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European Union and the External Dimension of Security: Supporting Tunisia as a Model in Counter-Terrorism Cooperation

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CONTENTS

European Union and the External Dimension of Security: Supporting Tunisia as a Model in Counter-Terrorism Cooperation

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Introduction

North Africa is experiencing the emergence of various Jihadist groups that are proving to be highly capable of and effective in capitalising regional instability and advancing their political programmes and military operations at the expense of the on-going post-Arab uprisings political transition. Accordingly, Jihadist threats should be considered as one of the multiple symptoms rather than the cause of the contemporary Mediterranean and Middle East instability and disorder. Therefore, not only do Jihadist groups raise security-related issues but their progress also highlights the need to develop a comprehensive political response capable of assessing all the factors of this on-going regional instability. Indeed, it is necessary to pursue a longer-term effort aimed at mitigating the root causes driving people toward extremism, and integrating military and security operations with policies aimed at promoting and sustaining socio-political development, equality and inclusiveness. North African states, in particular Tunisia, need such a shift in their security and counter-terrorism policies, especially regarding the urgency to develop new approaches and comprehensive responses. The Tunisian case is indeed one of the most interesting and useful to study, both in terms of adaptation of a transitional regime to a new counter-terrorism strategy and of the influence that the EU could exert on the development of new policies in the security sector of a third country. Concerted and collective EU level actions are indispensable in order to achieve this shared objective. EU commitment to such issues is not new, although it has not been effective so far.

Firstly, the paper reconsiders EU counter-terrorism strategy, its priorities and rationale, in order to point out how the EU and its neighbourhood have traditionally dealt with violent extremist groups, highlighting achievements and shortcomings. Secondly, the paper focuses on the EU's recent development in its counter-terrorism strategy and how EU countries and Tunisia are responding to such threats. In order to better address the issue, the case study of Tunisia will be analysed. The paper proposes some suggestions in order to develop a broader positive agenda that the EU and regional stakeholders can pursue together in order to overcome these violent extremism threats.

Framing the Threat

Since the 1990s, radical militant Islamism proved to be a complex phenomenon, able to learn, update, adapt and develop tactics and strategies according to the distinct socio-political conditions of each theatre of operation – domestic or international. While preserving a certain internal ideological coherence, contemporary Jihadism has changed and developed over the years. It progressively extended its area of activity. Firstly, it moved from the local dimension pervading the global sphere under the banner of al-Qaeda. More recently, albeit without abandoning the international domain, it returned to its primary local focus, exploiting the recurrent crises of recent years, as demonstrated by al-Qaeda in the Maghreb, the Arabian Peninsula and Iraq. At the same time, contemporary Jihadism has reconsidered its overall role and mission, experimenting with forms of territorial control. The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant's (ISIS) approach within Iraq and Syria should not be considered a total innovation, but the most sophisticated and ambitious fulfilment of such a trend, somehow in open competition with the traditional al-Qaedist internationalist paradigm.

On the other hand, the militant Islamist struggle proved its capacity to endure and revive, notwithstanding failures and defeats, spreading its message through a congeries of different individuals with distinct socio-cultural and economic backgrounds as well as geographical and national origins.

Indeed, while the radical Islamist threat was becoming local and global at the same time, this struggle mutated, shaping the outline and profile of a complex galaxy of people, groups and networks variously interconnected and regionally distributed but equally committed to the same objectives, ideology and mottos. A struggle that sought to impose a totalitarian "state of mind" and existential choice, as the ISIS motto of "there is no life without Jihad" sought to propagandise. In this framework, the West remained the "far enemy", to be defeated and hit within the different frontlines around the world and inside its borders. At the same time, the progressive anchorage to specific territorial contexts strengthened the rhetoric of the "near enemy", targeting any individual who did not comply with the canons of Jihadist orthodoxy and orthopraxis as well as its narrative, by radicalising the meaning of *takfir* and going through a sectarian conflict. This last aspect was particularly stressed by Abu Musab al-Zarqawy and its al-Qaeda group in Iraq and it represented one relevant element on which its heir ISIS founded its ideology and strategy.

At the same time, the perception of the Jihadist menace and its character, especially from a European perspective, has profoundly changed. While after 9/11 the extra-European dimension and Afghanistan were the frontlines of confronting terrorism, since

the invasion of Iraq and more clearly since the so-called Arab Spring the menace has progressively moved closer to Europe, repositioning and seeking to consolidate in North Africa too. Moreover, with the attacks in Madrid (2004) and London (2005), Europe entered the Jihadist sphere and its internal debate not just as one of a number of different and possible targets for terrorist operations but as the ideal operating theatre. Europe was described as the underbelly of the West where it could have been easier to develop networks and foster recruitment. Accordingly, it was Abu Musab al-Suri in 2004 who first proposed revising the traditional strategic modus operandi of al-Qaeda, promoting a more bottom-up approach and recalling the importance of conquering the hearts and minds of the European second and third generations, exploiting and manipulating the weaknesses of the European Union construction and the internal socio-political contradictions of its member states. It was not by chance that since then Europe has been increasingly presented with the challenge of home-grown terrorists, proving that radical militant Islamist struggle was neither a top-down phenomenon supervised by a single and unique hidden base, al-Qaeda, nor a solely external threat fighting in remote battlefields.

In this framework, the Arab Spring had a paradoxical effect. Its dynamics destabilised entire states and fuelled geopolitical and geo-economic competition, both at the regional and international level. It was precisely through the exploitation and manipulation of this phase of instability that Jihadist organisations found an unexpected chance not just to revive but to further develop, experimenting with more sophisticated and ambitious forms of militancy. The rise of ISIS, currently known as the Islamic State (IS) after self-proclaiming a caliphate in Mosul during summer 2014, shed new light and raised further questions about this evolving dynamic. IS no longer presents itself only under the rhetoric of the global Jihadist struggle according to al-Qaeda's paradigm, nor solely as an insurrectional movement, but now also claims statehood under its immediate and unique authority as well presenting itself as a sort of totalitarian cultural framework through which to judge the entire contemporary society, its lifestyle, ethics and morality, concretely practising its alternative within the territories it controls. Moreover, the capacity of this group to impose itself military and politically within the Syrian-Iraqi context, developing a form of proto-state system, further enriched the complexity of the contemporary Jihadist galaxy. In fact, IS overcame the image of the "patchwork" of self-radicalising groups with various international contacts and interactions, presenting itself both as a leading and inspirational authority and the homeland where all Muslims should reside and support the Jihadist struggle. In the medium-long term, this new narrative has proven attractive for a new generation of disenfranchised and marginalised citizens all over the Arab and Muslim world. Together with IS's ideological penetration into the Arab countries, its

physical expansion through the creation of new affiliated cells has helped make it a more effective threat to the stability of the North African region too. Tunisia represents a clear example of this dynamic: even in a context of democratic transition, the Jihadist message has been able to exploit the grievances of those who felt excluded (for different reasons) from the transition. At the same time, it has been able to penetrate the country from neighbouring Libya, where a new hotbed of regional Jihad has been created in the context of the chaos generated by Gaddafi's fall and the subsequent internal conflict.

Against this background, the EU progressively tried to develop its counter-terrorism architecture. Although it never intended to replace member states' efforts, the EU sought to complement national endeavours, strengthening existing instruments and developing collaboration. In this regard, the EU has progressively overcome its initial understanding of terrorism as an undoubtedly and primarily external threat, recognising the centrality of the concept of radicalisation facing the home-grown terrorist phenomenon. At the same time, the EU has constantly sought to develop the international dimension of counter-terrorism, with an increasing emphasis on the need to provide aid to specific targeted countries from which major concerns stem. Both dimensions raised multiple questions on the maintenance of the EU acquis and the effectiveness of the EU aid policy, especially within the Mediterranean area. In this framework, Tunisia is a relevant case study. Tunisia is, in fact, the most promising country that seems able to exit from the recent Arab uprisings developing a more inclusive, open and democratic political system. At the same time, it is a country that has been harshly targeted by terrorist operations and it is the main provider of foreign fighters worldwide, both in absolute and relative terms. Moreover, it has traditionally not developed a well-structured and effective counter-terrorism strategy, as during the previous decades it had not experienced a real and continuous terrorist threat, as was the case of Algeria, for example. Therefore, it represents an important field in order to reconsider how the EU counter-terrorism international dimensions and its policy of aid and support are interacting and overlapping in this period of transformation, trying to preserve a balanced and sustainable relationship between the need to advance and support the development of a mature and democratic concept of polity while, at same time, assuring and granting security to its citizens, avoiding the risk of securitisation.

EU Counter-Terrorism Strategy and its Development: An Overview

Since the beginning of the 20th century, many European states have experienced various forms of terrorism, although before 9/11 only France and Belgium had faced operations perpetrated by radical militant Islamist groups. Indeed, although terrorism progressively entered the sphere of the EU integration process (the first European organised platform on terrorism, radicalism, extremism and violence dates back to 1976 with the creation of TREVI), this phenomenon has been generally understood as intrinsically part of each state domain rather than as an issue to be shared within the EU schema. This perspective did not drastically change either with the Schengen Agreement (1985) or with the Maastricht Treaty of 1992, notwithstanding the creation of the Europol Agency and the inclusion of terrorism in its mandate (1999) and Eurojust (1999), as well as after the Lisbon Treaty (2007) (Coolsaet, 2010, p. 862).

In this framework, the 9/11 attacks, followed by those of Madrid (2004) and London (2005), could be considered important watersheds. The attacks on US territory represented a decisive shock, imposing on the wider public the existence of al-Qaeda and triggering a controversial phase of international activism with the war in Afghanistan and Iraq. These attacks boosted existing EU cooperation. Accordingly, a few weeks after 9/11 the EU Council adopted an Action Plan on Combating Terrorism, where it recognised the need to "play a greater part in the efforts of the international community to prevent and stabilise regional conflicts" and reaffirming the need to solve the Middle East conflict in close cooperation with the United States, the Russian Federation and partners in the Arab and Muslim world (European Council, 2001, p. 3). In this framework, in 2003 the EU Council adopted the European Union Security Strategy, under the title "A Secure Europe in a Better World", ranking terrorism as the first menace to Europe and world security. The Internal Security Strategy also confirmed this approach in 2010. Moreover, the 2003 European Union Security Strategy introduced another important element, recognising Jihadism as a direct menace to EU internal security and underlining the EU as both a "target and a base" of the post 9/11 terrorist activities (Monar, 2015, p. 336).

Accordingly, the EU recognised the need to enhance a common strategic vision and called for preventive engagement, also through multilateralism, to avoid new conflicts, highlighting a specific concern for the situation within the Balkans, Southern Caucasus, and the Mediterranean (Council of the European Union, 2003). Therefore, during this period, the EU took the first steps to shape and build a European counter-terrorism strategy, fostering cooperation within the EU dimension and calling for a more proactive and cooperative approach with third countries. Nevertheless, this aim did not sensibly transfer on the operational level, still proving the need for the EU to

increase efforts and commitment in order to be recognised as a relevant actor within this sphere.

The attacks in Madrid and London favoured further developments toward the definition of a comprehensive commitment, introducing a greater emphasis on the need to share information between member states, increasing coordination and fostering a holistic and comprehensive approach to the phenomenon. These events proved the validity of some of the previous analyses, especially regarding the concentration of terrorist activities within Europe given the fact that both operations were prepared entirely within its borders. In fact, this event – along with that of London – imposed on the EU the reality of home-grown terrorists, namely radicalised citizens who were born in Europe. Indeed, these attacks represented a decisive boost for enhancing cooperation, turning the spotlights on issues related to the recruitment of individuals into terrorist groups and the root causes of terrorism. The 2005 EU counter-terrorism strategy (Brussels, 30 November 2005) sought to recognise such concerns concentrating on four objectives: "Prevent", "Protect", "Pursue" and "Respond", clearly resounding the UK strategy. Accordingly, the 2005 Strategy for Combating Radicalisation and Recruitment to Terrorism sought to develop a more holistic approach to tackle terrorism, embracing both individual and network dimensions as well as promoting inclusiveness and equal opportunities in order to counter extremism.

The 2005 EU strategy adopted a multidimensional concept of counter-terrorism, recognising the complex evolving path of this phenomenon. At the same time, the results of this new commitment drastically varied according to the distinct interests of the actors involved. On the one hand, in the field of "Protect", where the European Commission was the leading actor, and "Pursue", where the need for cross-border cooperation was strongly perceived by all member states, the strategy produced significant results. On the other, in the third pillar, "Respond", the national interests tended to supersede EU action, while "Prevent" slowly developed because of the complexity of building an agreement on the root causes. The passage from the perspective of "recruitment" to that of "radicalisation", in particularly "self-radicalisation" and "self-recruitment", may be considered one of the most important steps of this phase of the debate. Of course, the London bombings of 2005 were determinant in suggesting such development and favoured the redefinition of the "Prevent" pillar as the first of the four strategic objectives.

Clearly, the emphasis on "prevention" and "radicalisation" favoured the development of the EU counter-terrorism multidimensional approach, although a definition of

radicalisation and its functioning remain controversial, especially in their connection with violence. In fact, radicalisation implicitly overlaps and intertwines a number of distinct socio-political dimensions, embracing issues related to integration, representation and social cohesion. Moreover, it involves civil authorities and organisations within the realm of security, with the risk of securitising social policies and reducing rights to be constitutionally protected, such as free speech, reducing the legitimacy and the authority of such actors within their respective sphere and field of action. At the same time, although avoiding a culturist approach, the definition of what we considered "radicalisation", its root causes and consequential implication remained dramatically important also under the perspective of EU cooperation with third countries in order to avoid manipulation and exploitation of such a concept to advance securitising policies, curbing the progress of socio-political rights as well as civil society activities. On this basis, the establishment of a public and honest dialogue between all the actors interested and involved, not just under the perspective of security and hard power, should be further developed to sustain a better mutual understanding and fine tuning of the policy making.

In this framework, the emergence of IS, the attacks against France, Belgium, Denmark and Germany and the emergence of new Jihadist cells among other European countries represented further watersheds. On the one hand, differently from al-Qaeda, IS showed itself even more resolute to directly target Europe both as field of recruitment and a military object. On the other, the fact that EU citizens were the perpetrators of these terrorist attacks and they have travelled back and forth between Europe, North Africa, Syria and Yemen, strengthened the need to rethink counter-terrorism and de-radicalisation policies both within the EU and in its external dimension. This former aspect is particularly strategic and it is fully recognised in the 2015 European Agenda on Security. Accordingly, the EU recognised the importance of maximising the "value of existing policy dialogues on security" as a strategic resource to achieve the three main EU priorities, namely responding to terrorism and foreign fighters, confronting serious and organised cross-border crime and, finally, combating cybercrime.

Actually, although since 9/11 the EU has proved its willingness to achieve visibility, presence and recognition of its role within the counter-terrorism domain, member states have resisted relinquishing competences and deepening cooperation and sharing intelligence among themselves. In particular, this situation results in a dual tension between, on the one hand, sovereignty and security and, on the other, the need for cooperation to tackle a phenomenon intrinsically transnational and the principle of subsidiary (Argomaniz, Bures, & Kaunert, 2014, p. 196). Accordingly, this has limited the EU's capacity to influence and impose its role on member states in counter-terrorism,

especially in its external efforts and regarding cooperation with third countries. In conclusion, traditionally there has been a widely shared and agreed opinion of the need for the EU's greater role in assisting member states in monitoring and preventing cross-border terrorist activities within and beyond Europe (Keohane, 2007, p. 126). Nevertheless, specifically, member states interpreted the role of the EU in this field more as a discussion platform than relying on it for informal and horizontal cooperation (Bossong, 2014, p. 71). Moreover, EU governments still prefer to pursue their relationships with third countries on the basis of their traditional diplomatic ties and outside the EU institutional and policy framework, inevitably weakening and limiting its role and status within the international dimension (Keohane, 2007, p. 129).

The EU's Approach to Counter-Terrorism in North Africa

The analysis of cooperation between the EU and Southern Mediterranean Countries in matters of counter-terrorism inevitably implies reconsidering some of the most relevant issues related to the wider dimension of the Union's foreign policies. This is particularly important in order to highlight the role and capability of the EU to act within this sphere, especially considering the realm of counter-terrorism. In fact, the dimension of counter-terrorism remains strictly bound to bilateralism and the traditional role of the states. This condition is still difficult to overcome although most governments recognise that contemporary terrorism phenomena and networks are widely transnational and global, requiring a strategy that can tackle them on this level and through multilateral cooperation, this strongly involving an actor such as the EU.

In this framework, two aspects seem deserving of particular attention. On the one hand, the EU's external role has been widely discussed according to the concept of "actorness", highlighting its function and capabilities to act effectively within the international and global dimension. The EU would have achieved such stability by occupying the three precise fields of "opportunities", "presence" and "capability" (Argomaniz, Bures, & Kaunert, 2014, p. 199). Specifically, the EU has developed counter-terrorism initiatives on different levels and within distinct fields, encouraging third countries to sign up to UN conventions, promoting dialogues on countering terrorism and offering assistance (Keohane, 2007, p. 140). Regarding the EU and terrorism in Africa, since 2005 the EU has formally included counter-terrorism clauses, revising the Cotonou Agreement (first signed in 2000) with Africa, the Caribbean and Pacific Group States, although it has shown clear difficulty in translating them into concrete projects and initiatives. Of equal importance, in 2008 an EU Delegation was established for the African Union, confirming the EU's strong interest in curtailing the influx of refugees as well as combating terrorism and trafficking, as emerges in the Common Security and Defence Policy of the Union (Rein, 2015, pp. 118-119).

On the other hand, it is important to reconsider the evolution of the EU's legal framework regarding mechanisms and instruments as well as its competence in these issues. Accordingly, while the Treaty of Amsterdam (1999) first recognised the EU's capacity to act externally in matters of justice and home affairs, the Treaty of Lisbon (2009) introduced important innovations because it formally enabled the EU to negotiate and conclude agreements with third countries, although within the limits of procedures and competence foreseen in the treaty as well as according to the intergovernmental dimension (Monar, 2015, p. 339). At the same time, it overcame the "pillars" structure, merging police and juridical cooperation within the same Title V. This has been particularly relevant for external counter-terrorism matters, favouring a more comprehensive

approach. The EU external counter-terrorism policies are perceived through the role and initiatives of specific actors and instruments. Accordingly, the decision to appoint a Counter-Terrorism Coordinator (CTC) in 2004 was an important as well as symbolic innovation. It clearly expressed the EU's willingness to introduce some possible remedies to its past shortcoming, exposed during the attacks in Madrid. This is still an ambition today. Indeed, the CTC's responsibility is to foster better communication between the EU and third countries as well as ensuring and sustaining the EU's active role in fighting against terrorism (Mackenzie, Bures, Kaunert, & Léonard, 2013, p. 326). At the same time, the Instrument for Stability, used for instance in Pakistan and in the Sahel region of Africa, represents a concrete resource for supporting the EU CTCs in counter-terrorism matters. However, the real function of the EU CTC has been that of monitoring and representing the EU's counter-terrorism international dimension.

Of course, the EU CTC is not the only actor involved in these matters. In fact, Europol and Eurojust have become progressively relevant, albeit secondary actors (Monar, 2015, p. 344) capable of fostering cooperation and assuring assistance with third countries.

Focusing now on the Mediterranean context, the EU counter-terrorism activities did not just develop within the above dimensions but also merged within the wider sphere of EU external policies in its neighbourhood. Since December 1973 the European Community has tried to promote cooperation with the Arab League through the Euro-Arab Dialogue (Kaunert & Léonard, 2011, p. 140). However, it was the 1995 Barcelona Conference that contributed to explicitly integrating counter-terrorism issues within the Euro-Mediterranean cooperation framework. In fact, the Barcelona Declaration openly recognised "fighting terrorism […] a priority for all the parties" calling for "strengthening cooperation in preventing and combating terrorism" by different means. Therefore, since 1995 the issue of terrorism has steadily grown in importance both in EU-Mediterranean statements and EU related documents (Kaunert & Léonard, 2011, p. 290). However, concrete cooperation between the two shores has remained limited and fluctuant. Between 2003 and 2004, the EU took a series of important decisions in the field of counter-terrorism. As seen above, in 2003 it adopted the European Security Strategy and in 2004 it supported the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), aimed at promoting a more systematic approach towards common security threats in the EU neighbourhood within the framework of the Barcelona Process (MacKenzie, Kaunert, & Léonard, 2013, p. 138). Thanks to the ENP, the cooperation between the EU and each neighbourhood country should have been developed bilaterally through the instrument of the Association Agreements. However, reconsidering such documents, only Egypt and Algeria planned clauses on counter-terrorism that, nevertheless, were very limited and vague in their

specific content. With the case of Morocco, the 2005 ENP Action Plan formally planned negotiation between this country and Morocco, "including actions on combating terrorism." Indeed, since the 1990s the EU's concern regarding terrorism steadily scaled up although this did not correspond to an equal capacity to develop effective and tangible cooperation with its neighbourhood. This also seems to be confirmed reconsidering the different cooperation projects with Maghreb countries launched by both Europol and Eurojust, which frequently suffered from a modest budget, lack of details of how to implement cooperation and, finally, the limited appeal of their multilateral nature (MacKenzie, Kaunert, & Léonard, 2013, p. 142).

Therefore, the Union's cooperation initiatives with Southern Mediterranean Countries have traditionally presented two interconnected ambiguities. On the one hand, it has been generally influenced by the EU's internal security agenda, instead of resulting from consideration related to the common foreign and security policy of the Union (Monar, 2015, p. 336). On the other, it frequently overlapped and intertwined with activities dedicated to delivering development assistance and promoting democracy. Accordingly, these have partially hampered the coherent development of EU external politics within the area, fostering securitising policies and stoking tension between short and long-term objects of the EU strategy in the neighbourhood.

The result has been paradoxical. On the one hand, for many years, the EU strove to find an acceptable balance between its security concerns and the need to deal with authoritarian regimes as well as financing credible democracy promotion initiatives, as frequently recalled in its documents. On the other hand, counter-terrorism cooperation between the EU and its Southern Mediterranean Countries has never developed as much as rhetorically believed (MacKenzie, Kaunert, & Léonard, 2013, p. 137). Therefore, this has created the perception that counter-terrorism and security issues were dominant in the EU's policies towards its neighbourhood, although such predominance and concern never transferred to effective and consistent concrete results in this field, or at least equal to such rhetoric. Moreover, this has provided a sort of constant external legitimisation of the authoritarian regime and its securitising agenda, undermining and reducing the influence and credibility of many EU policies aimed at promoting democracy. This issue represents one of the main contradictions in the approach of the European Union – both as an institution and at the level of its member countries – towards the Southern Mediterranean Countries. Before and after the Arab Spring, the EU has traditionally prioritised short-term stability over democratic reforms. This has resulted in an engagement with authoritarian regimes that has contributed to postponing the actual solutions to terrorism and radicalisation, by resorting to and justifying the short-term

counter-terrorism measures adopted by the North Africa regimes. While, in fact, it was clear that the authoritarian nature of regimes such as the Egyptian or the Tunisian were among the most relevant root causes of radicalisation (given the constant pressure that they exerted on the Islamist and, in general, opposition movements and the violent reaction that these movements resorted to against the institutions), the EU preferred not to create possible new tensions by criticising and de-legitimising these regimes. In doing so, at the same time the EU has accidentally strengthened the North African regimes, contributed to the emergence of new forms of radicalisation and, finally, lost credibility among the public in these third countries, who were disenchanted about the possibility that the European pressures could eventually lead to more inclusive and democratic processes. Moreover, there were other obstacles to the creation of a more structured, effective and shared counter-terrorism strategy between the EU and North African regimes. The latter have always been reluctant to cooperate with the EU on this issue for internal reasons. Moreover, the methods by which these countries preferred to combat terrorism have historically relied heavily on the military and repression, so preventing EU institutions from overtly providing them with support and creating new cooperation mechanisms.

In this framework, the Arab uprisings between 2010 and 2011 did not help to overcome some of the most important ambiguities of the past. Although the 2011 Joint Communication "A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood. A Review of European Neighbourhood Policy" again acknowledged the importance and necessity of fostering cooperation in counter-terrorism with neighbourhood countries, the EU directed its agenda toward social and economic as well as reform policies, also considered valid instruments to fight radicalisation. It was exactly through this association that the issue of securitisation re-emerged. Moreover, this was coupled with the diminished interest of neighbourhood countries affected by the Arab Spring in counter-terrorism cooperation, limiting developments in this field and blurring the frontiers between politics and security (MacKenzie, Kaunert, & Léonard, 2013, p. 149). Therefore, during this crucial phase of updating, revising and further developing the EU strategy towards the Mediterranean, this situation did not allow some of the traditional obstacles of counter-terrorism cooperation to be directly overcome. This is particularly true in the case of those related to a preference for bilateralism, lack of institutional capacity in those countries and, finally and more importantly, divergent interpretations of the instruments and methodology of counter-terrorism, with the EU more focused on intelligence and Med-countries on military means, as just underlined (MacKenzie, Kaunert, & Léonard, 2013, p. 148).

On 9 February 2015, in the aftermath of the first in a wave of Paris attacks, the EU Council reviewed its strategy proposing new solutions on counter-terrorism, based

essentially on conducting targeted and upgraded security and counter-terrorism dialogues with some countries, such as Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Morocco, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and the Gulf Cooperation Council. Furthermore, the strategy is aimed at strengthening political dialogue with the League of Arab States, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the African Union and other relevant regional coordination structures, such as the G5 Sahel. During the same period, the EU also proposed a revision of it neighbourhood policy, showing a clear interest in overcoming some of the traditional obstacles that undermined cooperation within this sphere. Parallel to the traditional recognition of the impact of extremism and terrorism, especially across North Africa and the Middle East, the communication directly expresses the EU's full willingness to develop "a new focus […] on security sector reform, conflict prevention, counter-terrorism and anti-radicalisation policies, in full compliance with international human rights law" (European Commission, 2015, p. 3). Accordingly, the new ENP directly defines as a priority "tackling terrorism and preventing radicalisation; disrupting serious and organised cross-border crime and corruption; improving judicial cooperation in criminal matters, and fighting cybercrime" (European Commission, 2015, p. 12). In fact, it ranked such issues in second place, highlighting that "cooperation could include security sector reform, border protection, tackling terrorism and radicalisation, and crisis management" (European Commission, 2015, p. 12). What seems particularly important is that this document sought to define priorities and targeted initiatives related to security in a dedicated section, diminishing past ambiguities. Particular relevance was given to Security Sector Reform. This should be considered an important development in order to improve the accountability of the authorities that deal with security and, at the same time, it may help reduce past divergences regarding the modus operandi and the perception in confronting terrorism. Nevertheless, this new agenda seems still strongly and deeply bound to the EU's internal concept of security and counter-terrorism, as the frequent direct and indirect reference to the European Security Agenda seems to confirm. In fact, the reference to the importance of the Common Security and Defence Policy seems aimed at recognising its role as a forum of exchange and capacity building, instead of being considered a strategic focus to also orient EU action in its cooperation with third countries in its neighbourhood.

Finally, it is still worth mentioning that two other obstacles have characterised the difficulties for the EU and the Western actors to build an effective shared counter-terrorism strategy with the North African countries. Firstly, a clear asymmetry remains in terms of common security systems between the two shores of the Mediterranean basin. Although over the last decades European integration has grown, even among relevant difficulties, on the other side of the Mediterranean a chronic institutional security vacuum

appears to persist and little progress has been made towards the establishment of common security and political mechanisms. The visions and interests of each actor tend to prevail over a shared security strategy and this problem does exist in Europe too. Indeed, while it is true that the EU has created a common institutional framework, cooperation among its member states has been limited (above all in the sensitive sector of information sharing). Only after the terrorist attacks against European countries of 2015-2016 have the member states been trying to overcome this obstacle. Therefore, it is clear that identifying and providing an EU-Southern Mediterranean joint policy while at the internal level – both in Europe and in the North African region – there is still a lack of cooperation, is a thorny challenge. Secondly, any attempt to set up a common security mechanism across the two shores of the Mediterranean has always been characterised by a North-South approach (and generally, a North-guided one). However, it is in fact along the South-South axis that the greatest threats to security are found, so again the lack of South-South cooperation constitutes a real barrier to the development of any effective counter-terrorism strategy for the region. Over the last decades, all the efforts made to move towards the construction of a common security architecture – such as the NATO Mediterranean Dialogue and the so-called "5+5 Defence Initiative" – have not fully succeeded in solving the crises from which instability arises, as the Southern countries failed not only in cooperating with the Northern ones, but even with each other.

Tunisia and the Emergence of Jihadism

Tunisia represents one of the most sensitive cases when facing the issue of the EU's action in cooperation with third countries in the field of counter-terrorism. This is true especially if we take into consideration the North African region in the post-Arab Spring context. Indeed, firstly, Tunisia is the country in which radicalisation and terrorism have spread most clearly. It is the country that provided most foreign fighters not only in the North African region but also the entire world with 5-6,000 Tunisians going to Iraq, Syria and Libya since 2012 to fight among the ranks of Jihadist groups there (The Soufan Group, 2015). Secondly, Tunisian borders, both westward (with Algeria) and eastward (with Libya) are extremely porous, resulting in criminal trans-border activities that constantly put the security of Tunisia at risk as well as the entire region, with repercussions on European security too (Kartas, 2013; International Crisis Group, 2013). This proved clear in the case of the terrorist attack in Berlin on 19 December 2016, when Anis Amri, a Tunisian citizen, killed 12 people in a lorry attack in a Christmas market. Other cases involving Tunisian citizens have been the Nice attack on 14 July, when Tunisian-born Mohamed Lahouaiej-Bouhlel killed 84 people, as well as the arrests in Italy between 2015 and 2017, involving Tunisian cells linked with Jihadist groups. Finally, historically Tunisia did not develop proper counter-terrorism strategy and equipment, resulting in a lack of preparedness when the first episodes of terrorism begun to occur in 2013 (Torelli, 2013). For European action, this makes Tunisia a country to sustain and cooperate with in the field of counter-terrorism. Moreover, the fact that Tunisia is experiencing a political transitional process from an authoritarian regime could facilitate and boost cooperation, whereas this is still difficult in the cases of Algeria and Egypt. However, this is not to say that European action in Tunisia is easy and without obstacles. The country is still in a delicate phase of transition and it presents some contradictory factors, such as the risk of the security forces to revert to pre-2011 practices, which included human rights abuses, corruption and excessive force (Amnesty International, 2017). At the same time, Tunisian institutions have tried to face the terrorist threat by adopting a new organic law in 2015, reforming its security sector and cooperating with neighbouring countries as well as with Western partners. These efforts have also had contradictory domestic factors, as there is a lack of institutional capacity for counter-terrorism operations and the new institutional architecture provided with the Constitution approved in 2014 was not clear about the responsibilities of the government and of the President of the Republic in the field of national security (International Crisis Group, 2016). The European Union has to face these problems in order to actually sustain Tunisia. Against this background, it has tried to be a model for Tunisian counter-terrorism policies and to influence the Tunisian government in establishing the priorities of its security strategy.

In order to better frame the cooperation between the EU and Tunisia on counter-terrorism, it is necessary to briefly overview the previous experiences of the country and identify

the challenges it is facing in the current context. As was the case in Europe, Tunisia took steps to enact a new counter-terrorism law in 2003, in the wake of the 9/11 attacks and the domestic terrorist bombing on 22 April 2002 against the synagogue of the island of Djerba, which killed 19 people, among them 16 Western tourists from Germany and France. The 2003 law was considered highly detrimental to civil and political rights (Human Rights Watch, 2011). It gave a very broad definition of terrorism, which also led to arrests and trials of peace activists and opponents of the regime. After the Arab Spring, between 2012 and 2013, a first wave of terrorist incidents occurred on the border with Algeria, especially in the region of Jebel Chaambi. The country found itself needing to adopt new instruments to prevent and combat terrorism. In this period, the political stalemate and the divergence of views within the Tunisian party system about the responsibilities of terrorism limited legislative action to the point that, until the summer of 2015, the 2003 law continued to be in force. The process of revision has accelerated since the terrorist attacks against the Bardo Museum (March 2015) and Sousse (June 2015), which brought civil society to demand greater guarantees of security, and the international community to support Tunisia in its efforts (Matar, 2015).

Tunisia has faced several challenges during this review process. First, there was the need to move from a security-driven approach to one that also includes socioeconomic initiatives, as well as de-radicalisation programmes, through a law that does not criminalise religion itself, but terrorism. Secondly, the Tunisian government had to find a way to ensure citizens' security without questioning the fundamental principles of the rule of law. Finally, it had to acquire the necessary credibility to gain the trust of citizens and the involvement of external partners in joint counter-terrorism programmes. Before the approval of the new counter-terrorism law, the Tunisian authorities have been facing the terrorist threat by resorting to Ben 'Ali's methods. In August 2013, Tunis declared the Salafist movement Ansar al-Shari'a in Tunisia (AST) a terrorist organisation and decided to repress Islamic radicalism or Salafism, rather than to implement de-radicalisation programmes or address the social, political and economic root causes of radicalisation (Petré, 2015). Summary arrests, torture in prison, trials without legal guarantees and killings have arbitrarily hit hundreds of Salafist individuals, not always connected to the terrorist incidents occurring in the area of the Jebel Chaambi. However, in the long run, the elimination of AST from the social scene has produced a further radicalisation of individuals. Moreover, since 2012 a radicalisation process has begun, caused by the poor socioeconomic conditions of the country (especially in western and central regions), as well as by the frustration of thousands of young people who, after having actively contributed to the fall of Ben 'Ali, found themselves marginalised again from the "new" Tunisian

political activity.[1] Against this background, the law passed by the Tunisian parliament in July 2015 presents a number of critical unresolved issues when compared to that of 2003. There are no special measures of de-radicalisation, the definition of terrorism is still very ambiguous and it could potentially allow authorities to suppress a number of internationally protected freedoms. The legislation has tried to adapt itself to the new threat, for example by introducing a series of counter-terrorism measures aimed at addressing radicalisation through the Internet. However, it could excessively restrict freedom of expression. In addition, the death penalty (on which since 1991 Tunisia has maintained a moratorium) is contemplated again and pre-charge incommunicado detention for up to 15 days will be allowed.[2]

1 For a detailed report on the social and economic root causes of the radicalisation in Tunisia, see Packer, G. (2016, March 28). Exporting Jihad. *The New Yorker.*

2 The full text of the counter-terrorism law approved by the Tunisian Parliament on July 2015 can be found in French here: http://www.legislation-securite.tn/fr/node/34061.

Marginalisation as a Driver of Radicalisation

In line with the new European approach to counter-terrorism, appropriate development policies and de-radicalisation programmes and reintegration of radicalised individuals should accompany security measures. In Tunisia, the root causes of radicalisation are to be found in the different levels of marginalisation that affect the population, especially in the more remote areas (Fahmi & Meddeb, 2015). This exclusion is social, but also political, economic and cultural. Socially and economically, Tunisia suffers from severe regional disparities. The eastern coastal areas are historically the most developed and it is here that most internal and external investments are concentrated. The centre-western regions have much lower levels of socioeconomic development. This resulted in a disadvantage compared to urban and eastern areas, in high levels of poverty and illiteracy and in unemployment rates significantly higher than the national average. Unemployment (or underemployment) is one of the major structural problems for the country, not only in the most disadvantaged region.[3] This factor especially concerns unemployment of young graduates, to the point that a special union for unemployed graduates has been created. Indeed, youths are not able to find job opportunities in a labour market that does not adequately meet the needs of the demand side. This kind of socioeconomic marginalisation is a major incentive to radicalisation. In fact, the lack of prospects and the frustration of young people may result in the choice to join the Jihadist groups in reaction to a system perceived as too distant from the real problems of the population. A similar dynamic occurs in the case of political marginalisation. The perception among the younger population is that of a "betrayal" by the Tunisian political class of the ideals that triggered the riots of 2010-2011. In particular, according to a widespread view, whereas the revolts were spontaneously pushed by civil society and by thousands of young people who demanded a change, the management of the political transition has been completely in the hands of the old party elite (Boubekeur, 2016, pp. 107-127). In this way, youths began to lose interest in and move away from politics. This is clearly demonstrated by the low participation in the parliamentary elections of 2014, where only 20% of voters between 18 and 29 actually voted. The result is the exclusion of a whole generation from decision-making processes. Faced with this situation, many young people suffer from the government decisions, without feeling truly represented. It has been in this context that dozens of Tunisians have gone through a process of radicalisation that led them to become potential Jihadists. Finally, as mentioned above, cultural marginalisation by institutions against those who flaunt their belonging to the Muslim faith has produced a climate of repression that threatens to further contribute to the radicalisation of young Islamists, rather than trying to integrate them into the system.

3 A detailed report on the persistent socioeconomic difficulties in Tunisia is in World Bank Group (2014, May). *The Unfinished Revolution: Bringing opportunity, good jobs and greater wealth to all Tunisians.*

Enflamed Borders:
Local Policies vs. Centralised System

At the local level, the counter-terrorism policies based solely on the security approach and not accompanied by appropriate interventions at the social and economic substrate have even proved counterproductive. A prime example in this regard is that of Ben Guerdane, a small town 30 km from the border with Libya. Traditionally, Ben Guerdane has been the epicentre of the informal economy on the border between Tunisia and Libya.[4] Most of the local population lives thanks to the trafficking of smuggled goods with Libya (a list of goods, such as petrol, is heavily subsidised in Libya and so it is cost-effective to buy them there and then to export them illegally in Tunisia). In 2015, after the attacks in Bardo and Sousse, whose perpetrators had been directly trained in Libya, the Tunisian authorities decided to take restrictive measures to prevent the transfer of weapons and of aspiring Jihadists between Libya and Tunisia. The government closed the border crossings with Libya and in February 2016 it completed the construction of a 200 km long protective fence along the border, from Ben Guerdane to the southern town of Dhiba. However, this choice has not been accompanied by measures aimed at enhancing the local socioeconomic conditions. Therefore, suddenly, the local population has been deprived of the largest source of revenue (albeit illegal) while the central authorities have implemented no alternative programmes in order to provide the population with viable alternatives to the informal economy. Paradoxically, this policy aimed at limiting the effects of terrorism has been potentially counterproductive. Therefore, part of the local population considered the central government responsible for the worsening of their social and economic conditions due to the closure of the borders with Libya. In the medium term, this kind of state intervention has led to the radicalisation of the local community, who then turned against the institutions themselves. On 7 March 2016, a commando formed by at least 50 Tunisian Jihadists returned from Libya attempted a real armed assault on the city of Ben Guerdane. Jihadists attacked the local police station and some security forces officers, hitting them directly in their private homes. This last factor made it clear that the attackers had collaborators in the field, reflecting the sense of contrast between locals and central authorities (Torelli, 2016).

In this regard, the Tunisian case gives us another hint about the counter-terrorism policies and de-radicalisation. Traditionally, in implementing counter-terrorism strategies with third countries, Europe and the Western actors favoured a direct relationship with the central authorities of the state, believing that the best strategy to equip a third country with effective tools in the fight against terrorism was to strengthen the central authorities. In contrast, the case of Tunisia epitomised by the events of Ben Guerdane and Kasserine (a small town on the border with Algeria that became a hotbed of Jihadism) shows how often the underlying problem lies precisely in the low power of the local authorities. In this sense, the best strategy to be pursued may be the one in the direction of greater decentralisation of administrative powers.

4 Among the studies focused on the problem of illegal trade across Tunisia's borders, see International Crisis Group (2013, November 28). Tunisia's Borders: Jihadism and Contraband. *Middle East and North Africa Report,* 148; Ayadi, L., Benjamin, N., Benassi, S., & Raballand, G. (2013, December). Estimating Informal Trade across Tunisia's Land Borders. *The World Bank Policy Research Working Papers,* 6731; Kartas, M. (2013). On the Edge? Trafficking and Insecurity at the Tunisian-Libyan Border. *Small Arms Survey.* Geneva: Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies.

De-radicalisation Programmes:
A (Still Unheard) Suggestion from Tunisia

As previously stated, on the one hand, in addition to focusing the response to terrorism on security and repressive policies, state intervention is needed aimed at addressing the socioeconomic problems that are the basis of radicalisation. On the other hand, de-radicalisation programmes should be implemented. These programmes can prevent acts of violence and re-integrate the radicalised people who decide to collaborate with the institutions. In promoting such policies, direct involvement of civil society is also required. An example of this is provided by the Rescue Association of Tunisians Trapped Abroad (RATTA), founded in 2014 with the aim of raising the awareness of institutions about the phenomenon of widespread radicalisation and of the departure of thousands of young people to Syria, Iraq and Libya.

The RATTA brings together more than 200 families of foreign fighters and promotes recovery programmes for Tunisians who have returned to their country after having directly experienced Jihad abroad. Among the other activities promoted by the association, one interesting project is related to the study of possible programmes of de-radicalisation of foreign fighters who return to Tunisia and of radicalised people who were prevented from leaving the country. According to data provided by the Tunisian authorities and RATTA itself, the phenomenon concerns several thousand young Tunisians: 800 have returned to Tunisia from the Jihad front and more than 12,000 have been halted before leaving for Syria or Iraq.[5]

The de-radicalisation programme proposed by RATTA is based on the identification of five different levels of radicalisation reached by the individual. At the highest level there are those deemed as "very dangerous", who have committed terrorist acts and have killed people. On the next level, there are those who have already received training but have not committed terrorist acts. At the third level, there are those who have been indoctrinated but have not yet received training, nor have carried out terrorist acts. These three categories of people should be kept within the de-radicalisation centres, where they will follow a programme leading to their gradual reintegration into society. The last two levels, on the other hand, concern those who show early signs of radicalisation, but still have not been indoctrinated enough. Among them, those who are in a more advanced stage of the process of radicalisation could be released during the day and work for the community, while remaining within the de-radicalisation centres. Finally, there are those that only required a signature (conditional freedom) and must undergo periodic psychological visits.

Although RATTA is currently just a proposal, such an approach moves right in the direction recommended by European institutions, and is also attentive to de-

5 This data and the following suggestions on de-radicalisation programmes are based on the interview that the author conducted with the President of RATTA in Tunis, February 2016.

radicalisation. Despite a greater presence of RATTA and of its founder and president Mohammed Ben Iqbel Rejeb in the media, the association criticises the Tunisian institutions. Indeed, their proposals have not yet been taken into account and the authorities have so far paid very little attention to the RATTA campaign. In contrast, the Tunisian approach is still very focused on traditional counter-terrorism strategies and pays attention to the security dimension, rather than extending the response to the social and political field. This is confirmed by the fact that, since 2012, the budget allocated to the Ministry of Defence has doubled and has risen at higher rates than that of the Interior Ministry, traditionally the most favoured by state funding on security (through the police apparatus).[6]

6 Data on the budget allocated for the Ministry of Defence can be found in Grewal, Sh. (February, 2016). A Quiet Revolution: The Tunisian Military after Ben Ali. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Middle East Center.*

The EU's Role in Sustaining Tunisian Efforts

Against this background, the aim of this paper is to analyse whether and to what extent the EU institutions could provide support to Tunisia in order to help it to overcome its internal difficulties and to outline an effective counter-terrorism strategy. This should be a primary goal of the European Union, as Tunisian success in providing security to its citizens and combating radicalisation and terrorism are strictly correlated with the security of the entire Mediterranean region. It was in this framework and under these preconditions that, for the first time, in September 2015 high level political dialogue on security and counter-terrorism took place between Tunisia and the European Union in Tunis. The EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator Gilles de Kerchove met with the then-Tunisian Prime Minister Habib Essid to discuss the steps to take in order to improve cooperation. They agreed on the relevance of the border control and on the need to dispose new measures in order to prevent radicalisation. Particular emphasis has been put by the EU on the need to keep together the fight against terrorism and respect for basic human rights and democratic standards. Moreover, the security sector reform has been identified as an essential step to move forward for Tunisia, as well as the need to involve all the social, economic and cultural ministries in a more comprehensive counter-terrorism and counter-radicalisation strategy, not to rely solely on military means (International Crisis Group, 2015). In terms of cooperation, the so-called G7+3 group (including the members of G7, Belgium, Spain and the European Union) has been identified as a new mechanism for cooperation. This has constituted a relevant innovation and within this framework the stakeholders organised a cooperation process along 3 lines: border security, tourism infrastructure and countering violent extremism. Moreover, this framework will provide a platform for sharing information, understanding Tunisian priorities and coordinating foreign aid. From the material point of view, in September 2015 the EU decided to allocate €23 million to sustain the reform of the security sector in Tunisia. In November 2016, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini went to Tunis and after a meeting with the new Prime Minister Yussef al-Shahed announced a further €300 million of financial support to be allocated in 2017. Part of this package is directed to counter-terrorism measures, including initiatives in the fields of education, research and industry. In this way, the EU again has shown the way for a more complete policy action aimed at addressing the root causes of radicalisation. Finally, in January 2017 the second high-level political dialogue on security and counter-terrorism between Tunisia and the EU was held in Tunis, renewing their cooperation. On this occasion, a tripartite consultation meeting with representatives of civil society had been held on 13 January 2017, as planned under the first dialogue in September 2015.

Therefore, the EU's action in sustaining Tunisian counter-terrorism efforts goes beyond the military and security aspect and focuses on political and (albeit to a lesser extent)

economic support. The European role has to be seen above all to guarantee a new Tunisian approach to counter-terrorism on the three main goals: outlining a comprehensive strategy, preventing radicalisation and respecting human rights. Under these preconditions, it is worth mentioning that the new strategic document developed by the national commission against terrorism created under the previous Prime Minister Habib Essid in March 2016 (which, however, has still to be published) exactly follows the EU's 2005 security strategy. Indeed, it outlined a strategy based on four pillars: prevention, protection, prosecution and response. The influence of the 2005 EU counter-terrorism document is evident. It seems that, in a constructivist process, Tunisia is following the European model, where the EU is an example to follow and, at the same time, the EU's role could help Tunisia to overcome the bureaucratic resistance to cross-ministerial coordination and planning. The European Union is continuing to push for reforms and the adoption of a new approach, as reiterated in the Report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs on the EU relations with Tunisia in the current regional context[7] (July 2016). In the document, the EU recognises that poverty and social exclusion are among the major causes of radicalisation and it calls for a joint response on the terrorism threat and for a structured reform of the security sector. However, it expresses concern about several provisions of Law 22/2015 and it stresses that this could seriously infringe civil liberties and undermine respect for human rights in Tunisia.

While the EU is trying to play this advisory and exemplifying role, cooperation on specific military and technical issues is left to bilateral relations of Tunisia with single member states. This kind of cooperation intensified especially after the two terrorist attacks of 2015. In 2016, Germany donated € 1.7 million for equipment including bomb suits, bomb disposal robots, trace explosives detection equipment and 30 off-road vehicles. Moreover, Berlin has undertaken the responsibility for the construction of the electronic monitoring system at the Libyan border and, together with the Italian government, it established a joint German-Italian training operation involving both Tunisian security forces and Libyan forces in Tunisia. In October 2016, the UK government sent troops to Tunisia within the framework of a cooperation programme on the borders patrol. France is one of the main security partners for Tunisia. In 2016 the French Minister of Defence Jean-Yves Le Drian outlined a project by which Paris would sell equipment and arms to Tunisia through the United Arab Emirates. This kind of transfer had been made by France to deliver arms to Lebanon through Saudi Arabia and it was code-named DONAS (DON Arabie Saoudite, or Saudi Arabian donation).

7 The full version of the text is available here: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+REPORT+A8-2016-0249+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN

Conclusions:
Policy Options for More Effective EU-Tunisia Cooperation on Security

The European Union could play an important role in supporting Tunisian counter-terrorism policies. On the other hand, Tunisia represents a crucial tile in the complex mosaic of the European security system. As the paper stated, security is no longer an internal issue but Europe also has to handle the external dimensions of its security concerns in order to effectively combat terrorism and radicalisation. In this perspective, Tunisia is, at the same time, a potential source of instability given the high number of radicalised people that has grown within it and the porosity of its borders, but also a good partner to work and cooperate with, given its relatively successful story of a once-authoritarian regime gradually transitioning to democracy. Therefore, it is in the interest of both the EU and Tunisia to cooperate in the field of security. Nonetheless, this is not an easy task and the path towards full and effective cooperation is full of obstacles. Some of them concern the traditional difficulties of the EU itself in defining a common security policy, while others concern the complexity of a transitional system like the Tunisian one and the regional constraints caused by the enduring conflicts and the persistence of authoritarian regimes. Against this background, there are some recommendation both for the EU and for Tunisia in order to make cooperation more effective and address the unsolved root causes of radicalisation and terrorism:

• Security Sector: Reform is the Key

EU representatives have insisted on the importance of reforming the security sector in Tunisia. The army has proved ineffective and unprepared to face the new terrorist threat. This is due to technological, strategic and political reasons. Under Ben 'Ali the army has been relegated to a secondary role when confronted with the police forces. Since 2012 the trend has been reverted, with more resources allocated to the Minister of Defence than to the Minister of the Interior. This has to continue and the EU should financially and practically support this process. Moreover, especially in order to guarantee the security of the border areas, a clear partition of responsibilities is needed between the army and the National Guard. The latter is the branch of security forces appointed to the borders patrol, but it depends on the Minister of the Interior and it complains of a lack of coordination with the army. These kinds of obstacles should be overcome.

• The Four Pillars: Focus on Prevention

The new Tunisian strategy on counter-terrorism reflects the European one. This is a good example of how the EU could serve as a model to be followed by Tunisia. Nonetheless, in the actual Tunisian strategy, too little attention is paid to prevention. The EU should continue to push for reforms in the social, cultural and economic fields in order to remove the possible causes of discontent that could be exploited by the fundamentalist forces in order to recruit new members against the institutional system.

• Finding a Balance between Security and Human Rights

For years, the EU has maintained strong relations with authoritarian regimes in exchange for stability and security. In the long term, this has proved to be a myopic choice, as authoritarian dynamics have contributed to raising internal tensions and to further radicalise the opposition. This is also true in the current Tunisian context. Although some improvements have been made, the emergence of Jihadist forces pushed the Tunisian authorities – also under pressure from public opinion – to implement new measures that could be detrimental to human rights. A report published by Amnesty International in 2017 shows several cases in which security forces committed abuses and violence against suspected people. These kinds of activities do not comply with European standards, resulting both in the impossibility for Europe to provide support to Tunisian counter-terrorism efforts and in the risk of creating new tensions with the population.

• Returning Jihadist: How to Handle the Dilemma

So far, about 800 Tunisian foreign fighters have returned to Tunisia. The phenomenon has reached a huge dimension and the authorities are struggling to address the uneasy task to cope with this problem, which could potentially undermine the Tunisian process of political transition. While prisons are overwhelmed and could become a further place of radicalisation, some political parties and the security forces unions proposed not allowing Tunisian extremists abroad to come back to the country, even by stripping them of citizenship. While the debate is still ongoing, specific improvements have to be made in the legislation regulating the repatriation of Tunisians who committed crimes in a third country. An EU-Tunisian agreement should regulate the issue, and bilateral agreements by Tunisia and member states should be implemented.

• Institutionalise the Regular Meeting Mechanism

The regular meeting mechanism launched with the G7+3, then G7+6 (with the Netherlands, Switzerland and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, UNODC), is an example of how the EU could serve as a platform to discuss counter-terrorism policies in third countries. These kinds of activities should continue and they should be expanded to other sectors related to counter-terrorism and counter-radicalisation.

• The South-South Cooperation

One of the greatest difficulties in building an effective shared security architecture in the Mediterranean region has traditionally been the reluctance of the Southern actors to cooperate, as well as the imposition of a “Northern” model that has often proposed solutions based on a North-South approach. In contrast, a cooperation mechanism involving South-South relations should be promoted in order to better tackle terrorism and

radicalisation in the area. One example is the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP), an initiative promoted by the United States in 2005 aimed at enhancing the capacities of governments in the Pan-Sahel region of Africa (Mauritania, Mali, Chad, Burkina Faso and Niger, as well as Nigeria and Senegal) to confront terrorism and at facilitating cooperation between the Pan-Sahel countries and Maghreb partners (Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia) in combating terrorism. Since 2013, Tunisia and Algeria have improved their bilateral cooperation in sectors like military-to-military cooperation and information sharing. In May 2016, the Tunisian government launched a counter-terrorism cooperation programme with Morocco too. The South-South cooperation is crucial in establishing a relationship of mutual trust and EU institutions should encourage it.

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EuroMeSCo

Comprising 106 institutes from 32 European and South Mediterranean countries, the EuroMeSCo (Euro-Mediterranean Study Commission) network was created in 1996 for the joint and coordinated strengthening of research and debate on politics and security in the Mediterranean. These were considered essential aspects for the achievement of the objectives of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.

EuroMeSCo aims to be a leading forum for the study of Euro-Mediterranean affairs, functioning as a source of analytical expertise. The objectives of the network are to become an instrument for its members to facilitate exchanges, joint initiatives and research activities; to consolidate its influence in policy-making and Euro-Mediterranean policies; and to disseminate the research activities of its institutes amongst specialists on Euro-Mediterranean relations, governments and international organisations.

The EuroMeSCo work plan includes a research programme with four publication lines (EuroMeSCo Joint Policy Studies, EuroMeSCo Papers, EuroMeSCo Briefs and EuroMeSCo Reports), as well as a series of seminars, workshops and presentations on the changing political dynamics of the Mediterranean region. It also includes the organisation of an annual conference and the development of web-based resources to disseminate the work of its institutes and stimulate debate on Euro-Mediterranean affairs.

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