



Press Release

Luxembourg, 28 March 2017

EU aid to Tunisia generally well spent, but management shortcomings need to be addressed, say Auditors

EU financial assistance to Tunisia after the 2011 Arab Spring was generally well spent, according to a new report from the European Court of Auditors. The aid contributed significantly to Tunisia's democratic transition and economic stability after the revolution. However, say the auditors, there were a number of shortcomings in the European Commission's management of the assistance.

Tunisia's "Jasmine revolution" in January 2011 was the first of the Arab Spring series of uprisings. Since then, Tunisia has substantially advanced its transition to democracy during a period of uncertainty characterised by political instability, social unrest and terrorist attacks. The European Union has provided considerable political and substantial financial support to help the country cope with these new challenges. Over the period 2011 to 2015, EU assistance to Tunisia totalled €1.3 billion.

The Auditors found that the European External Action Service and the Commission responded quickly with financial support to address the two main challenges: the economic crisis and the transition to democracy. But the Commission tried to tackle too many areas, which meant that the potential impact of its aid was diluted and its numerous activities were difficult to manage. Although coordination with the main donors and within EU institutions and departments was good, there was no joint programming with the Member States.

"Tunisia is struggling to maintain economic stability and security has become an important challenge for the country", said Mr Karel Pinxten, the member of the European Court of Auditors responsible for the report. "Against such a background, the effective management of EU financial support is paramount".

EU finance was delivered through budget support, a Macro-Financial Assistance loan and stand-alone projects. The budget support programmes transferred substantial funds quickly and helped the Tunisian authorities to shape a reform agenda, say the auditors. But the conditions were too flexible, which reduced the incentive for the Tunisian authorities to take the measures specified in the agreements. A Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability assessment, which could

The purpose of this press release is to give the main messages of the special report adopted by the European Court of Auditors. The full report is on www.eca.europa.eu.

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serve as a reputable barometer of actual progress made in reforming public finances, has not been made since 2010.

Budget support in two of three sectors lacked credible sector strategies. There were cases with both budget support and stand-alone projects where the objectives were neither specific nor measurable.

The Tunisian authorities implemented some significant reforms, say the auditors, but at a very slow pace. This was mainly due to the numerous changes of government and the significant nature and number of the other challenges faced. The Commission has committed itself to continue supporting Tunisia, both politically and financially, in dealing with these challenges.

The auditors make a number of recommendations concerning the planning of assistance and the management of EU support. In particular, the European External Action Service and the Commission should strengthen the programming and focus of the assistance. The Commission should revise the ways in which budget support programmes are implemented. It should also improve project planning by setting out clear objectives and by establishing realistic indicators for monitoring project performance.

Special Report No 3/2017: "EU Assistance to Tunisia" is available on the ECA website eca.europa.eu in 23 EU languages.