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Case study report

The view of the EU cultural and science diplomacy from Tunisia

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1. Introduction

1.1 General context of the cooperation between the EU and Tunisia

Tunisia is part of the **European Neighbourhood Policy** (ENP), revised in 2015, alongside 15 other countries from Southern and Eastern neighbouring regions, and beneficiary from the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI).

Although the Euro-Mediterranean relationship under previous guises was slightly impeded or besmirched at some point by its dependency to the old Tunisian regime¹, now, due to its role at the forefront of the democratic movement in the region, post-2011 Tunisia enjoys a relatively privileged status amongst the MENA countries in general, and in the Maghreb in particular². A “privileged partnership” was established in 2012³. This place was confirmed in 2016 by the Joint communication to the European Parliament and the Council: **“Strengthening EU support for Tunisia”**⁴. European days have been organised in 2016. In November of this same year, the HR/VP Federica Mogherini payed a visit to Tunis, and the EU Commissioner for ENP, Johannes Hahn, attended the conference “Tunisia 2020”. In December 2016, the Tunisian president Beji Caid Essebsi went to Brussels to sign the “EU-Tunisia Youth Partnership”.

Tunisia is one of the top beneficiaries of EU regional programmes for the Southern neighbourhood, in areas such as environment, energy, migration and security. The support to Tunisia amounted to 250 million € in 2016, and to 300 million € in 2017. The EU’s support to Tunisia encompasses many domains: economic reforms, private sector, employability, vocational training, schools, higher education, health, agriculture and rural development, decentralisation and regional development, environment and energy, transportation, governance, justice, security, human rights and civil society, gender equality, media and culture, migration and mobility, cross-border cooperation.

Amongst the different EU’s programmes run in Tunisia, one has to mention the support to a photovoltaic power plant in Tozeur, the de-pollution of the Bizerte Lake, and the project of de-pollution of the Mediterranean.

The Programme “Strengthening the cultural sector” (6 million €) is dedicated to the support of the Ministry of Culture, libraries, art festival, and the project **“Tfanem”**. Tunisia is the first Arab country to be associated to the European commission programme “Creative Europe” (11/5/2017), supporting

¹ See *Etudes internationales / Dirassat Duwalya*, n°107, 2008 : « Le Maghreb et les relations euro-méditerranéennes » (including Tunisian president Ben Ali’s discourse). See, in contrast, *op. cit.*, n°120, 2011 : « L’Union européenne et la Tunisie nouvelle : sur le chemin du statut avancé » ; n°122-123, 2012 : « Le nouveau Maghreb et l’Union européenne » ; n°124-125, 2013 : « Les relations Tunisie – Union européenne dans un contexte régional en mutation ».

² “Activity report of the European delegation to Tunisia” (2017).

³ “Relations Tunisie - Union européenne: un partenariat privilégié. Plan d’action 2013-2017”. See “Dimension humaine et scientifique: rapprochement entre les peuples” (p.44-46).

http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/delegations/tunisia/documents/press_corner/plan_action_tunisie_ue_2013_2017_fr.pdf

⁴ Joint communication to the European Parliament and the Council: “Strengthening EU support for Tunisia” (29/9/2016). See also Council conclusions on Tunisia (17/10/2016).

initiatives to strengthen the culture and media sectors, promoting cross-border cooperation, platforms, networking, literary translation and the distribution of audio-visual works.

1.2 Cooperation in higher education, scientific research and innovation

In April 2016, Tunisia became the first country from the South associated to **Horizon 2020**, Research and Innovation Programme, offering significant opportunities to Tunisian researchers, academics and innovators, and supporting Tunisia's investment in research and innovation as a incentive of socio-economic development.⁵

"H2020 Tunisia" in figures: 5 million €; 44 participants; 34 contracts; 25 beneficiaries (universities of Manar, Manouba, Sfax, Gabes; research centres; NGO; ministries); 465 international partners; 1000 focal points; 4000 followers on social media.

In March 2017, the Programme "**Education, mobility, research and innovation**" (EMORI), endowed with 50 million €, was launched by the Commissioner for science and innovation, Carlos Moedas.

10 million € are dedicated to **Erasmus+**. This additional fund will enable 1500 people, whether students or higher education staff, to train and exchange their experiences. The Erasmus+ office, based in the Tunis Science City⁶, communicated on those figures:

2015:	3M€	51 projects	639 mobilities
2016:	3M€	53 projects	688 mobilities
2017:	6M€	114 projects	1781 mobilities

Selected projects in 2017 (capacity building in higher education):

- "Strategic platform for ameliorating Tunisian higher education on food sciences and technology";
- "Wind engineering skills in Egypt and Tunisia";
- "Pathway in enterprise systems engineering";
- "Climate change in agriculture";
- "Structuration of, and assistance to student entrepreneurship in the Maghreb";
- "Strengthening of relations between higher education and the wider economic and social environment";
- "E-Learning innovative engineering solutions";
- "Strengthening public health research capacity to inform evidence-based policies in Tunisia";
- "On-Line quality assurance and EUR-ACE accreditation of engineering programmes in Mediterranean area";
- "Amelioration of governance in the higher education system in Tunisia";
- "International credit mobility: a new challenge for the Mediterranean region";
- "Master in agricultural and hydrological approaches to a better sustainable development".

1.3 Objectives of the study

Work Package 4, Task 3 is entitled "the view of the EU cultural and science diplomacy from the outside". It is an impact study that wants to show how the EU's cultural and science diplomacy is perceived in the MENA countries (Tunisia and Egypt) and Turkey. The primary question was: what do the EU's partners think of its approach to science, innovation and its enhancement of external cultural relations?

⁵ Horizon 2020 in Tunisia : <http://horizon2020tunisia.org>

⁶ Erasmus+ in Tunisia : <https://www.erasmusplus.tn/en/>

The main objective was thus to measure the degree to which populations notice and how they appreciate European cultural and science diplomacy actions.

Through interviews (qualitative study) and survey (quantitative study), WP4 Task 3 wants to be a measure of the reception of the EU's messages in the considered countries. This study aims at understanding better the partners' image of the EU.

1.4 Methodology

The case-study is based on a qualitative study (interviews) and a quantitative study (survey).

Interviews have been conducted in Tunisia with people engaged with European programmes, people having benefited from those programmes, or people well aware of the existence of them.

The **survey** has been implemented in different regions of Tunisia. 150 samples have been collected and analysed.

1.5 Team

At **EMUNI**: Abdelhamid El-Zoheiry (President), Kinga Konya (Project manager), Jerneja Penca (Research fellow), Antoine Hatzenberger (Research fellow).

In **Tunisia**: Olfa Riahi (University of Tunis), Najet Araari (University of Tunis/ University of Liège), Slim Aliouet (University of Sousse) with the support of the association Sanabel Tounsiya⁷.

2. Survey

The **survey** (quantitative study) has been implemented in different regions of Tunisia:

- governorates of Tunis (capital city and outskirts): Tunis, Ariana, Manouba, Ben Arous (76);
- Sousse (central costal area) (20);
- Gafsa (South-West) (15);
- Sidi Bouzid (central region) (15);
- Bizerte (North-East) (12);
- Siliana (West) (12).

For the survey, 150 samples have been collected and analysed (50% in the capital region). The samples represent a vast array of ages and professions. The majority of the respondents have a university degree (70% in average, with 40% in Bizerte and 80% in Sousse).

It is worth noting the geographical diversity of the study, which corresponds also to a diversity of the socio-cultural backgrounds. On the one side, Tunis and Sousse are the more opulent regions in the country, while Sidi Bouzid, on the other side, is famous for being the small Southern town of Mohamed Bouazizi, the vegetables and fruits monger who ignited the 2011 Revolution. On the coast, Sousse is a sea-resort well-known by European tourists. Like Siliana and Gafsa, Sidi Bouzid represents the regions from the inside of the country, often opposed to the littoral regions – historically more economically developed. The impact of EU actions is thus interesting to measure there, in regions

⁷ <http://association-sanabel-tounsiya.simplesite.com/>

where an important objective of EU programmes is precisely to compensate this unbalanced situation with specific programmes helping the decentralisation process and regional capacity building.

2.1 Evaluation of the relationship

When it comes to the measurement of the perception of the **EU involvement** in Tunisia, the EU is perceived as being “somewhat involved” in shaping the scientific effort in Tunisia at 66%, and “closely involved” for 19% (58% in Bizerte). In Sidi Bouzid, the results are slightly different: if 60% think that the EU is “somewhat involved” – a figure that corresponds to the national percentage –, only 6% think that it is “closely involved”, and 13% think that it is “not involved at all”. It is probably on this question that the regional gap is so noticeable.

About the ways in which the EU partners cooperate with Tunisia in the field of science, 34% think that Tunisia and the EU cooperate on common projects (46% in Gafsa), and 27% that Tunisian scientists perceive European funds to perform their own research. In Sousse, Gafsa and Sidi Bouzid, 20% think that Tunisia scientific priorities are influenced by preferences of the EU (11,3% at national level).

A vast majority believe that the EU is the most **important partner** of Tunisia in the scientific field (65%). This proportion is higher in Sidi Bouzid (73%) and Gafsa (80%).

The **benefits** for Tunisia of scientific cooperation with the EU are as follows:

- improved knowledge (59%);
- economic interests (patents, revenues) (42%);
- access to funds (40%);
- development of global science (38%);
- understanding of other cultures (23%).

These expected benefits are perceived differently in the inner regions, with a wider scope of less decisive answers, where access to fund comes first (Sidi Bouzid: 34%), and the economic benefits only in the 4th position (17%).

The **evaluation** of EU's actions in Tunisia is diverse. Judging from the scientific cooperation, 46% think that the EU is interfering in Tunisian internal affairs (this figure rises to 65% in Sousse and 73% in Sidi Bouzid). 35% think that EU's intervention is acceptable (47% in Tunis and 46% in Gafsa). Only 3% think that EU's actions are appropriate (8% in Bizerte).

Amongst the **reasons** envisaged for the EU's effort in international scientific cooperation, 47% think that the EU is seeking cooperation with international partners to convince others of the EU political or economic agenda, wanting to appear stronger than others (16% in Bizerte). 19% think that the EU is seeking cooperation because science knows no borders, and that the EU wishes to create a platform for scientific dialogue (41% in Bizerte). And 19% think that the EU is cooperating in science because the US, China, Australia and other actors are also doing it.

2.2 Gender issue

To the question to know whether scientific cooperation affects the status of women or not, 67% answer by saying that intensifying scientific cooperation encourages women to make better use of their potential and advance their traditional role (76% in Tunis). On the contrary, 10% think that scientific activity requires women scientists to assume a role that is not compatible with the traditional position of women in our society (25% in Bizerte and 26% in Sidi Bouzid). And 12% think that women's engagement in scientific activities does not impact their status (40% in Sousse).

When comparing the position of women scientists in the EU and in Tunisia, in general, 49% think that women scientists are more empowered in the EU (73% in Sidi Bouzid). 28% think that the position of women in science is about the same in the EU countries and in Tunisia (34% in Tunis). And 10% think that women scientists are more empowered in Tunisia (60% in Gafsa).

2.3 Perception of European values

Choosing amongst values associated with the EU, people made gender equality the last choice (25%). They listed the values in the following order:

- Democracy (47%);
- Rule of law (44%);
- Human dignity and human rights (44%);
- Freedom (36%);
- Political stability (29%)
- Equality (26%);
- Gender equality (25%).

Having to decide amongst pairs of values, the people interviewed establish the following series, with regional variations:

- Authority (94%) / Shyness
- Learning (94%) / Ignorance
- Growth (91%) / Stagnation
- Success (84%) / Disappointment
- Stability (84%) / Uncertainty (Tunis: 89/11; Sidi Bouzid: 53/46)
- Wealth (84%) / Poverty
- Security (83%) / Fear
- Optimism (82%) / Pessimism
- Openness (79%) / Intolerance
- Happiness (73%) / Depression (Sousse: 95/5)
- Secularism (73%) / Faith, religion (Tunis: 40/60; Sidi Bouzid: 86/13)
- Responsibility (65%) / Unreliability (Sidi Bouzid: 33/66)
- Peace (58%) / War, interventionism (Tunis: 84/16; Sidi Bouzid: 20/80)
- Compassion (58%) / Indifference (Tunis: 76/23; Sidi Bouzid: 26/73)
- Curiosity (56%) / Apathy (Tunis: 73/26)
- Materialism (54%) / Wisdom (Tunis: 21/79; Gafsa: 86/13)
- Injustice, double-standards (53%) / Fairness (Tunis: 60/40; Bizerte: 33/66)
- Individualism (52%) / Community (in Tunis: 40/60)

When it comes to **human rights**, and the role of the EU in contributing to their protection worldwide, 49% of the people interviewed believe that the EU advocates human rights, but applies them in a selective manner and has double-standards (65% in Tunis, and 60% in Sousse). 20% think that the key issue in the EU actions is self-interest and that it is precisely that – and not human rights – that motivates the EU. Only 13% think that the EU itself is based on the ideals of human rights. And 9% fear that the EU is shifting to nationalism and xenophobia.

Has then the European set of values an **influence** on Tunisian culture? 51% think that the European set of values has influenced the Tunisian culture (60% in Sousse). 29% think that it has “influenced it considerably” (39% in Tunis). In Sidi-Bouzid, 33% said that it has no influence).

2.4 Definition and impact of culture

What come to mind when one thinks about the world “culture”? What definition can be drawn from the answers given? The different components are ordered as follows:

- Civilization (62%);
- Knowledge and science (50%);
- Traditions, languages, customs and social or cultural communities (48%);
- Arts (26%);
- Life style and manners (21%);
- History (20%);
- Literature, poetry, theatre (19%);
- Education and family (18%);
- Values and beliefs (including philosophy and religion) (12%);
- Museums (10%).

2.5 Sense of belonging

Asked about their feeling of **attachment** (both geographical and symbolic), in general, people say to feel “very attached” – in this order – to (1) Tunisia; (2) their locality (be it village, town or city); (3) Europe; (4) their region; and (5) the world.

In Great Tunis – as well as in Sidi Bouzid for that matter –, people feel “very attached” centripetally first to the world; secondly to Europe; and then to Tunisia. In both regions, people feel fairly attached to their region, and to Europe and Tunisia at the same level. People feel “fairly attached” to (1) Europe; (2) their region; (3) the country; (4) the world; and (5) their locality.

These measurements show a strong European feeling in the capital, as well as in the other regions. One has to notice a certain detachment from the local spheres (governorate level) in some regions.

2.6 EU’s best access to its neighbours

A majority of people “totally agree” with the idea that culture and interactions with other cultures can play an important role in developing greater understanding and tolerance in the world, even where there are conflicts or tensions. The opinion is less affirmative about the worldwide role of European culture (the same proportion “tend to agree” and “tend to disagree”).

What would best help Europeans and neighbouring countries get to know each other is:

- development of the teaching of foreign languages at school (75%);
- increase of exchange programmes for students and teachers (53%);
- support of town-twinning across Europe (49%);
- implementation of programmes enabling people who do not usually travel to meet one another (33%);
- support of exhibitions and live performances (such as plays and concerts) in tours beyond national borders (23%);
- support of the distribution of movies originating from other EU member states (12%);
- support of the production of TV documentaries about other EU member states (8%).

Clear choices are made in Great Tunis, compared to a low rate of answers in Sidi Bouzid. Everywhere, the two more often cited ways to make Europe closer to its neighbours are (1) the development of the teaching of foreign languages at school, and (2) the increase of exchange programmes for students and teachers

3. Interviews

Interviews have been conducted in Tunisia with people engaged with European programmes, people having benefited from those programmes, or people who are well aware of the existence of them.

The interviewees have been asked 20 questions organised in 4 main categories:

1. "You, your country and Europe";
2. "European values";
3. "Evaluation";
4. "Recommendations".

The questions focused firstly on the information the partners got about the European programmes; the initial incentive of their participation; and the roles they played in the cooperation. The interviewees had then to evaluate the impact of EU programmes on individual careers, on institutions, and more generally, on Tunisia. They had also to evaluate the methodological impact on scientific procedures. The interviewees had also to elaborate on the perception of European values, to compare European programmes with those of other countries; to express their reservations and their recommendations – if any.

The Tunisian interviewees (16) have been selected in the academic world, the administration and civil society. They come from all sort of backgrounds:

- Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research;
- National Agency for Scientific Research Promotion;
- University of Tunis;
- University of Tunis - Al Manar;
- University of Manouba;
- University of Carthage;
- think-tanks and research centres (Arab council for the social science; Institut de recherche sur le Maghreb contemporain);
- culture centres, libraries and associations.

The analysis of the answers to the questionnaire shows:

3.1 Positive evaluation of the impact of EU programmes

The first advantage of EU programmes generally cited is the opportunity of **mobility**. The different schemes of mobility between Tunisia and European countries through the different EU programmes are very much appreciated. The partners speak well of the **Tempus** Programme (2007-2013), and now of **Erasmus+**. International mobility both of students and researchers is unanimously considered a real asset. The main benefits of those mobility programmes are considered training and meeting of new people as well as the more general cultural gain of discovering European countries and other ways of life.

The second interest of the partners for the cooperation with the EU lies in the international reach and **visibility** that it gives to Tunisian research. Giving opportunity for networking and publication, EU programmes guarantee an institutional and international recognition of local competences.

Thirdly comes **capacity building**. EU programmes give access to information, resources, and know-how. Within the area of education, they bring new teaching methods, continuing education to staff, innovative methods in project management and project engineering. As Tunisian universities tend to be more turned toward teaching than research, the EU cooperation helps to develop the latter, while developing a more pedagogical approach to teaching. Are also well appreciated the input for good

practices in scientific research and project management. The partners have pleasure to work in a well-established frame of set rules and clear procedures.

Specifically, high praise is said on particular projects in research and innovation. Some interviewees have been talking of specific programmes with great enthusiasm.

For example, **PASRI** (“Projet d’Appui au Système de Recherche et de l’innovation”, 2011-2014) has been mentioned as the “jewel of research ecosystem”⁸.

Good words are said too about **FETRIC** (“Future European Tunisian Research Innovation Cooperation”)⁹.

Was also cited as a success **ENI CBC MED** (“European Neighbourhood Instrument Cross-border Cooperation Mediterranean Sea Basin Programme”, 2014-2020), whose objectives include support to education, research, technological development and innovation.

First of all, there is a sense of pride expressed by many interviewees to be fully partner in **Horizon 2020**. All the interviewees say that EU programmes are beneficial to the researchers as individuals (boosting their work and their career), to the institutions (universities, research centres), and to the country as a whole. EU programmes have an impact on the scientific community, and hence on the society.

3.2 Positive images of Europe

The questions on **European values** lead to many very positive answers.

There is a good sense of the historical background of Europe, that goes back to the rich traditions of **humanism** that is symbolised by different cities representing different highlights of this history (Athens, Cordoba, Firenze, Rotterdam). Europe is seen as a continent of culture, historical and cultural diversity, place of exchange of ideas and population. Cooperating with the EU is a way to opening up the traditional bilateralism, sometimes inherited from a colonial past. It is also a way to speed up the modernisation process. Europe is seen as a “utopia” – in a positive sense.

Europe embodies **ethical values** rooted in the respect of human rights and in a set of humanistic moral notions, including concerns for gender issues, women emancipation, or protection of children.

Europe stands also for **political values** linked to the role model of democratic culture. Democracy, peace, equality are often cited by interviewees, as well as neutrality towards religions and faiths, which is a remedy against radical forms of nationalism. Europe is seen as a space of freedom and intellectual migrations (cultural, scientific and technologic) that is based on the nobility of international solidarity, a successful human globalisation, and a possibility of development. Taking part to a European project gives a feeling of belonging to a global citizenship.

The European values are present in scientific research itself, and are perceived as a “label EU”. What is appreciated is the **neutrality** of the cooperation that is clearly technical, with transparent objectives (compared to bilateral cooperation which implies more political stances). The interviewees praise the European deontology: confidentiality, notion of merit, scientific value, sense of responsibility and accountability in the utilisation of funds.

⁸ PASRI : <http://www.tunisieindustrie.nat.tn/fr/doc.asp?docid=763&mcat=22&mrub=179>

⁹ FETRIC : <http://www.fetric.eu/en/>

3.3 Comparative approach between multilateralism and bilateralism

Interviewees were asked about the comparisons they can draw between EU approach and the politics of cooperation lead by individual countries.

They are many contacts in the academic field in-between Tunisia and **European countries** – at individual or institutional levels – that work apart from the EU official channels. Many projects exist that do not benefit from EU funds, or that are not initiated through EU programmes. 19 European countries have a diplomatic representation in Tunis. Bilateral connections are still strong in Tunisia. As Tunisia is linked amongst other countries to France, Germany, Italy and Belgium, the interviewees can thus compare EU multilateralism and bilateralism.

In general, compared with EU programmes, bilateral cooperation is less difficult, but there are less resources available. Bilateral agreements are easier in terms of suggesting programs and achieving them.

The interviewees note a lack of coordination between European countries themselves in the field, and between European countries and EU. They also stress what they perceive as a problem of leadership between the main countries carrying the European project (especially France and Germany).

Apart from the European countries, the **USA** is very active in the field of science and innovation. USAid work more in a logic of gift. There is more proximity, and the cooperation is “tailored-made”. Working with the American Development office in Tunis is said easier and quicker. The Middle-East Programme Initiative (MEPI) is appreciated for its flexibility regarding the choice of the research topics and areas.

On the other hand, some say that there is no real integrated plan on the American part, and that USAid concentrates the efforts on punctual and isolated actions, according to what some call a “one-shot strategy”.

Some interviewees mention the growing influence of Turkey (especially dynamic in opening language centres), and China.

3.4 Reservations about EU mechanism and views

Although all the interviewees express great enthusiasm about cooperating with Europe, they also express some reservations, leading to some recommendations.

First of all, some interviewees have reported some **internal problems** within the Tunisian administration impeding somehow the cooperation and burdening scientific research. Were mentioned locks for the fund management. They deplore insufficient links between universities and the MHESR, the general lack of information about EU programmes. The up-bottom information system does not properly work. The international services within universities are not effective enough. Not enough personnel knows about the European procedures in Tunisia, and only the persons knowing the European tricks and levers can access the projects.

Secondly, **criticisms** were addressed to the EU.

Of course, heavy and long European procedures have been reported. This is somewhat a cliché, but that is often based on the reality of perception. Some have said having been discouraged to apply to projects because primarily of that. So, some are reassured and impressed by the EU procedures, and, at the same time, some others are deterred by the length of the application process and by the degree of precision required.

Common values do indeed exist between Tunisia and the EU. However, a certain lack of reciprocity in the relationship is felt sometimes. Some interviewees see an opposition between the theoretical recognition of the countries' equal status on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the practical recognition they aspire to. They denounce the gap between a highly abstract right and its concrete application for small partner-countries. Most interviewees express the wish that Tunisia could truly become a full partner in the EU projects, and not only the passive beneficiary of the programmes. In this respect, they think that the EU could do better in terms of effective solidarity.

The interviewees are sensitive about the fact that the partner has not the last word. Tunisia is involved rather last minute in some project, like the "last wagon" attached to an existing project, as if a Southern partner was needed only to complete a pre-existing consortium (composed beforehand by European bodies). This feeling could even sometime lead to the idea of being under a moral trusteeship, as if the opinion makers were some sorts of directors of conscience. Some deplore that there are not enough studies about the real needs of Tunisia, and that priorities are decided in Brussels. It is somewhat a criticism addressed to the way the composition of consortia is pre-determined and at the same time both formal and rigid. Europe is also said to spend a lot of money on some projects, and to be quite mean on other aspects. Some call the EU "myopic" about certain realities, and point at the discrepancy between face-value European ideals and the bare reality on the field.

Europe would tend to perpetuate a colonial relationship, with a paradoxical excess of toleration towards certain Tunisia dysfunctions – which is resented as a condescendence for structural weakness or development delays. For some, "transparency" and "good governance" are not conceived as universal concepts, and are thus not fully accepted as always transferable to the context of their allies. For instance, the importance of gender equity has been called too systematic sometimes. In this perspective, the EU should take a more sociological approach in the application of its values – that is to say a more progressive approach. Progress will be made step by step.

Regarding the mobility between Tunisia and Europe, some interviewees used very strong metaphors. They say for example that the Berlin wall has been replaced by the Schengen space, acting like a new "iron curtain" of the Mediterranean. These people accuse the "hypocrisy" of EU discourse on mobility and freedom.

Have also been expressed a certain reluctance towards European soft power, and worries of a EU "hidden agenda". They say that science should not be taken for politics and administration, and that institutions should serve research and innovation, not the other way around.

For the record, have been mentioned once: an ideological reservation towards European projects including Israel; EU obsession with Islam; the lack of involvement and dedication of EU local staff delivering aid and information; the feeling that project leaders are European and benefit most of the funds.

3.5 Recommendations regarding the organisation of the cooperation

In line with the above criticisms, interviewees have suggested some ideas they see fit to improve the cooperation between Tunisia and the EU.

Remarks are formulated about the **application** procedures. Some see the need to proportionate the difficulty of the application procedure to the amount of the funds, in order not to discourage applicants. In general, there is a demand for facilitating, minimising, simplifying the procedures of project application and evaluation process.

As a response to the plea expressed for a more central place given to the Southern partners of the EU in the relationship, it seems paramount to co-construct the research projects together. The call for

proposals should implicate the partners from the very beginning of the process, the conception of the programmes. There is a need for a common platform of conception of Euro-Mediterranean projects, in which all the partners are on the same level to decide the priority sectors. This could even lead to the idea of a Southern Europe, and of a network of MENA countries.

More specifically, more funds could be targeted to smaller punctual projects. Some interviewees stress the need to improve the relevance of the projects relatively to the context of their implementation.

Regarding the *mobility* of researchers, all agree on the need to facilitating it – and not restraining it. However, some insist on the need to encourage mobility from North to South, in order to “un-park” the Tunisian students, who feel somewhat trapped in higher education without any clear prospect (apart from the high unemployment rate), as well as locked-up within their national frontiers (by European visa policies). Encouraging both-directions mobility is also a good way of avoiding the “brain drain” effect. Mobility grants should not be seen as “legal vessels” to flee the country so to say. Mobility grants for students could sometime have a dispiriting effect on those who do not get one.

Some advices are directed to the European services in the country. The *EU delegation* should limit the number of European representatives too often “parachuted” in a local context that they do not know enough. The EU delegation should employ more local employees, and organise more info days around the country. In any case should the EU add its bureaucracy to the long-existing Tunisian bureaucracy.

Locally, there is also a need for decentralisation, and for a better coordination between MHESR and research centres in order to disseminate the information.

3.6 Recommendations regarding priority fields

Some interviewees have the impression that projects relating to civil society (local governance, environment, civic participation) receive nowadays more interest and more funds than culture and science. Even though problematics like the fight against corruption and good governance are not restricted to the political and economic areas, but could be relevant in the academic world.

Regarding the research fields, many stress the importance of funding also projects in human and social sciences. As humanities, cultural heritage and inter-culturality are very topical domains in the Tunisian society, and could be connecting topic between Tunisia and Europe.

As the Mediterranean is now littered with corpses – as one interviewee reminded us –, the thematic of mobility and migrations (diaspora) is of course very important nowadays. Projects should include reflections upon the concept of “plural histories”, and take the minorities in Tunisia as a proper topic. The study of Antiquity (especially Greek and Roman) has almost no place in the Tunisian research for the moment. Yet it is the foundation both of Europe and of the Euro-Mediterranean itself. The study of classics could be the basis for a new modernity, common to North and South. It would be a bridge between European and Oriental cultures. There was a debate at the Tunisian Parliament about the Mediterranean identity of the country (that was to be inscribed in the Tunisian Constitution).

Some interviewees expressed the wish to be able to develop certain projects in cooperation with the EU in the near future. Amongst the topics mentioned: the implementation of quality assurance and certification in higher education; the study of mining regions in Tunisia (Gafsa and Metlaoui) and Euro-Mediterranean from different angles: science and technology, cultural heritage and social history.

Was also mentioned the idea of launching Euro-Mediterranean prizes for literature, scientific research and innovation.

4. Conclusions

The way the survey was implemented, in Tunis, but also in Bizerte, Sousse, Siliana, Sidi Bouzid and Gafsa allows to have a general national sample, as well as regional samples. All things considered (on the basis of these 150 samples), we can first of all underline – or verify – some geographical discrepancies. Even though there is a general unanimity on major trends (especially the clear conscience of an existing connection between Tunisia and Europe), there are also some diverging views (on the role of women in science for example). People interviewed for the survey in Tunis and Sousse share more or less the same point of view on European affairs, but people from the inner regions have sometime some more reservations or less clear ideas on the topic. Is it due to the implementation of an important European project around the Bizerte Lake? Anyhow, people in Bizerte seem well aware of EU's programmes, and of their foreseeable benefits for the country.

The survey was also the opportunity to become aware of a generation gap on some questions, and of a certain form of pessimism of young generations. The most obvious example of that is the gender issue. We are faced with a paradox. On the one hand, the situation of women in science is thought to be better in Tunisia than in the EU. On the other hand, and at the same time, some amongst the younger people interviewed for the survey expressed very traditional views about the domestic role of women being challenged by scientific activities. As people having known the first Tunisian Republic (55-65 years old) are really enthusiastic about women being fully part of the development process of the country, some young men (last year of secondary school or undergraduates) seem to hold more conservative views about the gender issue, in the inner regions as well as – to a lesser degree though – in the capital.

Also expressed sometimes – in the survey – is the opinion that the EU is somewhat holding back an effective transfer of technologies in order not to have to face new competition with Southern countries. At the same time, most of the interviewees showed a real sense of pride of being part of Horizon 2020. A paradoxical conclusion in a sense, that maybe points toward a difference of views between the general population and the experts.

About the author



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