



EUROPEAN  
COUNCIL  
ON FOREIGN  
RELATIONS  
ecfr.eu

POLICY  
MEMO

# TUNISIA'S ELECTIONS AND THE CONSOLIDATION OF DEMOCRACY

Anthony Dworkin

## SUMMARY

By holding parliamentary and presidential elections, Tunisia is taking a further step towards democracy. If the country's transition continues to move forward, it would be a powerful signal that democracy can take root in the Arab world. But Tunisia will face a series of challenges after the elections. Its politicians will need to form a government without falling back into polarisation and find effective solutions to pressing economic and security challenges so that Tunisia's people do not lose confidence in democracy. Beyond that, Tunisia will need to undertake fundamental reforms to public administration, security forces, and the judiciary, remaking its state in order to deliver on the aspirations of the revolution.

The EU has an enormous interest in the success of Tunisia's experiment. At a time of negative trends across the region, Europe should consider an overhaul of its Mediterranean policy to prioritise support for Tunisia. The EU should help to ensure that short-term economic measures do not hurt Tunisia's worst-off people and help Tunisia fight terrorism in a more accountable way. Europe should also redouble its efforts to promote educational and other exchanges with Tunisia's people, provide investment to create jobs and improve services, and offer itself as a partner in reform of the state.

Tunisia is about to hold its first regular parliamentary and presidential elections since a wave of popular protests nearly four years ago forced the departure of the country's long-time autocratic leader, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, and launched the Arab revolutions of 2011. Following the adoption of a new constitution at the beginning of this year, legislative elections will take place on 26 October, followed by a presidential election in two rounds in November and December. At a time when hopes of moving towards political reform and accountable governments elsewhere in the Arab world have been dashed, Tunisia is the only country where the aspirations of the Arab uprisings may yet be fulfilled in the near future.

Even if Tunisia's example does not inspire any immediate followers in the region, the consolidation of a successful democracy in the country would be a powerful signal that reform and political pluralism are not doomed to fail in the Arab world. It is therefore in the EU's interest to do everything it can to help ensure success in Tunisia. The country has already overcome a series of difficulties and crises, but in order to consolidate democracy it will need to take two further steps. In the short term, further instability and popular discontent must be avoided by creating a political balance after the elections that allows the government to tackle pressing economic and security problems. Beyond this, the larger challenge of systemic reform will ultimately determine whether Tunisians come to feel that democracy has delivered the opportunity, dignity, and social justice that the revolution demanded.

## The elections and beyond

Tunisia's first experience of directly elected government after the revolution was turbulent. Elections in late 2011 gave the Islamist Ennahda party the leading position in the country's constitutional assembly, and it formed a "troika" government in coalition with two smaller secular centre-left parties, Congress for the Republic (CPR) and Ettakatol. After the assassination of two leftist opposition politicians and a broader political crisis last year threatened a breakdown of Tunisia's transition, and with one eye on the fate of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Ennahda entered a national dialogue with opposition parties and agreed to hand over power to a neutral technocratic government in early 2014.

As Tunisia's elections approach, a pressing question is whether the country will be able to find a distribution of political authority after the vote that is more stable and effective than last time. Tunisia's new constitution establishes a hybrid system in which power is shared between the parliament and president.<sup>1</sup> The parliamentary election is more important for Tunisia's future direction, as the largest party in parliament is entitled to name the prime minister and try to form a government that can win majority support in the assembly. The president's powers are largely focused on national security and foreign affairs. Nevertheless, many Tunisian political parties have given more attention to manoeuvring for position in the presidential elections than to developing an effective nationwide parliamentary campaign.<sup>2</sup> In Tunisian public debate, the presidential elections have so far overshadowed the legislative ones.<sup>3</sup>

Despite Ennahda's loss of popularity during its period in government, many people expect the party to do well in the parliamentary elections. It may well emerge again as the largest group in parliament, even if it fails to match the 37 percent share of the vote it received in 2011. Politicians and analysts agree that Ennahda remains the most disciplined and best organised political party across the country. It has recruited a more broad-based group of candidates than in the previous election, including a number of influential members of Tunisia's business community. From its leader Rachid Ghannouchi down, Ennahda officials have consistently emphasised that if the party wins the most seats in the new parliament, it will seek to form a broad-based government that is supported by as much of the political spectrum as possible. "We need unity government to face all the challenges in our troubled region", Ghannouchi said in a recent interview.<sup>4</sup> After much internal discussion, Ennahda decided not to field a presidential candidate, announcing

instead that it would seek to throw its weight behind a consensus candidate, though no obvious contender for this role has emerged.

The other party that is expected to emerge as a significant force in the elections is Nidaa Tounes (Call for Tunisia), the secular-nationalist party founded in 2012 by former interim prime minister Beji Caid Essebsi to balance against Ennahda's dominance. Nidaa Tounes made a strong initial impact, and became the leading force in the "Union for Tunisia" opposition front. Since then, however, the party has been hit by a series of internal divisions. A persistent source of controversy is the influence of figures linked to Ben Ali's RCD party, including its former secretary-general, Mohamed Ghariani. Nidaa Tounes officials justify their links with old regime officials as a way of bringing in elites with political experience, and also allowing the party to profit from the former RCD electoral machine around the country (which might otherwise be taken over by Ennahda).<sup>5</sup> There has also been dissension over the party's allegedly undemocratic internal practices.<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, the Union for Tunisia front crumbled after Nidaa Tounes decided to present its own list of candidates, in a move that an official of a formerly allied party described as motivated by "egocentrism".<sup>7</sup>

Beyond these two dominant parties, other political groups are struggling to achieve any significant influence. The electoral law under which the parliamentary vote will be held does not set any national threshold for representation, which is seen as encouraging smaller parties to try their luck rather than banding together into a few larger groups. As in 2011, the electorate is divided into 33 large districts (27 in Tunisia, and six abroad) under a list-based system of proportional representation.<sup>8</sup> The election authority has registered over 1,300 different lists to compete in the elections.<sup>9</sup> According to some politicians, personal ambition among the aging generation of political leaders (who see a final chance to achieve political office in the new democracy) is overcoming more far-sighted vision.<sup>10</sup>

Against this background, there is significant public disenchantment with the political process and the current roster of political leaders. Opinion polls suggest a growing impatience with the quality of democracy and the results it has achieved so far for the population.<sup>11</sup> Among many analysts, including activists working to raise political awareness in the country, there is concern that turnout

5 Author interview with Mohsen Marzouk, 5 June 2014.

6 Asma Ghribi, "Unpleasantly Familiar Faces in Tunisia", *Foreign Policy*, 2 October 2014, available at [http://transitions.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2014/10/02/unpleasantly\\_familiar\\_faces\\_in\\_tunisia](http://transitions.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2014/10/02/unpleasantly_familiar_faces_in_tunisia).

7 Author interview with opposition politician, 5 June 2014.

8 Duncan Pickard, "Electoral Law Brings Tunisia One Step Closer to Completing Transition", *Atlantic Council*, 7 May 2014, available at <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/electoral-law-brings-tunisia-one-step-closer-to-completing-transition>.

9 Abdul Latif al-Hanachi, "Tunisia's First Legislative Elections Post-Revolution", *Al Jazeera Center for Studies*, 2 October 2014, available at <http://studies.aljazeera.net/en/reports/2014/10/20141027409786296.htm>.

10 Author interview with opposition politician, 5 June 2014.

11 "IRI Poll: Tunisia's Democratic Transition at a Crossroads", the International Republican Institute, 19 August 2014, available at <http://www.iri.org/news-events-press-center/news/iri-poll-tunisia%E2%80%99s-democratic-transition-crossroads>.

1 For a summary of the distribution of responsibilities in the constitution, see "Comparative analysis between the constitutional processes in Egypt and Tunisia – lessons learnt – overview of the constitutional situation in Libya", European Parliament, Directorate-General for External Policies, Policy Department, April 2014, pp. 9–11, available at [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/note/join/2014/433840/EXPO-AFET\\_NT\(2014\)433840\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/note/join/2014/433840/EXPO-AFET_NT(2014)433840_EN.pdf).

2 Author interviews with politicians and NGO members, June 2014.

3 Author interview with Amine Ghali, 7 October 2014.

4 Tarek Amara, "Tunisia's Islamists ready for a coalition with old regime officials", *Reuters*, 10 October 2014, available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/10/10/us-tunisia-election-idUSKCN0HZ0TT20141010>.

in the elections could be low.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, an extended registration period and public outreach campaigns conducted by NGOs succeeded in adding nearly one million extra voters to the total of those registered to vote in the last few months.

Since no political group is expected to gain a majority of seats in parliament, the post-electoral period is likely to see extended negotiations over the formation of a government. There has been much speculation about the possibility of some form of alliance between Ennahda and Nidaa Tounes. The former enmity between the parties has lessened, partly through their participation together in the national dialogue to resolve the political crisis of 2013, and partly because the adoption of a new constitution has defined the rules for political competition and reduced fears on both sides that the political process might be subverted. Any formal coalition between the two groups would still be highly controversial with segments of each party. Some influential figures within Nidaa Tounes argue that such a coalition would not be possible unless Ennahda renounces its ties to the Muslim Brotherhood and abandons its long-term project of social transformation, conditions which are clearly intended to be prohibitive. They also warn that financial assistance from the Gulf – which Nidaa Tounes believes is important for economic stability – will not be forthcoming if Ennahda is given a role in government.<sup>13</sup>

A formal coalition between Ennahda and Nidaa Tounes remains unlikely. It is more probable that members of the assembly will coalesce into different blocs, perhaps with one providing the government and others in opposition. If Ennahda is the largest party it may struggle to find coalition allies (the experience of governing as part of the “troika” led to mass defections within CPR and Ettakatol) and it is possible that it may install another technocrat government.<sup>14</sup> Particularly if Nidaa Tounes’s leader Beji Caid Essebsi wins the presidency, an informal understanding between these two political groups will nevertheless be essential for Tunisia’s stability. The country’s leadership after the elections will need to have broad-based support and legitimacy to tackle Tunisia’s economic and security needs. But in the longer term Tunisia also needs a government that is ambitious and flexible enough to take on the broader task of fundamentally reforming the state.

## Urgent priorities: the economy and security

There is wide agreement across the political spectrum about the most urgent priorities that the new government must tackle: improving Tunisia’s economic situation and dealing with threats to national security. The risk in both cases is that conditions have deteriorated since the revolution and could lead to a loss of confidence in democracy.

Economic demands were at the heart of the revolution in 2011, but since then the country’s economic situation has worsened. The economy grew at only 2.3 percent in 2013 and growth for 2014 is forecast at around the same level, well below the pre-revolutionary trend and not enough to generate the jobs the country needs. The fiscal deficit and current account deficit remain high. Most significantly, the level of unemployment was at 15.2 percent in the first quarter of 2014 (compared to 13 percent before the uprising), and would have been higher but for an increase in public employment that cannot be sustained in the longer term.<sup>15</sup> Around 33 percent of young Tunisians (aged between 15 and 29) are not in employment, education, or training.<sup>16</sup>

According to a former finance minister, the Tunisian economy does not seem at risk of an imminent breakdown, but it remains a cause for concern.<sup>17</sup> The technocrat government under Prime Minister Mehdi Jomaa that took office early in 2014 has made a start on improving the macroeconomic situation and the climate for investment in Tunisia, but the most difficult measures still lie ahead. It is widely accepted that the next government will need to take further steps to stabilise public finances, including through further reducing subsidies and cutting the public sector payroll, and that it should encourage investment and entrepreneurship by revising business regulation.<sup>18</sup> In doing this, the government will have to overcome resistance from business elites who benefit from the current regulatory environment. At the same time, the government will need to step up its assistance to more socially deprived groups who are harmed by the impact of reforms. An approach that follows these lines should be able to win support from most political parties, as well as the country’s powerful UGTT trade union, according to Tunisian political analysts.<sup>19</sup> Tunisia also needs continued external investment in major development projects, including those highlighted during the “Start-Up Democracy” donor conference held in September 2014.

<sup>12</sup> Author interview with Ons Ben Abdelkarim, 3 June 2014.

<sup>13</sup> Author interview with Mohsen Marzouk, 5 June 2014.

<sup>14</sup> Author interview with Slaheddine Jourchi, 5 June 2014.

<sup>15</sup> “MENA Economic Monitor: Corrosive Subsidies”, the World Bank, October 2014, p. 37, available at [http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2014/10/08/000350881\\_20141008084801/Rendered/PDF/912100WPOBox380RSIONoOCTOBER0402014.pdf](http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2014/10/08/000350881_20141008084801/Rendered/PDF/912100WPOBox380RSIONoOCTOBER0402014.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> “Giving Young People in Tunisia a Chance”, the World Bank, 2 October 2014, available at <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2014/10/01/giving-young-people-in-tunisia-a-chance>.

<sup>17</sup> Author interview with Elyes Fakhfakh, 4 June 2014.

<sup>18</sup> See the detailed analysis of the World Bank in “The Unfinished Revolution: Bringing Opportunity, Good Jobs And Greater Wealth To All Tunisians”, the World Bank, May 2014, available at <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/tunisia/publication/unfinished-revolution> (hereafter, “Unfinished Revolution”).

<sup>19</sup> Author interview with Amine Ghali, 7 October 2014.

Political violence nearly derailed Tunisia's transition in 2013. The country's security services have reasserted control since then, but the security situation remains precarious. The most serious threats are concentrated on Tunisia's borders. In July 2014, 15 soldiers were killed in a mass attack by fighters near the Mount Chaambi region on the border with Algeria, the site of recurrent skirmishes in recent years. Disorder in Libya has exacerbated the problem of weapons and fighters crossing into Tunisia across the long border the countries share. Meanwhile, up to 3,000 Tunisians are thought to have travelled to fight with jihadist groups in Syria and Iraq, and the government is concerned that those who come back could further destabilise the country. The government claims to have knowledge of "a few hundred fighters" who have already returned from Syria.<sup>20</sup>

Local analysts recognise that religiously inspired violence in Tunisia is a complex problem that is still poorly understood by security forces and will require a broad-based effort to confront.<sup>21</sup> In the longer term, the fight against violent extremism is likely to involve redressing economic and social exclusion and regaining control of the religious sphere. Ennahda was criticised by its opponents for being slow to recognise the threat of terrorism, but the head of its political bureau, Amer Larayedh, now says that "Tunisia is in a war against terrorism, but not one to be fought only by military means. [...] It must be combated through public discourse, the media, in schools and mosques, as well as with the security forces and the army."<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, Tunisian officials consistently put border assistance, military equipment, and help tracking foreign fighters at the top of their demands to overseas partners.

## A more ambitious reform agenda

Beyond these short-term measures to head off any imminent security crisis and to begin delivering an economic dividend from the transition to democracy, Tunisia needs to adopt a more ambitious reform agenda in order to complete its revolution and meet the aspirations of its people. The Tunisian state needs to be restructured in order to address the underlying weakness and failures that became entrenched during the period of authoritarian rule. The danger of the post-election period is that political caution and institutional resistance will combine to suppress any broad reformist initiative. The immediate task of restoring stability should not obscure the greater importance of fundamental change in the relation between Tunisia's state and its people.

According to numerous analysts, public administration in Tunisia remains inflexible and unaccountable. The World

Bank argued in a recent report that "the policy infrastructure inherited from the Ben Ali era perpetuates social exclusion and invites corruption".<sup>23</sup> In the words of the former Finance Minister Elyes Fakhfakh, "public administration is sluggish, heavy and centralised. [...] The country needs a big governance revolution and much less corruption."

<sup>24</sup> A young political activist warns that "there will be a tendency to tinker, but really we need a new start for public administration".<sup>25</sup> Decentralisation of decision-making, mandated by the constitution but not yet established, is widely seen as essential in order to make the state more responsive to the demands of residents in Tunisia's more socially deprived regions. According to the World Bank, extending access and improving the quality of basic services such as health and education in these areas is essential to reduce Tunisia's regional disparities.<sup>26</sup>

There is also an urgent need for security sector reform. In the aftermath of the revolution, security forces were demoralised and passive, according to many observers. Now that services have been given renewed public backing and endorsement to confront the rising threat of terrorism, some of the abusive practices of the past have begun to reappear. Human rights organisations report a partial return of the use of excessive force, abuses in detention, and even torture.<sup>27</sup> Officials from before the revolution remain in place at the interior ministry, and the same lack of transparency and accountability prevails. One long-time human rights activist describes the interior ministry as a "state within the state".<sup>28</sup> There are allegations of ties between some elements of the security forces and criminal groups, and the opacity of the interior ministry only encourages public distrust. There is no effective accountability for abusive actions by security forces, and many people also believe that the forces' poor level of professionalism has hampered their ability to understand and confront the threat of violent extremism.<sup>29</sup>

The government has mounted an intensive campaign to prevent terrorist attacks from disrupting the forthcoming elections, but they have acted in a way that shows little concern for due process. In August, the government suspended over 150 NGOs for alleged links to terrorism, acting under pre-revolutionary laws rather than more recent legislation giving power to suspend such associations to the courts.<sup>30</sup> Ultimately, the success of Tunisia's campaign against terrorism will require that it respects the people's rights rather than resorting to arbitrary measures.

<sup>23</sup> "Unfinished Revolution", p. 127.

<sup>24</sup> Author interview with Elyes Fakhfakh, 4 June 2014.

<sup>25</sup> Author interview with Ons Ben Abdelkarim, 3 June 2014.

<sup>26</sup> "Unfinished Revolution", p. 327.

<sup>27</sup> Author interview with Amna Guellali, 2 June 2014.

<sup>28</sup> Author interview with Khadija Cherif, 5 June 2014.

<sup>29</sup> Author interview with Sihem Bensedrine, 5 June 2014; see also Amna Guellali, "Three Graves, One Question: 'Justice, When?'" the World Post, 1 October 2014, available at [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/amna-guellali/three-graves-one-question\\_b\\_5913264.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/amna-guellali/three-graves-one-question_b_5913264.html).

<sup>30</sup> Omar Belhaj Salah, "Liberty and Security in Tunisia", Sada, 16 September 2014, available at [http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/index.cfm?fa=show&article=56633&solr\\_hilite=](http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/index.cfm?fa=show&article=56633&solr_hilite=).

<sup>20</sup> Tarek Amara, "Tunisia cracks down on jihadists as elections loom – PM", Reuters, 11 October 2014, available at <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2014/10/11/uk-tunisia-security-idUKKCN0100FF20141011>.

<sup>21</sup> Author interview with Slaheddine Jourchi, 5 June 2014.

<sup>22</sup> Author interview with Amer Larayedh, 3 June 2014.



Alongside the security services, Tunisia's judiciary is also in need of restructuring. The constitution contains strong provisions on judicial independence, but in the meantime the judges who were appointed under the old regime mostly remain in place. There has been no systematic effort at reforming the judiciary, and Ennahda's moves to dismiss a broad swathe of judges in 2012 were widely interpreted as a partisan initiative. A lack of capacity within the judicial system has been an obstacle to efforts to investigate and prosecute those responsible for the political assassinations of 2013, further damaging public confidence in the state.<sup>31</sup> The recently launched Truth and Dignity Commission should contribute to maintaining pressure for security and judicial reform, but it will take several years to complete its work, and the commission's president, Sihem Bensedrine, warns that it will face obstacles from the country's vested interests.<sup>32</sup>

The interlinked nature of the reform initiatives that are needed calls for a systematic effort that is carried out with a broad constituency of support. But there is concern that the increasing visibility of politicians linked to Ben Ali's former RCD party could produce a new political class with many members who have little interest in reform. Beyond the obvious split between Islamist and secular parties, the most significant division in Tunisian politics may be between those groups (notably among the younger generation) who are committed to develop and take forward a new vision of the state, and those who do not want to go beyond tinkering with the status quo.

Indeed, in this respect, Ennahda and Nidaa Tounes may not be so far apart. Paradoxically, these two dominant parties are in some ways mirror images of each other. Both see themselves as social movements as much as political parties with a clear policy agenda. Both are led by political veterans and give little scope for younger activists to influence their decision-making. And both have at times faced allegations of having links to extra-state groups that have engaged in political intimidation: the Leagues for the Protection of the Revolution in Ennahda's case, and the police unions in Nidaa Tounes's.<sup>33</sup> In this light, while a post-election political pact between Ennahda and Nidaa Tounes would offer political stability to the country, it would also require outside pressure to help ensure it remained committed to a path of genuine reform.

Nevertheless, many young people in Tunisia remain passionately engaged in public life, even if they are alienated from the current political parties. Pressure from outside and a change of leadership within the parties make it likely that there will continue to be some impetus for reform, which will in any case be a long-term process. Young activists remain optimistic that in ten years a generation with a

different way of looking at things will have assumed a more prominent political role.<sup>34</sup> But in order for this to happen, the country's transition must at least keep moving forward. If Tunisia's economy does not start to show some benefit from the advent of democratic politics, and if the oppressive dominance of an unreformed state over Tunisian society does not begin to lift, the successful consolidation of democracy cannot be guaranteed.

## How Europe can help

In the aftermath of the Arab revolutions, the EU reframed its policy towards the Southern Mediterranean to emphasise the support of democracy and economic reform. At that time, it saw all countries in the region as potential reformers. Now Tunisia appears as a lone beacon of democratic transition, and Europe has a strong interest in preventing the failure of this effort. European officials say they recognise the importance of Tunisia, and argue that they are working the existing system of European assistance as far as possible to maximise support for Tunisia. What has conspicuously not taken place, however, is any broader rethinking of Europe's policy towards the region and Tunisia's place in it.<sup>35</sup>

Europe continues to face its own economic problems and resource constraints. However, given Tunisia's size, it would not require massive sums of money to have a significant impact on the country's prospects during this critical period. This could include funds that might have been spent supporting political reform in countries such as Egypt, where transition to accountable and inclusive government has stalled. The EU should consider Tunisia as a particularly strategic interest in the next few years and be prepared to invest significant resources and political effort in its development.

In particular, the following priorities could guide European policy:

- Tunisia has been allocated between €202 and €246 million from the European Neighbourhood Instrument for 2014–15. The EU should be ready to supplement this amount if circumstances demand and to consider an increased allocation in following years.
- The EU should also be prepared to add to the recent €300 million macro-financial assistance package, if needed. It is particularly important that Tunisia has sufficient resources to carry out financial restructuring in a way that does not add to the hardship of its citizens during this transitional period.

<sup>31</sup> Author interview with Amna Guellali, 2 June 2014.

<sup>32</sup> Author interview with Sihem Bensedrine, 5 June 2014.

<sup>33</sup> I am grateful to Monica Marks for drawing this point to my attention.

<sup>34</sup> Author interview with Ons Ben Abdelkarim, 3 June 2014.

<sup>35</sup> For a broader argument that the EU needs a new framework to replace the European Neighbourhood Policy, see Nick Witney et al., "Rebooting EU Foreign Policy", European Council on Foreign Relations, October 2014, available at [http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/rebooting\\_eu\\_foreign\\_policy319](http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/rebooting_eu_foreign_policy319).

- The EU should also work to mobilise investment and macro-financial assistance from other international institutions and bilateral donors. One focus should be on the Gulf, which has given little to Tunisia in the post-revolutionary period. European advocacy for Gulf investment and assistance will be particularly important if Ennahda assumes a role in the next government. Tunisia has thus far luckily escaped the destructive regional competition between pro-Muslim Brotherhood Qatar and anti-Islamist Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, so it would be important for Gulf assistance to be provided on a non-partisan basis.
- EU institutions and member states should focus assistance particularly on measures that improve services and infrastructure, and create jobs in Tunisia's disadvantaged regions. Improving access to education, health, and employment prospects should be seen as a priority. Assistance should not be channelled only through state structures, and should be delivered in a way that has a visible impact throughout the country. European businesses should be encouraged to explore opportunities in Tunisia, assuming the elections provide the basis for continued stability.
- The EU should step up immediate assistance in dealing with violent extremism, including through reinforcing security on Tunisia's border with Libya, improving the effectiveness of Tunisian security forces, and co-operating to share information on foreign fighters travelling to Syria. This could be coupled with steps aimed at cementing Tunisia's regional security (for instance, partnership programmes within the OSCE initiative for Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation and similar initiatives).
- At the same time, the EU should use its engagement on security to promote reform of the security and justice sector, demonstrating that a more rights-respecting approach is likely to be more effective in containing security threats in the longer term. Work on justice reform could include a counterterrorism element to promote a law-enforcement response to security threats. Member states that co-operate particularly with Tunisia on counterterrorism should use their relationships as a lever to encourage reform. Training and exchange programmes for police and public prosecutors should be a priority. If applicable, such efforts could be offered in partnership with other international institutions such as the Council of Europe.
- More broadly, the EU and member states individually should step up education and other youth exchange programmes as an investment in promoting a European orientation and

familiarity with democratic procedures in Tunisian society. European states involved in the mobility partnership with Tunisia should offer expanded access for education, employment, and training. European member states that have a close relationship with Tunisia – above all France but also others such as Germany and Italy – should use their ties to the country's business elites to push for a more open and competitive environment. National parliaments in Europe and the European Parliament should step up their engagement with the new Tunisian parliament.

- European political leaders should continue high-level engagement with Tunisia to show that the EU recognises the significance of the Tunisian transition to democracy at a time of negative regional trends.
- European politicians and officials should engage with Tunisian political leaders to encourage them to continue seeking broadly supported solutions to problems that arise in the run-up to the elections and in their aftermath. Here the EU can build on its successful role in helping to promote a consensual solution to the political crisis of 2013 through intensive mediation.
- The EU should seek to develop contacts with civil society and younger, emerging reform-minded politicians who may offer the best hope for the country's medium-term political development. It should enhance support directed to civil society groups that monitor the development of democracy through the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights and the European Endowment for Democracy.
- The EU should consistently offer encouragement and assistance with reform of state institutions, including decentralisation and the improvement of public administration.

Above all, the EU should ensure that it does not lose focus on Tunisia at a time when more apparently urgent security crises in Libya and Iraq demand attention. In the longer term, Tunisia's continued democratic development could be of enormous significance for the Mediterranean region. The EU must make every effort to do what it can to support it.

## About the author

*Anthony Dworkin* is a senior policy fellow at ECFR and leads the organisation's work on human rights, democracy and justice. Since 2011 he has worked closely on political developments in North Africa and the EU's response to them. Among his publications for ECFR are *The Struggle for Pluralism after the North African Revolutions* (2013) and *Egypt's Unsustainable Crackdown* (with Helene Michou, 2014). He was formerly the executive director of the *Crimes of War Project* and co-edited the book *Crimes of War: What the Public Should Know* (Norton, rev. ed. 2007).

## Acknowledgements

This memo is based in part on an ECFR visit to Tunisia in June 2014, undertaken by the author and ECFR colleagues Myriam Benraad, Francisco de Borja Lasheras and Karina Piser. I am grateful to my colleagues for many suggestions that have helped to shape the paper, and for comments on an earlier version. I would like to thank all those mentioned in the footnotes and the other people that we met for sharing their analysis with us. I am particularly grateful to the Spanish ambassador, Juan Lopez Doriga Perez, for hosting an extremely informative and enjoyable dinner and for much other help. ECFR Council member Emma Bonino provided very generous advice and assistance. Within ECFR I would like to thank Daniel Levy for valuable advice, and Hans Kundnani for editing the memo.

ECFR extends its thanks to the governments of Norway and Sweden for their ongoing support of ECFR's Middle East and North Africa programme.

## ABOUT ECFR

The **European Council on Foreign Relations** (ECFR) is the first pan-European think-tank. Launched in October 2007, its objective is to conduct research and promote informed debate across Europe on the development of coherent, effective and values-based European foreign policy.

ECFR has developed a strategy with three distinctive elements that define its activities:

- **A pan-European Council.** ECFR has brought together a distinguished Council of over two hundred Members – politicians, decision makers, thinkers and business people from the EU's member states and candidate countries – which meets once a year as a full body. Through geographical and thematic task forces, members provide ECFR staff with advice and feedback on policy ideas and help with ECFR's activities within their own countries. The Council is chaired by Martti Ahtisaari and Mabel van Oranje.
- **A physical presence in the main EU member states.** ECFR, uniquely among European think-tanks, has offices in Berlin, London, Madrid, Paris, Rome, Sofia and Warsaw. Our offices are platforms for research, debate, advocacy and communications.
- **A distinctive research and policy development process.** ECFR has brought together a team of distinguished researchers and practitioners from all over Europe to advance its objectives through innovative projects with a pan-European focus. ECFR's activities include primary research, publication of policy reports, private meetings and public debates, 'friends of ECFR' gatherings in EU capitals and outreach to strategic media outlets.

ECFR is a registered charity funded by the Open Society Foundations and other generous foundations, individuals and corporate entities. These donors allow us to publish our ideas and advocate for a values-based EU foreign policy. ECFR works in partnership with other think tanks and organisations but does not make grants to individuals or institutions.

[www.ecfr.eu](http://www.ecfr.eu)

The European Council on Foreign Relations does not take collective positions. This paper, like all publications of the European Council on Foreign Relations, represents only the views of its authors.

Copyright of this publication is held by the European Council on Foreign Relations. You may not copy, reproduce, republish or circulate in any way the content from this publication except for your own personal and non-commercial use. Any other use requires the prior written permission of the European Council on Foreign Relations

© ECFR October 2014.

ISBN: 978-1-910118-16-0

Published by the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR),  
35 Old Queen Street, London,  
SW1H 9JA, United Kingdom

[london@ecfr.eu](mailto:london@ecfr.eu)