

## **Flash Report of 5th EU-Tunisia Joint Committee meeting and ENP sub-committee meeting on research, innovation and education**

**Tunis, 13-14 December 2011**

The fifth Joint Committee meeting with Tunisia took place in Tunis on 13 and 14 December. The meeting was carried out jointly with the ENP sub-committee meeting on research, innovation and education. The meeting was co-chaired by Prof. Jeel Ezzine, Director General of International Cooperation at the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research and Laurent Bochereau, Head of Unit International Cooperation policy at the European Commission, DG Research and Innovation. Representatives from EEAS and the EU Delegation in Tunis attended on the EU side.

The EU Delegation representatives underlined a complete change in attitude of our Tunisian interlocutors since the Arab Spring. Discussions have become transparent, dynamic and forward looking. Hope is expressed for improvement in the country and closer cooperation with the European Union is one of the major aims.

### **Recent developments in R&I**

Both sides exchanged information on recent developments in policy and programmes relating to research and innovation.

- The EU side provided information on Europe 2020, the Innovation Union, Horizon 2020 and the development of a new international strategy for research and innovation.
- In view of the dramatic changes that have occurred in the country since January 2011, the Tunisian side provided information on its future aspirations in the area of research and innovation. A clear strategy is in the process of being developed, with a main focus on setting research priorities and the valorisation and commercialisation of research project results. The National Agency for Research Promotion (ANPR) will play a large role in the creation of such a **National Innovation Strategy (NIS)**.

### **Current Cooperation**

- Tunisia is currently the **3rd most active partner in FP7 in the Mediterranean region**, directly after Egypt and Morocco, involved in 57 projects. The highest levels of cooperation are in Food, Agriculture, Fisheries and Biotechnologies, Environment, Marie-Curie and Health.
- Successful projects were discussed: **REGPOT** and **ERA-Wide** projects for their capacity-building benefits and for their concrete socio-economic impact, the **ARIMNET ERA-Net** for its capacity to better coordinate activities and actors in the area of agriculture and the ICT project **JOIN-MED** for its ability to unite actors in the area of ICT during a period of political difficulties in Tunisia. Finally, the ENPi funded project **PASRI** that aims to improve the impact of research and innovation on economic and social development and employment was extensively discussed in terms of its effect on institutional capacity building. The calls of Work Programme 2012 that are still open and that are of interest to Tunisia were presented.

## Increasing Cooperation

The International Cooperation objectives of DG Research and Innovation that aim to increase relevance and impact were discussed:

- Make better use of the "**general opening**" of the Framework Programme and base cooperation on common interests and mutual benefits: a joint **evaluation** on the impact of the cooperation agreement will be launched, which will include a reflexion on the priority domains for future cooperation, regional perspectives and reciprocity.
- **Promotion of cooperation at bi-regional level** (both Euromed as well as EU-Africa): Tunisia was encouraged to keep playing an important role in the Euro-Mediterranean Monitoring Committee on Research (MoCo) and the INCO-NET project MIRA. The **Euro-Mediterranean Conference** that will take place in Barcelona on 2 and 3 April was discussed; Prof. Jelel Ezzine plays an active role in the Steering Committee of this conference.
- **Improved coordination of research policies and programmes:** at the last MoCo meeting Tunisia confirmed its financial commitment to a possible ERANET-Plus for the Mediterranean region (planned for the WP2013).
- **Improved synergies with the external policy of the EU:** holding the Joint Committee meeting and the ENP sub-committee together allows for the creation of synergies between FP7 and the ENP in the area of research and innovation. The National Indicative Programme should continue to integrate research and innovation capacity-building and the continuity of activities foreseen by the PASRI project should be encouraged.

## Other Areas of Discussion

- Tunisia expressed its interest in **Association** to the Research Framework Programme, as a longterm objective
- The meeting was concluded with a draft outline of a roadmap, which will be developed in more detail in the weeks to come.

## Next Meeting

- It was agreed that the next meeting would be held in Brussels in one year's time. Both parties agreed that a continuous exchange of information should take place in the meantime, with the possibility to organise a video-conference.