



Plenary sitting

B8-0255/2016

17.2.2016

MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

to wind up the debate on the statement by the Commission

pursuant to Rule 123(2) of the Rules of Procedure

on the opening of negotiations for an EU-Tunisia Free Trade Agreement
(2015/2791(RSP))

Bernd Lange, Marielle de Sarnez

on behalf of the Committee on International Trade

**European Parliament resolution on the opening of negotiations for an EU-Tunisia Free Trade Agreement
(2015/2791(RSP))**

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the opening on 13 October 2015 of negotiations on an EU-Tunisia Free Trade Agreement,
- having regard to the statements made by Commissioner Malmström on 13 October 2015 in Tunis at the opening of the negotiations on a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement between the EU and Tunisia,
- having regard to the decision of 9 October 2015 to award the 2015 Nobel Peace Prize to the National Dialogue Quartet representing Tunisian civil society,
- having regard to the EU Council conclusions of 20 July 2015 on Tunisia¹,
- having regard to Recommendations No 1/2015 of the EU-Tunisia Association Council of 17 March 2015 on the implementation of the EU-Tunisia Action Plan (2013-2017) implementing the privileged partnership within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy²,
- having regard to Decision No 534/2014/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 May 2015 providing macro-financial assistance to Tunisia, and to the making available of a first instalment on 26 April 2015³,
- having regard to the trade sustainability impact assessments carried out by Ecorys in support of negotiations on a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) between the European Union and Tunisia⁴,
- having regard to the sustainability impact assessment on the Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area, Final Report of the SIA-EMFTA Project, Consultation Draft September 2007, carried out by the Impact Assessment Research Centre Institute for Development Policy and Management, University of Manchester⁵;
- having regard to the Euro-Mediterranean Agreement establishing an association between the European Communities and their Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of Tunisia, of the other part⁶,

¹ Conclusions 11076/15 RELEX 626 of the Council of the European Union of 20 July 2015.

² OJ L 151, 18.6.2015, p. 25.

³ OJ L 151, 21.5.2014, p. 9.

⁴ <http://www.trade-sia.com/tunisia/the-study/?lang=fr>.

⁵ <http://www.sia-trade.org/emfta>.

⁶ OJ L 97, 30.3.1998, p. 2.

- having regard to the Joint Communication of the Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of 18 November 2015 entitled ‘Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy’,
 - having regard to its previous resolutions on the Union for the Mediterranean and the countries of the Southern Neighbourhood, and in particular that of 10 May 2012 on ‘Trade for Change: EU trade and investment strategy for the Southern Mediterranean following the Arab Spring revolutions’¹,
 - having regard to the motion for a resolution by the Committee on International Trade,
 - having regard to Rule 123(2) of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to Article 21 of the Treaty of the European Union (TEU) and Articles 3, 207 and 218 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU),
- A. whereas Euro-Tunisian relations are close and date back a very long time, whereas the EU is Tunisia’s largest trading partner, and whereas Tunisia is the EU’s 34th largest trading partner;
 - B. whereas the first trade cooperation agreement between the two partners was concluded in 1969, and whereas in 1995 Tunisia was the first of the countries on the southern shore of the Mediterranean to sign an association agreement with the European Union;
 - C. whereas on 13 October 2015 the EU and Tunisia opened negotiations on an ambitious free trade agreement on the basis of the mandate unanimously adopted on 14 December 2015 by the EU Member States, and whereas the first round took place from 19 to 22 October 2015;
 - D. whereas the preliminary discussions between the European Union and Tunisia on the DCFTA lasted four years, and whereas Tunisia set up a national commission to identify its priorities;
 - E. whereas the deepening of EU-Tunisia trade relations through the conclusion of an ambitious trade partnership represents an opportunity for growth and closer ties between the economies of Tunisia and the EU; whereas this partnership must contribute to the political and democratic stabilisation of Tunisia;
 - F. whereas the trade partnership is part of the wider framework of neighbourhood relations between the EU and Tunisia governed by the 1995 Mediterranean Association Agreement, which provides for the establishment of a free trade area and contains provisions on agriculture and services; whereas on 17 March 2015 the EU-Tunisia Association Council adopted a new action plan implementing the privileged partnership, with a view to achieving a significant measure of economic integration; whereas the review of the European Neighbourhood Policy must promote the EU’s and Tunisia’s common values and interests and seek to support inclusive social and economic development, bring about job creation for young people and lead to economic stabilisation;

¹ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2012)0201.

- G. whereas Tunisia, the birthplace of the events known as the ‘Arab Spring’, is the only country in the Middle East/North Africa region to have implemented a process of democratic and political transition and, as such, represents an example for the entire region;
- H. whereas political stability and economic development go hand in hand, and whereas this trade agreement must seek to offer real prospects for the economies of Tunisia and the EU;
- I. whereas, in parallel with these negotiations, the EU must continue and increase its aid to Tunisia and provide the country with appropriate financial and technical assistance, during the negotiations and, subsequently, during the implementation of the agreement’s provisions, by developing a genuine partnership in which the interests of people on both shores of the Mediterranean can be taken into account;
- J. whereas Tunisia and the EU have every interest in promoting and strengthening ‘South-South’ regional integration processes between Tunisia and its neighbours, in particular through the Agadir Agreement, and whereas the EU-Tunisia free trade negotiations must complement those efforts;
- K. whereas Tunisia’s democratic transition remains an example for other countries in the region; whereas on 26 January 2014 the National Constituent Assembly adopted a new Constitution for Tunisia; whereas that Constitution provides exemplary protection of rights and freedoms; and whereas on 21 December 2014 Mohamed Beji Caid Essebsi was elected President of the Republic of Tunisia in a free, pluralist and transparent election;
- L. whereas Tunisian civil society, through its dynamism and level of education, has played a vital role in the country’s transition to democracy; whereas it should continue to be closely involved in the process of political decision-making, including in the DCFTA negotiations;
- M. whereas the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to the Tunisian National Dialogue Quartet represents an acknowledgement of the efforts made to consolidate democracy, and an incentive to continue on that path; whereas it is vital that an exemplary agreement should be concluded in order to allay the concerns voiced by civil society;

The economic, political and social situation in Tunisia

- 1. Condemns in strong terms the terrorist attacks committed in Tunisia in recent months, which have claimed many lives; considers that Tunisia faces a very serious terrorist threat, and notes that the attack carried out on the presidential guard bus on 24 November 2015 and the terrorist attacks of 26 June 2015 in Sousse and of 18 March 2015 at the Bardo Museum caused a collapse in the tourism prospects for the summer of 2015 when tourism and related sectors account for 15% of the country’s GNP; expresses its full solidarity with Tunisia and reaffirms its support for the efforts of the Tunisian authorities in their fight against terrorism, in compliance with human rights standards and the rule of law;

2. Notes that the Tunisian economy faces major difficulties, that GDP grew by 2.3% in 2014, that the unemployment rate in 2015 was 15% of the active population, that 28.6% of graduates have no jobs and that unemployment among young Tunisians is rising;
3. Notes that there is a clear demographic and economic imbalance between the European Union and Tunisia, and that this justifies an asymmetric and progressive approach in the negotiations;
4. Notes that in Tunisia there are significant regional disparities between the capital, Tunis, and other parts of the country, with very significant development gaps between the coast and the central areas of the country, in particular with regard to the unemployment rate and access to healthcare and education, and that these disparities could be worsened by climate change;
5. Notes the employment gap in Tunisia today between the various sectors covered by the trade agreement, and points out that if this is not corrected, it will lead to over-employment in the agricultural sector, while other sectors important to the diversification of Tunisia's economy, such as manufacturing and mining, will disappear;
6. Notes that Tunisia's democratic transition process is the most successful in the region and that the country has opted for a political and economic development model which is unique among the countries of the southern shore of the Mediterranean, and calls on the Commission to take account of these facts in the negotiations; considers it essential that the EU should take all possible measures to support Tunisia's democratic transition to a stable pluralist society;
7. Notes that Tunisia faces a very unstable regional environment, particularly as a result of the conflict in Libya and the sporadic violence in Algeria, both of which are neighbouring countries;
8. Notes that Tunisia has taken in more than 1.8 million Libyan refugees, which is equivalent to 16 % of the total population of Tunisia;

Criteria for a successful trade agreement between the EU and Tunisia

9. Welcomes the opening of negotiations in the autumn of 2015 with a view to the conclusion of a free trade agreement between the EU and Tunisia, on the basis of the mandate adopted by the Council in 2011 in the wake of the Arab Spring; notes that since 2011 Tunisia has consolidated its democratic transition, with the proclamation of the new Constitution on 26 January 2014 and with parliamentary and presidential elections held on 26 October and 23 November 2014 respectively;
10. Considers that this agreement has more than just a trade dimension, and that it should seek to contribute to the stability of Tunisia, to the consolidation of its democracy and to the reinvigoration of its economy by having a positive impact on consumer prices, employment and the wages of skilled and unskilled workers and by reducing inequalities; urges that no agreement which does not address these issues should be concluded;

11. Urges the negotiators to conclude a progressive and asymmetrical agreement which takes account of the significant economic disparities between the parties, to demonstrate flexibility, responsiveness, openness to innovation, transparency and adaptability in the negotiations, and to bear in mind that the agreement must benefit the economies and societies of Tunisia and the EU, while taking proper account of the specific differences and sensibilities, and socioeconomic and cultural contexts, of both parties and without distorting Tunisia's intra-regional trade;
12. Welcomes the presentation by the Tunisian Government of a five-year plan (2015-2020) of economic reforms designed to reduce unemployment and regional disparities in the country and to diversify the economy; believes that the free trade agreement must be consistent with the objectives of this plan;
13. Points out that this is the first trade negotiation of this magnitude for Tunisia, and that it is important, therefore, that the various sectors of the country's economy should be opened up gradually and asymmetrically, that transitional periods should be provided for sensitive sectors and that certain products which the parties deem sensitive should be excluded from the negotiations;
14. Considers it essential that Tunisia should receive substantial financial and technical assistance from the EU so that it can properly implement the provisions of the free trade agreement; calls for the financial aid to be granted in a transparent manner and for steps to be taken to ensure that it actually benefits its recipients;
15. Welcomes the support provided by the European Investment Bank to numerous projects in Tunisia; stresses that this support is contributing to Tunisia's economic diversification and helping to create jobs, particularly for young people;
16. Welcomes the fact that the EU has made Tunisia one of the priority countries in its neighbourhood policy vis-à-vis the countries of the southern Mediterranean, and that it has granted Tunisia a loan of EUR 300 million in the form of macro-financial aid to carry out economic reforms;
17. Calls, nevertheless, on the EU, as well as the Member States, the EIB and the EBRD, to continue to stand alongside the Tunisians and to step up aid and assistance programmes, including through the introduction of exceptional autonomous trade measures and the possible renegotiation of loans should balance-of-payments problems arise, to help Tunisia consolidate its democratic process; welcomes the establishment by some Member States of 'partnerships for the transformation' of Tunisia; calls on the EU to continue its programme to reduce regional inequalities in access to basic medical care in Tunisia;
18. Calls on the EU to take account of Tunisia's specific situation in these negotiations, in particular as regards the fragile nature of the democratic transition and the difference in economic development between the EU and Tunisia, always bearing in mind that solutions that benefit both partners are best;
19. Calls on the Commission to ensure that the negotiations quickly produce tangible gains for the EU and Tunisian economies in key sectors and for all stakeholders, including SMEs and VSEs;

20. Emphasises that this agreement must contribute to the development and diversification of the Tunisian economy, which is currently heavily dependent on agriculture, and to a reduction in regional disparities, and must provide tangible benefits for all Tunisians and Europeans;
21. Welcomes the fact that Tunisia has launched significant social and economic reforms; insists that these reforms continue even during the negotiation period so that the country can draw maximum benefit from the future agreement;
22. Considers that the agreement should contribute to the deepening of economic cooperation between the EU and Tunisia, which is already well advanced thanks to the abolition of tariffs on industrial goods in accordance with the association agreement; proposes, therefore, the new name of ‘economic partnership between the EU and Tunisia’;
23. Strongly encourages the Commission and the Tunisian Government to implement a clear and detailed process for involving Tunisian and European civil society throughout the negotiations, and to take an innovative approach to this issue; in that connection, declares itself satisfied with the role played by Tunisian civil society in the first round of negotiations, and calls for the consultation process to be open and transparent and to take greater account of the diversity of Tunisian civil society, drawing on best practices employed in similar negotiations;
24. Welcomes, in that connection, the setting-up by the Ministry of Trade and Crafts of a website to provide information about the DCFTA to the public and the willingness of the negotiators to publish a trilingual version of the final text; considers that Tunisian civil society could also be involved in the negotiations through an impact assessment supervisory committee;
25. Urges the Council to make public the negotiating mandate unanimously adopted by the Member States on 14 December 2011;
26. Hopes for regular dialogue to be established between Tunisian and European parliamentarians and to continue throughout the negotiations; with that aim in view, welcomes the setting-up of an EU-Tunisia Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC), which will play a central role and enable European and Tunisian parliamentarians to meet regularly and monitor effectively the negotiations on the free trade agreement;
27. Hopes that this dialogue will make it possible to assess more effectively the expectations and concerns of both parties, and thus to improve the terms of the agreement;
28. Points out that the Union for the Mediterranean supports the development of practical projects in the region and can therefore provide expertise during the negotiation of the agreement;
29. Calls for impact assessments and sectoral evaluations to be carried out, on both sides, including by the European Parliament working with Tunisian experts, of the impact of the agreement in various areas, including services, public procurement, SME competitiveness, employment, agriculture, the environment or any other priority sector;

notes Tunisia's wish to involve its own experts from the outset in order to ensure that the impact assessment figures are credible in Tunisia itself;

30. Calls for these impact assessments and sectoral evaluations to be funded by the European Union and, as requested by a number of Tunisian civil society organisations, for them possibly to be preceded by an ex-post evaluation of the socio-economic impact of the 1995 Association Agreement;
31. Urges the Commission to determine as soon as possible whether the agreement is to be mixed or exclusive, and calls on it to involve the Member States' national parliaments in the debate from the start of the discussions;
32. Emphasises that environmental conditions in the Mediterranean basin, in particular the shortage of water, which makes farming more difficult, must be taken into account in the negotiations and that an economic model must be promoted which is environmentally sustainable and makes for sustainable management of natural resources;
33. Stresses that the trade negotiations with Tunisia form part of the wider context of Euro-Mediterranean trade relations; insists that the 10th Conference of Trade Ministers of the Union for the Mediterranean, postponed indefinitely since 2013, take place soon in order to reconsider trade issues in the region and the work priorities to be established for the next few years;

Sectoral approach to the negotiations

34. Calls for the agreement to accord proper importance to the services sector, which offers significant growth potential for the Tunisian economy and which should attract strategic investments; considers, in light of the fact that this is the first trade negotiation of this magnitude for Tunisia, that negotiations on the services chapter should be based on a positive-list approach for both market access and national treatment;
35. Notes that the public sector is of fundamental importance for Tunisia and is the biggest provider of skilled employment in the country;
36. Notes that Tunisia has many start-ups, micro-enterprises and highly dynamic SMEs in high-tech fields, and calls for the agreement to promote their capacity to develop and internationalise; notes the call made by the Tunisians that the agreement should incorporate ambitious and balanced provisions concerning online trade;
37. Calls on both parties to boost employment levels, including through joint initiatives, as this is essential to Tunisia's economic recovery and political stability;
38. Believes that the agreement should be beneficial to small-scale producers and entrepreneurs in Tunisia, who are vital to the country's economy; calls for regular dialogue to be developed between entrepreneurs, professional organisations and training bodies, so that good practices can be promoted and the difficulties and expectations of each side better understood;

39. Believes that it is important to take a cautious, progressive and flexible approach to the negotiations on the competition chapter, given the strategic significance of State aid for Tunisia's economic development;
40. Draws attention to the importance of setting up bilateral chambers of commerce to provide permanent forums in which the stakeholders can establish partnerships and develop their economic and commercial activities;
41. Calls on the Commission to facilitate the granting of short-term visas for performing 'Move IV'-type services requiring the movement of natural persons for a limited period of time in accordance with precise conditions stipulated by contract and by domestic legislation; emphasises that nothing in the agreement should prevent the EU and its Member States from applying measures to regulate the entry of natural persons into, or their temporary stay on, its territory, including those measures required to ensure the orderly movement of natural persons beyond its borders, such as admission conditions;
42. Hopes that the agreement will help permanently establish in Tunisia a favourable climate which acts as an incentive to long-term investments in key and dynamic economic sectors, such as tourism, energy, including renewable energy sources, high-tech services, the digital economy and data exchange; urges the Commission to include a chapter on investment, with a view to facilitating direct foreign investment between the EU and Tunisia, and to speed up the implementation of the Euro-Mediterranean trade and investment facilitation mechanism, which will make it possible for relevant data to be collected, strengthen trade partnerships and benefit Tunisia in particular;
43. Takes the view that the agreement should incorporate provisions on public procurement which reflect a cautious approach to the opening-up of markets on both the European and the Tunisian side and which take account of the structure of and specific conditions in the Tunisian economy;
44. Believes that the EU and Tunisia have everything to gain from better reciprocal access to their agricultural markets and that the agreement should help to reduce customs tariffs, eliminate non-tariff barriers and improve export procedures;
45. Notes that Tunisia has focused on developing organic farming, and stresses that the agreement should provide opportunities for Tunisian organic farming products to gain access to new markets;
46. Urges that the negotiations should not harm the economy of either of the parties; Calls on the EU and Tunisia to take into account the fact that there are several sensitive agricultural products on both sides of the Mediterranean, for which exhaustive lists will have to be agreed upon in the negotiation process, and to provide for transitional periods and appropriate quotas for these sensitive products, or even for their exclusion from the negotiations;
47. Encourages the Commission to negotiate the establishment of rigorous, stringent standards in the fields of health and plant health and the resolution of veterinary problems and problems relating to checks on meat and fruit and vegetables in Tunisia; calls on the Commission to include in the agreement specific technical assistance

provisions to help Tunisian producers meet the EU's stricter health and plant health standards;

48. Believes that the agreement should help to define stringent standards in the area of sustainable development, particularly with regard to social standards;
49. Looks to the Tunisian Government and the EU institutions to establish suitable provisions on the identification of the origin and provenance and on the traceability of Tunisian products, providing greater transparency for producers, middlemen and consumers;
50. Hopes that the agreement will include an ambitious chapter on intellectual property rights, including the recognition and enhanced protection of geographical indications, ensuring full recognition of the geographical indications of the EU and Tunisia, traceability of the products concerned and the protection of manufacturers' know-how;
51. Calls on the Commission to extend the protection of geographical indications to non-agricultural products, including for this agreement, given that, for its part, Tunisia recognises them;
52. Hopes that the agreement will enable Tunisian industry to modernise and gain expertise, so that it can cover more of the supply chain for manufactured goods and therefore make use of higher skill levels and employ better qualified staff locally;
53. Urges the Commission to include in the agreement an ambitious chapter on energy and raw materials, so that research and cooperation can be stepped up in the electricity, gas, wind, solar and other renewables sectors;
54. Hopes that the agreement will contain provisions to help strengthen scientific cooperation, particularly between universities and research centres in Europe and Tunisia, in the areas of research, innovation, the development of new technologies and, more generally, culture and education, and that these initiatives may also play a part in supporting the Tunisian labour market;
55. Welcomes the fact that Tunisia has been included in the Horizon 2020 European research programme, and urges the Commission and the Tunisian Government to include in the agreement an ambitious chapter on sustainable development, promoting high social and labour standards in accordance with International Labour Organisation (ILO) conventions and the environmental standards laid down in the relevant multilateral agreements;
56. Points out that Tunisia has ratified all the ILO conventions, but that, according to an independent monitoring body, it must step up its efforts to promote high labour standards; hopes that the DCFTA will help Tunisia develop more protective social and labour standards, particularly as regards trade union rights; expects the DCFTA, in the Tunisian context of democratic transition and terrorist threat, to encourage a strengthening of the rule of law and fundamental freedoms, including the freedoms of association, expression and information;

57. Calls on the Commission to include in the agreement the human rights clause, on the strength of which the EU may suspend the agreement unilaterally should the other contracting party commit any breach of human rights;
58. Calls on the parties to consider introducing a tax good governance clause, based on the work of the Commission's Platform for Tax Good Governance, to rule out any instance of double non-taxation;
59. Welcomes the shared interest in deepening the Mobility Partnership established on 3 March 2014, and hopes that a visa facilitation agreement and a readmission agreement will be finalised;
60. Calls on the EU institutions to introduce appropriate compensation measures in the event that actual or possible damage is done to one or more of the trade sectors covered by the agreement;
61. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and to the Commission.