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Germany and the Maghreb Countries after the Arab Unrests: New Times, New Dynamics

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The Arab unrests, sparked by the Tunisian revolution in January 2011, have not only drawn the interest of German foreign policy makers for the MENA region, but also of numerous institutions and organisations, as well as prompting new perceptions among the German public opinion and media. This is particularly true for the Maghreb region, and especially for Tunisia, which has been the focus of attention since 2011. Although economic relations have been important for decades and have improved over time, political and societal ties have, on the other hand, been somewhat weak. In the Libyan crisis, Germany did not participate in the military intervention that led to the fall of the Gaddafi regime in 2011, but did give support through the provision of humanitarian aid, medical care for the wounded, and contributions to the reconstruction process. With Algeria, relations have been strengthened and reinforced by Foreign Minister Westerwelle's visit to Algiers in January 2012, and a counter visit by the Algerian Foreign Minister Mourad Medelci in March 2013. With Morocco, relations are close and particularly intensive in the fields of development cooperation, the environment, climate change and economic and renewable energy cooperation.

Like that of other EU Member States, German foreign policy intends to combine and fuse national and European interests. However, in the Maghreb region it is less motivated by geostrategic or political (security) interests, than it is by economic ones.

With regard to concrete measures, the federal government allocated an additional 100 million euros for the time period 2012-2013 for the transformation process in North Africa.¹ The goal is to help counter-balance the socio-economic challenges that all Maghreb countries are currently facing, in one way or another, such as high (youth) unemployment rates, unstable economic situations following the unrests, and the impact of the global financial and economic crisis or increases in food prices.

Getting Closer – Bilateral German-Maghreb Cooperation

Political Dimension

The upheavals encountered numerous positive reactions in German politics. A rapid institutional response was the creation of "transformation partnerships with Tunisia and Egypt" (partly also valid for Jordan, Morocco and Libya) by the Foreign Office in 2011. Their objective is to foster democratic transformation, as well as improve the economic and social situation. In addition, there was a restructuring process of the involved work units in the Foreign Office. This included the appointment of a representative of the German Foreign Minister for the Arab World and a bilateral working group of the Tunisian and German foreign ministries was established, which meets twice a year and is responsible for evaluating the progress of common projects. Besides increased diplomatic activities of the Federal Chancellery and different ministries, the parliamentary committee for German relations with the Maghreb

¹ www.auswaertiges-amt.de/DE/Aussenpolitik/RegionaleSchwerpunkte/NaherMittlererOsten/Umbrueche-TSP/Transformationspartnerschaft-TUN -node.html (11 May 2013).

countries, also became more active in the wake of the Arab Spring.

Relations between Tunisia and Germany have been stepped up through numerous reciprocal visits since 2011, including several visits by the German Minister of Foreign Affairs to Tunisia (February 2011, January 2012 and March 2013), who signed a “Common Declaration” on 9 January 2012 with Rafik Abdelsalam (Ennahda), the then Tunisian Minister of Foreign Affairs, paving the way to numerous German-Tunisian cooperation projects in the fields of democracy, rule of law, media, civil society, professional training, education, and cultural cooperation.² For the time period 2012-2013, about 60 million euros have been allocated to Tunisia. In March 2012, Hamadi Jebali (Ennahda), the then Tunisian Prime Minister, visited Berlin, followed by the Tunisian President Moncef Marzouki in March 2013. In March 2012, Chancellor Angela Merkel and Hamadi Jebali concluded the introduction of “Governmental Consultations” – an upgrading of the diplomatic relations and a first for German-Maghreb relations. On the basis of these consultations, transformation, security and energy partnerships are being implemented.

The first official governmental consultations between Tunisian and German State Secretaries took place on 12 September 2012 in Berlin, building the basis for deepened German-Tunisian cooperation. Besides the Chancellery, up to nine different ministries (foreign affairs, finance, education and research, development etc.) are involved. The objective is to discuss the ongoing reform process in Tunisia and further cooperation possibilities, particularly with regard to the private economy, support for Tunisia’s integration into the world economy, and the implementation of the EU’s “privileged partnership.” Germany’s support for the Tunisian reform process is bound to the respect of certain principles defined in the Common Declaration (liberal democracy on the basis of the universal values as defined in the UN Charter, republican values of alternation, rule of law, a new constitution, free elections, civil society participation) as

well as the ENP principle of positive conditionality (“more for more”).

The intensification of bilateral cooperation mainly concerns three areas: (1) education, university cooperation and vocational training; (2) research and innovation, including in the energy sector; (3) good governance, including anti-corruption measures and judicial cooperation. From the perspective of Germany’s foreign policy, Tunisia stands as the pioneer of the Arab Spring, which is why numerous efforts are dedicated to the Tunisian transformation process.

Economic Dimension

In terms of economic relations, the commercial trade balance between Tunisia and Germany is about 2.35 billion euros (exports to Tunisia: 1.13 billion euros, imports from Tunisia: 1.22 billion euros). About 150 German industrial companies and 270 export companies with German capital participation are present in Tunisia, creating and maintaining a significant number of jobs.³

The Tunisian revolution did not cause many German companies to relocate, and the country continues to be considered a positive economic site, mainly due to its qualified local workforce and low wages.⁴ However, international, as well as German, companies fear that the situation regarding the rule of law and transparency of administrative decisions taken by the current Tunisian government might have a negative impact on the investment climate and the general situation for business operations.

In addition, Germany maintains close relations in the energy sector (fossil fuels and renewable energy sources) with Algeria, Libya, Tunisia and Morocco. In the field of renewable energy politics, a new dynamic has been developed with Tunisia and Morocco. In January 2012, an energy partnership was concluded with Tunisia, and in July 2012 with Morocco. The objectives are the development of the renewable energies sector and the political backing of the Desertec Initiative.

² www.auswaertiges-amt.de/cae/servlet/contentblob/625616/publicationFile/171710/120912-Gem-Erklaerung.pdf (11.5.2013).

³ WEIGERT, Maxime. “Les industriels allemands en Tunisie. Précurseurs d’un nouveau modèle de coopération Nord-Sud?,” *Palimpsestes*, no. 12, Paris: IPEMED, 2012.

⁴ Survey organised by the Deutsch-Tunesische Industrie- und Handelskammer (AHK) (ed.): *Les entreprises exportatrices allemandes en Tunisie, situation et perspectives*, 2011/2012. Tunis: AHK.

German tourism in the Maghreb countries, especially in Tunisia and Morocco, is also an important economic factor (about 520,000 German tourists travel to Tunisia per year, for example), although, in the wake of the Tunisian revolution, this sector has dramatically decreased.

Cultural and Social Dimension

The introduction of the transformation partnerships led to a multiplication of German-Tunisian (and German-Egyptian) cooperation projects, coordinated by the leading organisations traditionally active in these fields, such as the GIZ, the Goethe Institute, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and political foundations.⁵ These projects include, for instance, shared Master programmes, conferences and training programmes, and there are also plans for the creation of a technical German University in Tunis (following the example of the technical German University in Cairo).

The presence and activities of German political foundations in the Maghreb countries have also increased. The Friedrich Naumann Foundation and the Heinrich Böll Foundation, for example, opened new offices in Tunisia, along with the DAAD organisation. Further civil society projects, organised by twin towns, bilateral friendship associations, NGOs, women, or youth associations underwent new dynamics. All these projects have contributed to increasing mobility (although limited to selected professional groups and individuals) and cultural exchange between the Maghreb countries and Germany since 2011.

The European Context: Germany in the EU's Mediterranean Policy

The EU remains the major economic and commercial partner for the Maghreb countries. In addition

to the bilateral Free Trade Association Agreements, signed between the EU and all Maghreb countries (except Libya), individual EU Member States have adopted additional bilateral economic agreements with the Maghreb countries. For Tunisia, in recent years, Germany has become its third largest trading partner, behind France and Italy, and its fourth largest investor. Commercial relations have existed for a long time; in the past Germany and Tunisia have signed numerous bilateral agreements. Germany's relations with France regarding the Maghreb region were not always easy, while today, their policies often run parallel.⁶ Although historically German and French relations with the Maghreb are very different, including different forms of actors and networks, or different accents in political strategies, the economic and political interests are similar overall, and both countries are implementing similar cooperation measures.

In order to minimise contingent competition, especially now with Europe going through a major financial and political crisis, the potential of German-French cooperation must be revitalised, not only within the European context, but also in terms of external relations towards the southern and eastern Mediterranean. In terms of multilateral and regional cooperation, after the French-German dissent regarding the Union for the Mediterranean in 2007/2008, and the reintegration of the UfM into the EU context, the UfM could never really diverge politically. At the same time, France is pushing forward a revival of the "5+5 Dialogue." During the last 5+5 Conference in Malta in October 2012, President François Hollande presented his understanding of the UfM as a pragmatic implementation agency of the ENP, and a "Union of projects (in infrastructure)." The 5+5 Dialogue goes almost unnoticed in Germany; a country which continues to support the UfM Secretariat in Barcelona and has been active in existing Euro-Mediterranean programmes and projects for many years.

⁵ www.allemagnepartenaire.tn/Fr/accueil_46_4 (11.5.2013).

⁶ SCHÄFER, Isabel, *Entre idéaux et intérêts: les nouvelles perspectives françaises et allemandes sur le Maghreb. Visions franco-allemandes*, IFRI, no. 22, February 2013.

⁷ EUROPEAN COMMISSION: *Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean. Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions*, COM(2011)200, Brussels, 8 March 2011.

⁸ SCHÄFER, Isabel, "Les politiques euro-méditerranéennes à la lumière du printemps arabe", in: *Mouvements, Dossier spécial, Printemps arabes, Comprendre les révolutions en marche*, Nr. 66, Summer 2011, pp. 118-126.

The EU's "Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean"⁷ (March 2012), also supported by the German government, is, however, just a continuation of the principles and programmes of the ENP and UfM.⁸ From a German perspective, the European character of its Mediterranean policy was always in the foreground, including the intention to implement – via the existing institutional multilateral frameworks (EMP, ENP, UfM) – a common European foreign policy towards third countries in the southern and eastern Mediterranean. Given the fact, that the UfM has not been able to function effectively over the past five years, Germany also intensified its bilateral relations with the region, as did many other EU Member States. Germany also contributed support to the reform process of the ENP, resulting in the "New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood" (May 2011),⁹ announcing more European support in the domains of "money, markets and mobility," individual country approaches and more binding implementation of positive conditionality, which was updated in March 2013.¹⁰

As Germany is one of the most important actors in the EU (on the political, economic and financial levels), it also influences the EU's Mediterranean policies, such as the "privileged partnership" and new ENP Action Plan with Tunisia (Deepened and Com-

prehensive Free Trade Zone), concluded in November 2012, during the EU-Tunisia Association Council. Finally, Germany is also supportive of the Arab Spring in other international fora and institutions, such as the G8 group, IMF, World Bank and EIB, through different aid programmes aimed at supporting the transformation process in the southern and eastern Mediterranean.

Major objectives of Germany's Mediterranean policy remain the economic integration of the Mediterranean area and democracy promotion. Like that of many other EU Member States, German foreign policy constantly meanders between an interest-oriented (exports, energy interests) and value-oriented (respect of rule of law and human rights) foreign policy, and the importance given to international and regional institutions. Multilateral and regional cooperation are understood as complementary, and not contradictory, elements of self-interest in the Mediterranean area.

By supporting and backing the EU's Mediterranean policy, Germany can contribute to addressing current key challenges such as (youth) employment in the Mediterranean region, getting a hold on the financial and economic crisis, and redefining Euro-Mediterranean relations following the Arab unrests, in a constructive and sustainable manner.

⁹ EUROPEAN COMMISSION, *A new response to a changing Neighbourhood. Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions*, COM(2011)303, Brussels, 25 May 2011.

¹⁰ EUROPEAN COMMISSION, *European Neighbourhood Policy: Working towards a Stronger Partnership. Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions*, JOIN (2013) 4 final, Brussels, 20 March 2013.