. If I had to assess the relevance of the EU's contribution from 1 to 10, I would say 6".⁶⁵ The party received substantial support from the EU: Goubantini took part in several EU-funded training programmes herself.⁶⁶ She pointed at the lack of follow up as the main limit to the EU's support.⁶⁷

Djilani Hammami (*Front Populaire*) recognised the role played by EU in the aftermath of Belaid's and Brahmi's death: "the EU made a relevant effort through its diplomatic representatives and through its influence on a number of civil society organisations to keep the political situation under control. In fact, the National Dialogue was warmly welcomed by the EU".⁶⁸ According to Hammami, the EU positively contributed to the civil society's empowerment during the establishment phase.⁶⁹

The 'outside-in perspective' corroborates to a large extent the findings of the analysis carried out in the previous paragraphs. The majority of the key actors (LTDH, Nidaa Tounes, *Front Populaire*) confirmed that the EU positively contributed to the

⁶³ Interview with Mohamed Nejib Gharbi, *op. cit.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Interview with Sabrine Goubantini, independent MP, former member of Nidaa Tounes, Tunis, 20 April 2016.

⁶⁶ Interview with Sabrine Goubantini, *op. cit.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Interview with Djilani Hammami, Deputy Secretary General of Tunisian Workers Party, Tunis, 19 April 2016.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

establishment of a democratic framework between 2011 and 2014. However, representatives of UGTT and Ennahda disagreed.

In the following section, I will apply the same research methodology to the fourth, and last, phase of Tunisia's democratic transition: the ongoing consolidation phase.

Consolidation phase

This section analyses the EU democracy promotion policy in the last phase of Tunisia's democratic transition: the consolidation phase. First, I will assess the relevance of the EU's declaratory policy, then I will proceed at assessing its implementation. Third, I will present the domestic actors' perception.

EU declaratory policy during the consolidation phase

During the consolidation phase, the frequency of the dedicated official documents is high: the EU institutions issued 35 official documents regarding Tunisia in this three-years period (about 12 documents per year on average – one per month), and mentioned the country in 188 documents.⁷⁰ A vast majority of the statements were issued at the highest level in the EU institutional hierarchy, including HR Mogherini, the president of the European Council Donald Tusk and the European Investment Bank. The language used is highly assertive, although economic and political stability also attract an increasing share of the EU's attention: in the 35 statements the word 'democracy' and its derivatives are repeated 71 times (more than twice per document on average), but the word 'economy' and its derivatives appear a staggering 137 times (almost 4 times per document on average), while the words 'terrorism' and 'security' are mentioned 48 and 45 times respectively.⁷¹

Three major strategic documents define the EU's guidelines in its current relations with Tunisia: first, the 'Privileged Partnership Action Plan 2013-2017', which defines

⁷⁰ European Commission, *Press Releases Database*, *op.cit.*; Council of the European Union, *Press Releases and Statements*, 22 January 2015.

⁷¹ European Commission, *Press Releases Database*, *op.cit.*

democracy and the rule of law as the EU's first priority.⁷² Second, the 'Single Support Framework 2014-2016', according to which 15% of the resources allocated should be employed to 'strengthen fundamental elements of democracy'.⁷³ Third, the ENP review 'Stronger Partnerships for a Stronger Neighbourhood', published on 18 November 2015. This new, more pragmatic approach strongly emphasises stabilisation, differentiation and national ownership, reconfirming democracy promotion as one of the overarching goals of the ENP: "the EU is committed to promoting good governance, democracy, rule of law and human rights".⁷⁴

In spite of the increasing concern regarding Tunisia's economy and security, democracy promotion occupies a central role in the EU's declaratory policy. The EU has set highly relevant democracy promotion declaratory objectives in the consolidation phase, reaffirming its commitment to Tunisia's democratic transition.

Implementation during the consolidation phase

The consolidation phase recently entered in its fourth year, and the EU mobilised a large amount of resources to support Tunisia in the last three years. In 2014, the EU allocated € 169 million in support to Tunisia.⁷⁵ In 2015, the overall support amounted to € 186.8 million,⁷⁶ and in 2016 to € 213.5 million.⁷⁷ In this three-years period the EU made available almost € 570 million, gradually increasing its annual support. The SPRING programme came to an end in 2013, and was replaced by the Umbrella programme, which accounts for a large share of the funds made available by the EU in this period (€ 50 million out of € 169 million in 2014; € 71 million out of € 186.8 million in 2015 and € 80 million out of € 213.5 million in

⁷² European Commission and High Representative, "Joint Proposal for a Council decision on the Union position within the Association Council set up by the Euro-Mediterranean Agreement establishing an association between the European Communities and their Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of Tunisia, of the other part, with regard to the adoption of a recommendation on the implementation of the EU-Tunisia Action Plan implementing the privileged partnership (2013-2017)", JOIN(2014) 36, Brussels, 29 November 2014, pp. 9-10.

⁷³ European External Action Service and European Commission's Directorate-General for Development and Cooperation, "Single support framework EU-Tunisia 2014-2016", Brussels, pp. 5-9.

⁷⁴ European Commission and High Representative, "Stronger Partnerships for a Stronger Neighbourhood: A Review of European Neighbourhood Policy", SWD(2015) 500, Brussels, 11 November 2015, p. 5.

⁷⁵ European Commission, "Tunisia", EU Neighbourhood Policy, 1 February 2016.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ European Commission, *Press Releases Database*, *op.cit.*

2016).⁷⁸ The sector-specific financial support to civil society empowerment was equal to € 10.748.500, equal to almost 2% of the overall financial support (medium).⁷⁹ A large number of projects (18) were funded and implemented thanks to these resources (see Annex II).

In 2014-2016, the EU democracy promotion policy was implemented to a large extent. An intense political dialogue took place as well, including President Essebsi's visit to Brussels in July 2015. Most importantly, in October 2015, the negotiations for a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) were launched in Tunis. The negotiation process is currently ongoing and according to the free trade-oriented development approach of the EU, the reciprocal although asymmetrical market opening should provide a substantial incentive to Tunisia's economic growth. Additionally, a Mobility Partnership agreement was concluded in March 2014.

Table 6: Effectiveness of the EU democracy promotion during the consolidation phase

DECLARATORY POLICY				IMPLEMENTATION				OVERALL DEGREE of EFFECTIVENESS
Frequency of statements	Level of the source	Assertiveness of language	LEVEL of RELEVANCE	Nominal amount of resources	% of overall support	Number of programmes funded	EXTENT of IMPLEMENTATION	
HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	LARGE	MEDIUM	LARGE	LARGE	HIGH

Source: author's compilation

Overall, the effectiveness of the EU democracy promotion policy during the consolidation phase is high. The EU implemented to a large extent the highly relevant declaratory objectives. The increase in the financial support matches the criteria of the 'more-for-more' approach. Specifically, the progressive increase of additional funds made available through the SPRING programme in 2012-2013 and through the Umbrella programme in 2014-2016 confirms that Tunisia is a 'good student'.

⁷⁸ European Commission, "Tunisia", EU Neighbourhood Policy, 1 February 2016; European Commission, *Press Releases Database*, , *op.cit.*; European Commission, *Décision d'exécution de la Commission du 25.11.2016 relative au programme d'action annuel 2016 partie en faveur de la Tunisie à financer sur le budget général de l'Union*, COM(2016) 7803 final, Brussels, 25 November 2016, p. 2.

⁷⁹ EU Delegation in Tunisia, *Cooperation Report EU-Tunisia 2014*, Tunis, 2015, pp. 76-98; EU Delegation in Tunisia, *Cooperation Report EU-Tunisia 2015*, Tunis, 2016, pp. 113-118.

In the next paragraph I will compare these findings to the perception of the domestic actors.

Stakeholders' perception of the EU's support during the consolidation phase

Most of the stakeholders recognise that the EU made a relevant effort in promoting democracy in Tunisia during the consolidation phase, allocating a relevant amount of resources to key sectors such as civil society support and electoral observation. With the exception of Ennahda's representative, all the interviewees agreed that the EU put enough money on the table. According to the representatives of UGTT, LTDH and UDC, access to funds and the lack of follow up were the main limitations to the EU support in this phase as well.⁸⁰ Moreover, the representatives of UGTT and UDC argued that the funds were selectively allocated to some specific segments of Tunisian civil society – “linked to the parties in power”, added Cheffi (UGTT).⁸¹ According to Khraifi (UDC), “the EU marginalised the true actors who made the revolution possible”.⁸² Trifi (LTDH), referring to a recent visit to Sidi Bouzid, said: “the people who made the revolution didn't get anything”.⁸³

A further critical aspect relates to the current economic situation in Tunisia: the economic instability is perceived by most of the stakeholders as the main threat to the consolidation process, as people's dissatisfaction undermines the legitimacy of the new institutional framework. The structural support provided by the EU is perceived as less than substantial. Cheffi (UGTT) stated: “what is needed is structural support to Tunisia's economy. [...] The economic difficulties have not been tackled”.⁸⁴ Trifi (LTDH) argued that “Tunisia did not receive any substantial economic support to overcome the crisis”.⁸⁵

The DCFTA is the EU's main initiative to stimulate Tunisia's economic growth. However, the stakeholder's perception regarding the ongoing negotiation process is very negative. UGTT perceives the Agreement as an interest-oriented manoeuvre: “the greatest economic power in the world negotiates with a vulnerable and fragile country.

⁸⁰ Interviews with Samir Cheffi, Moktar Trifi, and Sherif Khraifi, *op. cit.*.

⁸¹ Interview with Samir Cheffi, *op. cit.*.

⁸² Interview with Sherif Khraifi, *op. cit.*

⁸³ Interview with Moktar Trifi, *op. cit.*

⁸⁴ Interview with Samir Cheffi, *op. cit.*

⁸⁵ Interview with Moktar Trifi, *op. cit.*

It's an unbalanced negotiation that might have very dangerous side effects".⁸⁶ Trifi (LTDH) lamented the limited involvement of the civil society in the negotiation process.⁸⁷ Moreover, he argued that the Association Agreement is not yet fully implemented and the new bilateral Agreement "is going to have a negative impact on several sectors of Tunisian economy. Tunisia is not ready".⁸⁸ Goubantini (Nidaa Tounes) underlined the lack of transparency in the negotiation as well: "as a parliamentarian I only receive scraps of information from other actors. There is no transparency, not even in the parliament".⁸⁹

The 'outside-in perspective' confirms to a large extent the previous findings. All the civil society representatives (except for Ennahda) agreed on the relevant role played by the EU in supporting Tunisia's democracy in the most recent three years. This concludes the analysis of the four phases of Tunisia's democratic transition. In the next section I will wrap up the result of the analysis conducted so far, providing an answer to the research questions.

Conclusions: the EU as a latecomer to democracy promotion

This paper examined how the EU approach to democracy promotion in Tunisia evolved overtime and to what extent it was effective in promoting the country's democratic transition. I argued that the commitment of the EU increased over time, adapting to new circumstances: the EU's declaratory policy identified democracy promotion as a priority in all the phases of Tunisia's (pre-)transition, but the extent of the EU's implementation efforts greatly increased over the last twenty years.

In the pre-transition phase, the EU did not apply any substantial pressure on the regime in order to trigger top-down democratic reforms, nor did it engage with Tunisian civil society in order to stimulate bottom-up political change.

In the regime collapse phase, the EU maintained a cautious stance, waiting for the ousting of Ben Ali. The short-term response of the EU was untimely: the first statement was issued four days before the regime collapsed and support for 'the democratic aspirations of Tunisian people' was expressed only once the dictator had left the country.

⁸⁶ Interview with Samir Cheffi, *op. cit.*

⁸⁷ Interview with Moktar Trifi, *op. cit.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Interview with Sabrine Goubantini, *op. cit.*

Increasingly stronger statements of political support were issued in the following weeks, but the first substantial measures were undertaken only a month after the end of the regime collapse phase.

Once the regime had fallen, the EU rediscovered its commitment to democracy promotion. Specific funding schemes were developed and the amount of resources allocated to civil society on a yearly basis between 2011 and 2013 was 25 times higher than the amount of resources allocated to the same sector during the pre-transition phase. The 'more-for-more' declaratory policy was implemented, contributing to the establishment of a democratic regime in Tunisia.

In the consolidation phase, which is still ongoing, the EU is making a genuine effort to ensure the success of this young democracy. The EU rewarded 'the good student' for successfully establishing a democratic framework and is currently engaged in supporting its consolidation. In 2014-2016 the amount of resources allocated to democracy promotion was higher than ever before and the support to civil society almost doubled compared to the establishment phase.

In a nutshell, in Tunisia the EU did not apply a 'democracy promotion' policy, as this concept envisages the idea of preparing the ground for political change, actively promoting democratic values. In Tunisia, the EU applied a 'democracy support' policy: once the regime collapsed, the EU made a genuine effort to support the efforts of this embryonic democracy through the establishment and consolidation process, exploiting a 'window of opportunity'.

My second argument, as presented in Table 7, is that the EU's democracy support policy was only partially effective: first, an effective policy sets relevant declaratory objectives. Second, it achieves these objectives, providing sufficient financial resources and implementing a sufficient number of programmes and initiatives on the ground.

Table 7: Overall evolution of the EU democracy promotion effectiveness

PHASE	RELEVANCE of DECLARATORY POLICY	EXTENT of IMPLEMENTATION	OVERALL DEGREE of EFFECTIVENESS
Pre-transition phase	MEDIUM	SMALL	LOW
Regime collapse phase	MEDIUM	SMALL	LOW
Establishment phase	HIGH	LARGE	HIGH
Consolidation phase	HIGH	LARGE	HIGH

Source: author's compilation

In this perspective, the EU's 'democracy promotion' policy was ineffective during the pre-transition and regime collapse phases: although the declaratory objectives were relevant, the declaratory policy was implemented to a very limited extent. On the contrary, the 'democracy support' effort of the EU during the establishment and consolidation phases met the aforementioned criteria: relevant declaratory objectives were set and consequently pursued, allocating adequate resources and implementing a significant number of initiatives. The result of the 'outside-in perspective' analysis carried out above supports this argument: representatives of the main civil society organisations unanimously agreed that the EU made a positive but limited contribution to the success of the democratic transition. It is not thanks to the EU if a beacon of hope for democracy in the Arab world shines in North Africa.

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Annexes

Annex I: Democratic transition and civil society programmes implemented during the establishment phase (2011-2013)

Initiative	Period of implementation	EU financial contribution
Reinforcing the role of civil society in the promotion of human rights and democratic reforms: domestic electoral observation	2011-2013	300.000 €
Follow up and support to Tunisia's democratic transition	2012-2013	260.000 €
Reinforcing the grassroots elements of democracy: support to political parties	2011-2013	300.000 €
« Tous les tunisiens aux urnes »	2011-2013	50.000 €
Support to the Tunisia's democratisation and to civil society organisations in preparation for the domestic electoral observation	2011-2012	200.000 €
Towards a transparent electoral bilateral process (TRANSPROCESS)	2011-2013	265.000 €
Electoral assistance to Tunisia	2011-2013	1.605.000 €
Support to the reconstruction of Tunisia's League for Human Right (LTDH)	2011-2013	300.000 €
Reinforcement of human rights activists and civil society emerging actors in the context of the democratic transition	2011-2012	100.000 €
Capacity building for civil society organisations willing to apply to funding in the framework of the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR)	2012	50.000 €
Civil Society Support Programme (PASC Tunisia)	2012-2013	2.800.000 €
Reinforcement of associational capabilities (ARCA)	2011-2013	100.000 €
EU support to Tunisia's constitutional process	2012-2013	910.000 €
Emergency support to build the civil society capacity to advocate for a gender-sensitive democratic transition in Tunisia	2011-2013	365.000 €
Support to the democratic transition in Tunisia through civil society organisations and political actors	2013	175.000 €
Dialogue on political pluralism in Tunisia	2013	108.500 €
Mobilising Tunisian civil society in the follow up of relations between Tunisia and the EU	2013	68.000 €
TOTAL: 17 initiatives		7.956.500 €

Sources: EU Delegation in Tunisia, *Cooperation Report EU-Tunisia 2012*, Tunis, 23 March 2013, pp. 173-206; EU Delegation in Tunisia, *Cooperation Report EU-Tunisia 2013*, Tunis, 2014, pp. 55-73.

Annex II: Democratic transition and civil society programmes implemented during the consolidation phase (2014-2016)

Initiative	Period of implementation	EU financial contribution
Electoral assistance to Tunisia	2014	1.000.000 €
Observation, follow up and evaluation of elections (OSEE)	2014-2016	395.000 €
Active citizenship, elections and democratic transition in Tunisia (Vox in Box)	2014 - 2016	394.000 €
Connecting the political agents: preparing inclusive reforms	2014-2015	211.000 €
Development of an associational platform (Jamaity.org)	2014-2016	218.000 €
Civil Society Support Programme (PASC Tunisie)	2014-2016	5.250.000 €
EU support to Tunisia's constitutional process	2014-2015	910.000 €
Support to the democratic transition in Tunisia through civil society organisations and political actors	2014	175.000 €
Dialogue on political pluralism in Tunisia	2014	108.500 €
Support to the local authorities for the implementation of municipal public policies	2015-2016	214.000
Acting together for a joint local development	2015-2016	266.500
Rural women in action	2015-2016	108.500 €
Supporting the civil society as an actor in the local governance of natural resources	2015-2016	256.500
KOLNA KESRA	2015-2016	232.500
Implementation of the local governance in Tunis	2015-2016	235.500
Reinforcement of the local third sector	2015-2016	240.500
Civil engagement and decentralization (MARSAD BALADIA)	2015-2016	300.000
Mobilising Tunisian civil society in the follow up of relations between Tunisia and the EU	2014-2016	233.000 €
TOTAL: 18 initiatives		10.748.500 €

Sources: EU Delegation in Tunisia, *Cooperation Report EU-Tunisia 2014*, Tunis, 2015, pp. 76-98; EU Delegation in Tunisia, *Cooperation Report EU-Tunisia 2015*, Tunis, 2016, pp. 112-122.

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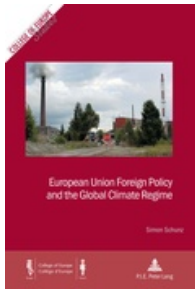
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