EU-Tunisia Association Council

The EU-Tunisia Association Council met in Brussels today. It was the first time the Association Council had met since Tunisia's historic revolution in January 2011. This ministerial meeting marks a new stage in relations between the European Union and Tunisia, reflecting the new dynamics and prospects opened up by Tunisia's democratic transition.

The Association Council was chaired by the Tunisian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Rafik Abdessalem, who was accompanied by the Minister for Investments and International Cooperation, Mr Riadh Bettaieb. Ms Erato Kozakou-Marcoullis, Cypriot Minister for Foreign Affairs, attended the meeting on behalf of Catherine Ashton, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission. The European Commission was represented by Štefan Füle, Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy.

The meeting of the Association Council provided an opportunity to seal a political agreement on the Privileged Partnership between Tunisia and the EU, as exemplified by the new Action Plan. That joint document will guide the Tunisia-EU partnership within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy. It defines the common priorities for bilateral cooperation and establishes the strategic framework governing EU support for the reforms and the democratic process. The Privileged Partnership Action Plan provides an ambitious road map reflecting Tunisia's desire to implement reforms in all areas.

The meeting of the Association Council enabled both parties to assess what has been achieved since the start of Tunisia's transition twenty months ago and to reflect on the steps that lie ahead.

It also provided an opportunity to exchange views on developments in Tunisia and the EU, and on regional issues of common interest.
The Tunisian side underlined recent developments in the constitution-drafting process, reviewed the forthcoming stages of the electoral process and highlighted the importance of strengthening bilateral relations, *inter alia* by implementing the Privileged Partnership. It also outlined what it expected from the EU in terms of political and economic support and defined its priorities with regard to trade and mobility.

The EU reaffirmed its full support for the transition, underlining the importance of consolidating the protection of human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law. In particular, it stressed the important role played by civil society in ensuring a successful transition. Finally, it reiterated its offer to gradually integrate Tunisia into the European internal market, to relaunch negotiations on liberalising trade in agriculture, to make rapid progress in the aviation discussions and to improve the mobility of EU citizens and Tunisians through the conclusion of a mobility partnership.

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