

Joint Declaration on the occasion of the EU-Tunisia Association Council of 11 May 2017

Joint Statement by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Malta, George Vella, on behalf of the EU High Representative and by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Tunisia, Khemaies Jhinaoui, following the EU-Tunisia Association Council

The thirteenth session of the Association Council of the European Union and Tunisia took place in Brussels on 11 May 2017. The session was co-chaired by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Malta, George VELLA, whose country holds the rotating Presidency of the Council of the European Union, on behalf of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy / Vice-President of the Commission, and by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tunisia, Mr. Khemaies Jhinaoui. Mr. Johannes Hahn, European Commissioner for Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, also participated in the session.

The session provided an opportunity to review the development of relations between Tunisia and the EU within the framework of the Privileged Partnership. These relations have gained new momentum, as demonstrated by President Essebsi's visit to Brussels on 1 December 2016, the first visit at the highest level by a Tunisian President to the European institutions.

In this regard, the two parties noted with satisfaction the progress achieved since the 12th session of the EU-Tunisia Association Council (Luxembourg, 18 April 2016) in terms of the implementation of the Privileged Partnership Action Plan for 2013-2017. They welcomed the positive momentum that characterises relations between Tunisia and the European Union, and stressed their commitment to reinforcing this partnership further and to opening up new opportunities, duly respecting the principle of a differentiated approach contained in the revised European Neighbourhood Policy.

The European side, which welcomed the unprecedented nature of the Tunisian democratic experience, renewed its resolute commitment to continue to support the process of reforms undertaken by the Tunisian authorities with a view to ensuring the effective implementation of the Constitution and the socio-economic development of the country. The recent adoption of the Five-Year Development Plan 2016-2020 and the progress made in the reform process will make it possible, in particular, to anchor the interventions of the Tunisian public authorities and their international partners, including the EU, within a new targeted and coherent programming framework.

The Association Council was also an opportunity to have an exchange of views at high level on regional issues of common interest, in particular the situation in Libya. In this regard, the EU welcomed Tunisia's important role

in seeking a resolution to the Libyan conflict, and in particular supported the initiative launched by His Excellency the President of the Republic of Tunisia for a comprehensive and inclusive political solution to the Libyan crisis.

The two sides noted with satisfaction the marked improvement in the security situation in Tunisia, in particular due to the perseverance of the national security forces. Stabilisation of the security situation will allow the gradual resumption of economic activity, especially in the tourism sector. In this regard, Tunisia noted with satisfaction the changes made by a number of European to their country's travel advice concerning Tunisia.

Aware of the challenges posed by the transnational threat of terrorism, the European Union and Tunisia emphasised the progress achieved in their bilateral cooperation in the field of security and the fight against terrorism. In this context, the 2nd session of the High-Level Dialogue on Security in Brussels on 19 January 2017 reflected and their shared will to intensify cooperation in this field while promoting full respect for the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The two partners stressed the importance of the forthcoming local elections in Tunisia, scheduled for 17 December 2017. The EU expressed its readiness to deploy an election observation mission, as it had done for the elections of 2011 and 2014. This proposal was welcomed by the Tunisian side, who stated that the preparation, supervision and monitoring of elections were the exclusive responsibility of the Independent High Authority for Elections (ISIE).

The European side reiterated the importance it attaches to its cooperation with Tunisia, its Privileged Partner. The Joint Communication of the EU High Representative and the European Commission of 29 September 2016 'Strengthening EU support for Tunisia', as well as the Council Conclusions of 17 October 2016, confirm the commitment of the EU and its Member States to that effect.

The Tunisian side, which noted with satisfaction the effort made by the European side in elaborating this Communication, views this document as a good starting point for giving new impetus to EU-Tunisia cooperation and further strengthening bilateral relations. The European side highlighted the success and positive momentum of the 'Tunisia 2020 International Conference' of 29 and 30 November 2016.

Tunisia expressed its appreciation for the EU's decision to increase the bilateral financial aid envelope for 2017 under the European Neighbourhood Instrument to EUR 300 million, and to maintain an equivalent level of funding for the period 2018-2020. The two sides welcomed the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding and the loan agreement for the granting of a second Macro-Financial Assistance (MFA) operation amounting to EUR 500 million to Tunisia on 27 April 2017. Once the conditions are met, this MFA will support Tunisia, in part, with its pressing external financing needs, in the consolidation of the internal reform process, and in strengthening the resilience of the national economy. In the same context, Tunisia and the EU

stressed the need to consolidate European financial support to Tunisia and underlined the desirability for Tunisia to make the best use of the resources of the next European External Investment Plan, which aims to support private investment and strengthen employment opportunities.

The two sides held an exchange of views on the future framework of relations between Tunisia and the EU which will replace the Action Plan for a Privileged Partnership (2013-2017). In this respect Tunisia reiterated its determination to make significant progress in its relations with the European Union and to advance them in order to reinforce its anchoring in the European socio-economic space, as well as to reflect the Tunisian priorities defined in the five-year development plan 2016-2020. Tunisia believes that this is an opportune time to engage in a common broader and deeper reflection with the European side so as to define a new political horizon for Tunisian-European relations. There is a need today for this partnership to evolve in order to bring it into step with Tunisia's democratic consolidation and achievements.

The two sides agreed on the importance of making progress in identifying a new framework for the future EU-Tunisia Partnership to replace the current Action Plan, to define priorities that reflect the scale and the depth of our privileged relations, and to meet their ambitions for the future in respect of the principle a differentiated approach as provided for in the revised European Neighbourhood Policy.

Noting the opportunities and challenges posed by migration, the European Union and Tunisia reiterated their wish to define together a common vision for the proper management of migration flows within their Mobility Partnership. To this end, both sides welcome the opportunity posed by the week of dialogue on migration and mobility last October, which helped to deepen the dialogue on all issues related to migration and to launch the negotiations for an agreement on visa facilitation and the negotiations for an agreement on readmission.

The 13th session of the Association Council provided an opportunity to identify concrete bilateral actions in the priority areas of youth and of economic development:

Youth Partnership

As part of the implementation of the 'EU-Tunisia Youth Partnership' initiative launched on 1 December 2016, the two parties agreed on priority themes such as: youth employability; education in the wider sense; the participation of young people in public and political life and the strengthening of links between young Tunisians and Europeans. The activities that could be developed include EU support for the preparation and implementation of the Tunisian integrated youth strategy by 2030, greater dialogue between European and Tunisian youth, and the identification of new measures, also taking into account the multidimensional strategic vision recently elaborated by the Tunisian side. On the occasion of the launching of this partnership, the EU had already committed to making full use of the opportunities under the Erasmus + programme for Tunisia, in particular so as

to ensure the mobility of 1,500 students, teachers and young people annually until 2020.

Partnership for Growth

In an enhanced effort to promote trade and investment and with the aim of supporting the Tunisian government's efforts for its economic transition, the two sides discussed the main thrusts of the 'Partnership for Growth' announced in the Joint EU Communication on 'Strengthening EU support for Tunisia', exchanging views inter alia on:

- a high level EU economic mission to Tunisia;
- the organisation of business forums on priority issues for the Tunisian economy with the involvement of the European businesses community;
- a structured dialogue on the various sectors of economic activity, with the first session of this dialogue potentially concerning the textile and clothing sector.

The two sides also pledged to strengthen their economic and trade relations and reaffirmed their commitment to continuing negotiations on a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA). In this context, Tunisia requested that the EU implement the exceptional measures set out in the Joint Communication that are aimed at boosting Tunisian exports and guaranteeing better access to the European market.

The two sides also noted with satisfaction the strengthening of cooperation between Tunisia and the European Parliament and remain committed to further deepening this cooperation. This is also achieved by strengthening parliamentary relations. The two sides welcomed the important speech of His Excellency the President of the Republic of Tunisia in a formal sitting of the European Parliament on 1 December 2016 and the organisation of the Tunisian parliamentary week from 2 to 4 May 2017. The variety of topics covered during the week clearly highlighted the depth of the partnership.

In the margins of the Association Council's work, the two parties signed:

- an agreement on Tunisia's participation in the European programme to support the cultural and creative sectors entitled 'Creative Europe'. This programme will enable Tunisia's cultural and audio-visual actors to network and cooperate with their counterparts on the other side of the Mediterranean. It will thus help to strengthen the role played by culture in socio-economic integration and will help bring our societies closer together;
- a financial Convention for the 'Integrated Local Development Pilot Initiative'. With a grant of EUR 60 million, this initiative aims to support the government's efforts in the decentralisation process aimed at reducing inequalities in regional development.