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Subject: Council conclusions on Tunisia
- Council conclusions (17 October 2016)

Delegations will find enclosed the conclusions on Tunisia adopted by the Council at its 3492nd session, held on 17 October 2016.

COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS ON TUNISIA

Foreign Affairs Council, 17 October 2016

1. The Council renews its firm commitment to the Tunisian people to support the transition towards liberty, democracy, dignity and social justice, which they embarked upon in 2011. Considerable progress has been made during the transition, and this is a source of hope for the region and the rest of the world. At the same time, Tunisia is facing significant challenges: a difficult socio-economic situation, serious security threats, and the need to put the advances enshrined in the new Constitution into practice. These major challenges put the country in an exceptional situation, to which the European Union intends to provide an appropriate response. In line with its Global Strategy, it is in the EU's strategic interest to contribute towards building the resilience of Tunisian society and support the emergence of a democratic, strong and stable Tunisia in its neighbourhood.
2. The Council welcomes the Joint Communication 'Strengthening EU support for Tunisia' from the High Representative and the European Commission, and reaffirms its commitment to fully supporting the consolidation of democracy in Tunisia, based on the principles of the rule of law, respect for human rights, good governance, and inclusive and sustainable socio-economic development. The EU's support for the reforms agreed upon by the Tunisian government and its people remains constant and resolute. This support must also be reflected in a high-level political dialogue between Tunisia and the EU on all issues of mutual interest, which must be wider-ranging and more ambitious than ever before. The Tunisian President's forthcoming visit to the European Institutions is a sign of a shared desire to engage in such a dialogue.

3. Tunisia's political progress can only be sustained if it is accompanied by economic progress on a similar scale. Tunisia's five-year development plan, which should be adopted and implemented as a matter of priority, is essential to the reform process. This plan will also act as a pillar to enable Tunisia's partners to target their support and financial assistance. The international conference on promoting investment in Tunisia, to be held on 29 and 30 November 2016 in Tunis, will be an opportunity for the EU to reiterate its support at the highest level. The Council is in favour of conducting high-level European missions with the aim of strengthening economic ties with Tunisia.

4. The Council welcomes the approach recommended by the High Representative and the Commission for responding to the exceptional nature of the situation in Tunisia, which aims to mobilise all the instruments available to the EU, including a balanced combination of financial and non-financial measures commensurate with the scale of the issues at stake. The Council particularly supports increasing the EU's financial aid up to EUR 300 million in 2017 and maintaining a high level of funding until 2020, on the basis of the progress made in the reforms announced in the government's strategic development plan, while addressing the country's most urgent needs. The Council also supports the continuation of EU macro-financial assistance and welcomes the recent adoption of a second programme for an amount of EUR 500 million. For their part, the Member States undertake to examine the possibility of providing additional financial and non-financial assistance. The Council welcomes the adoption, by the Assembly of the Representatives of the People, of the new law on investment and calls on the government to implement it quickly in order to improve the business environment and pave the way for a decisive relaunch of investment in Tunisia.

5. The Council believes that the Joint Communication from the High Representative and the Commission should act as a catalyst for the EU and the Member States to strengthen their commitment to supporting the transition in Tunisia and working in close collaboration with the Tunisian authorities. It is crucial that the Tunisian authorities play an active role in this process to ensure that the financial support from the EU and other international partners is put to better and more effective use.

6. The EU calls on Tunisia to continue to the full and effective implementation of the Constitution, the strengthening of democratic institutions and the promotion of human rights, and remains fully committed to supporting this historic process. The EU encourages the holding of transparent and inclusive local elections, and is willing to assist in organising and observing them.

The EU also calls on Tunisia to continue its efforts to strengthen good governance, public administration and justice sector reform, and the fight against corruption, which are essential for Tunisia's successful political and economic recovery. The EU and its Member States are ready to support reforms in these areas, including by sharing lessons learned from transitions that have taken place in Europe.

7. The EU welcomes the fact that the new Tunisian government has announced structural reforms and encourages it to implement them. The EU stands ready to support these reforms in line with the decentralised approach, the goal of social and territorial cohesion and the principle of sustainable and fair development laid down in the Constitution. Reducing social and regional disparities, particularly in the southern and central regions, moving towards greater equality of opportunity for all and strengthening the role of women are key to building Tunisia's socio-economic resilience. Reforms in Tunisia to address the social and economic challenges faced by young people, particularly by improving their education and employment opportunities, are also fundamental and the EU will support them too.

8. The EU welcomes the progress made in the negotiations on the conclusion of a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA). The EU confirms its commitment to working with Tunisia towards the rapid conclusion of an ambitious agreement based on an asymmetric approach in favour of Tunisia, with the aim of making this a significant component of support for the country's economic diversification and its socio-economic development. To this end, the EU reiterates its commitment to supporting the negotiations and the implementation of the future agreement through a set of accompanying measures. In this regard, the Council calls on the EU to explore all avenues for the implementation of the initiatives envisaged in the joint communication on supporting growth in Tunisia and the business environment.
9. Supporting and strengthening civil society in the process of democratic transition in Tunisia remains one of the EU's main priorities. It will continue to encourage civil society to take part in the dialogue with the authorities in all policy areas and, in particular, through the tripartite dialogue between the EU, the Tunisian government and civil society. Civil society must also assume responsibility for driving forward the reform process that is needed.
10. The EU again stresses the great importance of enhanced dialogue and cooperation in the Euro-Mediterranean region and its sub-regions, both on peace and security and on economic integration, including in the energy sector. It fully supports the structural projects carried out in the framework of the Union for the Mediterranean and welcomes Tunisia's involvement and the first projects launched, particularly in Bizerte.

11. The EU and Tunisia face common security challenges that require both parties to take coordinated action, in line with the shared values of democracy and human rights. Following the EU-Tunisia enhanced high-level political dialogue on security and counter-terrorism held in 2015, the EU has stepped up its cooperation with Tunisia in these areas. The EU shares the concerns of the Tunisian government about the impact of the Libyan crisis on Tunisia. The EU intends to strengthen the implementation of its extensive cooperation with Tunisia in the security sector, in the fight against terrorism and in preventing violent radicalisation and extremism, on the basis of the proposals made in the joint Communication and the enhanced dialogue.
12. The EU wishes to strengthen its cooperation with Tunisia on migration and mobility, which are a shared priority. The EU will target its support through the promotion of socio-economic development in order to address irregular migration and tackle its root causes. The EU encourages Tunisia to participate actively in the mobility partnership, the Valetta action plan and the Rabat and Khartoum processes, and to make full use of the opportunities afforded by cooperation with the EU, including the Emergency Trust Fund for stability and addressing root causes of irregular migration and displaced persons in Africa. The EU welcomes the launch on 12 October 2016 of the negotiations on visa facilitation and readmission agreements and encourages Tunisia to be the first country in the Southern Neighbourhood to conclude such ambitious and effective agreements.
13. The Council invites the High Representative and the Commission to monitor the implementation of the joint communication in support of Tunisia regularly, in close cooperation with Member States.
