

**CHARLES UNIVERSITY**

**FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**

Institute of Political Studies

Master in International Economic and Political Studies (IEPS)

**Master's Thesis**

**2023**

**Kelsey Elizabeth Roman**

**CHARLES UNIVERSITY**  
**FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**

Institute of Political Studies  
Master in International Economic and Political Studies (IEPS)

**Can't Buy Me Love: The Limitations of EU Intervention  
in Promoting Tunisian Democracy**

Master's thesis

Author: Kelsey Elizabeth Roman

Study programme: International Economic and Political Studies

Supervisor: Mgr. Bohumil Doboš, Ph.D.

Year of the defence: 2023

## **Declaration**

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.
2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.
3. I fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.

In Prague on August 1<sup>st</sup>

Kelsey Elizabeth Roman

## References

ROMAN, Kelsey Elizabeth. *Can't Buy Me Love: The Limitations of EU Intervention in Promoting Tunisian Democracy*. Praha, 2023. 59 pages. Master's thesis (Mgr.). Charles University, Faculty of Social Sciences, Institute of Political Studies. Department of Political Science. Supervisor Mgr. Bohumil Doboš, Ph.D.

**Length of the thesis:** 92,245 Characters

## **Abstract**

Despite significant amounts of democratic and civil society aid offered by the EU over the past decade, Tunisia has backslid towards authoritarianism. What lessons can be learned about the effectiveness of democracy promotion in Tunisia from the EU perspective? This thesis aims to examine possible missteps of EU support for Tunisia's transitional democracy. I will argue that populist movements and civil society made transitions into democracy possible for Tunisia, and elite cooperation guaranteed initial success. The EU has made meaningful contributions to this process. However, E. U. funding funneled into narrow channels of civil society, as well as particular definition of democratic norms and development goals, and EU migration and trade agendas have neglected significant segments of the population and their grievances. In these ways the EU has undermined some of its substantial efforts in long-term democracy promotion. Unanswered grievances have set the stage for widespread political disillusionment and the populist backlash against democracy and civic engagement that led to the election of Kais Saïd. Finally, this thesis will make suggestions towards future EU democracy promotion in Tunisia in light of recent authoritarian regime shifts. For this case study, I will base my arguments on qualitative and quantitative research around patterns of EU democracy promotion, researcher analyses of pre and post-Arab Spring Tunisia, and an empirically defined theory supporting the necessity of vertical and lateral pressure in ensuring democratic changes. I will also use a collection of surveys and interviews of Tunisian civil society activists, youth, and general population members.

## **Abstrakt**

Přestože EU v uplynulém desetiletí poskytla Tunisku značnou pomoc v oblasti demokracie a občanské společnosti, Tunisko se vrátilo k autoritářství. Jaké poučení lze z pohledu EU vyvodit z účinnosti podpory demokracie v Tunisku? Tato práce si klade za cíl prozkoumat možné chybné kroky EU při podpoře přechodné demokracie v Tunisku. Budu tvrdit, že populistická hnutí a občanská společnost umožnily Tunisku přechod k demokracii a spolupráce elit zaručila počáteční úspěch. EU k tomuto procesu významně přispěla. Nicméně financování ze strany EU směřující do úzkých segmentů občanské společnosti, stejně jako určité definice demokratických norem a rozvojových cílů, a migrační a obchodní agendy EU zanedbaly významné segmenty obyvatelstva a jejich stížnosti. Tímto způsobem EU

podkopala některé ze svých významných snah o dlouhodobou podporu demokracie. Nezodpovězené stížnosti připravily půdu pro rozsáhlé politické rozčarování a populistický odpor proti demokracii a občanské angažovanosti, který vedl ke zvolení Kaisa Saïda. V závěru této práce budou předloženy návrhy týkající se budoucí podpory demokracie ze strany EU v Tunisku s ohledem na nedávné změny autoritářského režimu. V této případové studii budu své argumenty opírat o kvalitativní a kvantitativní výzkum vzorců podpory demokracie ze strany EU, analýzy výzkumníků v Tunisku před a po arabském jaru a empiricky definovanou teorii podporující nezbytnost vertikálního a laterálního tlaku při zajišťování demokratických změn. Využiji také soubor průzkumů a rozhovorů s tuniskými aktivisty občanské společnosti, mládeží a běžnými členy populace.

## **Keywords**

Tunisia, EU, democracy promotion, populism, civil society, migration, trade, norms

## **Klíčová slova**

Tunisko, EU, podpora demokracie, populismus, občanská společnost, migrace, obchod, normy

## **Title**

Can't Buy Me Love: The Limitations of EU Intervention in Promoting Tunisian Democracy

## **Název práce**

Can't Buy Me Love: Limity intervence EU na podporu tuniské demokracie

## **Acknowledgement**

I could not have accomplished this without the support of Jonathan Waidele to keep me sane, Petra Šufliarská, to keep me on track and laughing, and Ondřej Rosendorf, who saw potential in me I didn't know I had. I am also grateful to the incredibly knowledgeable professors at IPS and IES, and for my family's encouragement. Finally, I am forever indebted to the kind, Arabic-speaking strangers in Sfax who helped a lone, injured, backpacking woman without hesitation. My desire to understand you better inspired this thesis.

# Table of Contents

<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>1. THEORIES OF DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>2. EMPIRICAL CONTEXT .....</b>	<b>11</b>
2.1. Theory in the Tunisian Context .....	11
2.2. EU Achievements in Tunisian Democracy Promotion.....	13
<b>3. EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS.....</b>	<b>17</b>
3.1. EU and Tunisian Civil Society .....	17
3.2. Tunisian Perceptions of EU Norms .....	20
3.3. Migration, Trade, Debt, and EU Self Interest.....	24
3.3.1. <i>Migration</i> .....	24
3.3.2. <i>Trade</i> .....	30
3.3.3 <i>Debt</i> .....	36
3.4. Consequences of Neglecting the Populist Element .....	37
3.4.1. <i>Surveys of Tunisian Civilians</i> .....	38
3.4.2. <i>An Illiberal Populist Coup</i> .....	40
<b>4. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS.....</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>5. CONCLUSIONS.....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>LIST OF REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>51</b>



## **Introduction**

When the Arab Spring erupted in Tunisia, the possibility of democracy ignited hope, especially among Tunisian youth across social media. (Karolak 2020) The disenfranchisement experienced by these highly educated but consistently underemployed youth finally held a collective and organized voice. Tunisians took to the street to depose the dictatorship of Ben Ali and demand a redistribution of resources, influence, and opportunity. (Mansouri 2020) For the EU, whose European Neighborhood Policy has consistently included democracy promotion, these developments also seemed promising. The EU was quick to offer support towards fledgling democracy in Tunisia both in the forms of funding tied to humanitarian and anti-corruption initiatives, and political party training. (Marzo 2020) Four years after the initial stirrings of unrest, when all other countries involved in the Arab Spring had failed to maintain democratic gains, Tunisia held on. The EU reassessed its funding approach and made concerted efforts to include civil society in policy development. (Marzo 2020) Another five years passed and a majority of surveyed Tunisians dismissed the importance of “dimuqratiyya.” (Ridge 2022)

In 2019, this loss of faith was reflected in the election of populist outsider Kais Saïd (Wolf 2019) who moved that July to suspend parliament until he had rewritten the Tunisian constitution. (Ridge 2022) Under this new constitution, Tunisia held its first parliamentary elections in December of 2022. Candidates could only be supported by private funding and the elections were marked by a historically low turnout of voters at 11.2% compared to a 41% voter turnout three years prior. Ten of the twenty-three candidates won their elections because they ran unopposed, while 11 political parties boycotted participation in the election entirely, declaring them a state crime. (Grewal 2022) How have democratic efforts and the faith of Tunisians in democracy at large failed so spectacularly? Moreover, the EU has

invested over 8 billion dollars in Tunisia spanning between 2010-2021, primarily as aid and democracy promotion. (European Commission 2023) It would be unrealistic to blame the EU for Tunisia's failure to achieve lasting democracy. Instead, this thesis asks: Has the EU made any ineffective choices in supporting Tunisia's democratic transition and what are the possible consequences of these choices?

While democratization in Tunisia was destined to be a difficult transition due to rampant corruption among an unyielding technocratic elite (Carboni 2023), this thesis argues that the EU made the following fundamental mistakes in supporting Tunisia's Democratic transition:

1. The EU has invested selectively in established and centralized CSOs, unintentionally contributing to disenfranchisement in regional and youth populations.
2. The EU has prioritized an agenda of democratic norms and human rights over socioeconomic development, helping to leave the main drivers of social unrest unaddressed.
3. The EU has at times prioritized its own concerns around migration, security, trade, and debt at the cost of providing consistent support to the economic and human rights development of Tunisia.

Furthermore, this thesis intends to contribute to theories of external democracy promotion by making the case that the success of democratic transition depends on an interplay between an elite and the greater population. Democratic transition and later democratic consolidation rely on a willingness of elites to acquiesce to the corrective populist demands to redistribute political and economic access. (Bermeo 1997) Patterns of external democracy promotion fail to recognize the necessity of appeasing the populist

element in favor of courting the attention of elites whose reforms may not reflect the spirit of democratization. Neglecting the crucial spark of democracy inherent to populist opposition may deprive citizens of faith in democracy and destabilize its vulnerable transition phase. (Acemoglu and Robinson 2001) The failure of democracy in Tunisia depicts an imbalance between the cooperation of reforming elites, and the unanswered grievances of the Tunisian populist element, which the E.U had a hand in exacerbating.

This thesis will be a qualitative case-study focusing on the unique context of developments in EU democracy promotion towards Tunisia over the span of twelve years. The analysis will primarily examine EU efforts within Tunisia's political, civil society, and economic spheres. In order to verify the above expectations, I will employ a meta-synthesis from a literature review covering EU democracy promotion, Tunisian historical analyses, Tunisian civilian surveys, and empirical and qualitative theories of democratic transition. Through a meta-synthesis, I hope to use the various individual research contributions to build a broader view of the weaknesses and inconsistencies in recent methods of democracy promotion, as well as depict their correlation with youth disenfranchisement and an increase in non-democratic populist sentiment. In addition, I aim to tie in reported grievances and ineffective practices with recent policy suggestions from political analysts and future possibilities in response to Tunisia's regime change.

This thesis does not hold the EU directly responsible for Tunisia's democratic backsliding, as doing so would neglect ongoing domestic issues in parliament efficacy and rising corruption levels which have no doubt negatively influenced Tunisian perspectives of democracy. (Lefevre 2017) Instead, by identifying weaknesses and inconsistencies I hope to demonstrate the EU's unintentional contributions to Tunisian disenfranchisement.

For the purposes of this analysis I will first describe a few theories of democratic transition and compare their applicability with the Tunisian case. Then I will provide an overview of EU efforts towards democracy promotion in Tunisia. I will focus on three areas of potential missteps which may have led to further disenfranchisement of Tunisians and undermined democratic progress : EU elite engagement, EU democratic norms, and the EU's adherence to policies of self interest. Finally, I will present surveys of Tunisian citizens' reported grievances with post-revolutionary Tunisian state-building and growing skepticism towards democracy as evidence of consequences partially attributable to EU missteps in CSO investment, norm diffusion, and trade and migration negotiations.

# 1. Theories of Democratic Transition

In order to assess which aspects of Tunisia's democratic transition have failed, I will first turn to broader constructs theorizing the democratic transition process. In their "Theory of Political Transitions," economists Acemoglu and Robinson define non-democratic societies as containing a rich- elite minority, and an impoverished underclass. (2001) Through empirical measurements of redistribution of wealth in transitioning societies, they are able to mathematically model that the poor are most likely to engage in revolution during a recession as this has the lowest opportunity cost. It is at this point that the rich-elite can choose to capitulate by agreeing to reform the government structure and possibly aid redistribution of wealth. Without this final step the democracy is unconsolidated. In fact, both elite coordination and popular protest are necessary for democratic transition, as Sato and Wahman demonstrate in their work. (2019) Their statistical analysis of elections across 74 autocracies shows that the relationship between democratic change and popular support is conditional on elite coordination. In other words, without elite coordination democratic change is almost entirely absent. Bermeo elaborates upon the necessity of elite cooperation with pressure to democratize from citizens. She attributes such cooperation as the product of a risk analysis on behalf of the elite, who are willing to cede some power and influence to ensure their own survival, but will repress uprisings in which the risks from citizens are too low or too high to justify concessions. (Bermeo 1997)

In cases where an external actor seeks to support democratic transition, engagement with the elite class is therefore invaluable. Grimm and Weiffen claim that an external actor's leverage is dependent upon correctly identifying domestic elites who hold the power to prevent or promote meaningful democratic change. (2018) During the period of democratic transition, external actors negotiate with domestic elites over state-building norms. Powel's

interpretation of the theory of norm diffusion proposes that through an external actor's socialization of norms within foreign institutions, norms can become routinized. He also raises the issue of whether inclusive dialogue exists when an external actor exercises normative power. (Powel 2009) When there is a lack of consensus, domestic elites are likely to contest or selectively adapt externally promoted norms. Levels of existing clientelism within a society can hinder the effectiveness of external actor democracy promotion, as well. Generally, external actors are significantly more effective in authentic democracy promotion when taking the concerns of the domestic elite into account. (Grimm and Weiffen 2018) However, as Acemoglu and Robinson rightfully point out, the initial grievances that inspire the push towards democratic revolution originate with the poor majority. It is the pressure they instigate that may force elites to consolidate democracy through a redistribution of wealth and power, but the elite-class is not always motivated to do so. If early cooperation between elites and poor revolutionaries does not lead to decisive redistribution because of elite hesitance, inequality remains and the very stability of the democracy is at risk. (Acemoglu and Robinson 2001)

In the current international political climate the risk to democracy from this perceived inequality has been attributed to populism. (Ruth-Lovell and Grahn 2023) Over years of debate and publications, the definition of populism has coalesced within political science into a recognizable phenomenon necessarily containing the following elements: a differentiation between the ingroup of the people and the outgroup of controlling elites, as well as the ambition that power over the political process be ceded to the people. (Mansbridge and Macedo 2019) In addition, populism is often anti-institutional, highly defensive against the illicit influence of supposed outsiders, and reform-oriented. In practice, such defensiveness often results in nativist and illiberal tendencies. These tendencies lead to

the erosion of institutional checks and balances that exist to safeguard pluralistic democratic participation. (Pasquino 2008) Increases in populist tendencies are commonly inspired by dramatic decreases in economic welfare. Mounting dissatisfaction in life quality leading to profound social unrest. Quality of life decreases may be brought about by an economic crisis, or by austerity measures, which are regularly implemented in attempts to fiscally consolidate a struggling state. (Bugarcic 2019) In the 21st century, various states have experienced bottom-up shifts in their political leanings in the aftermath of economic crises. Populism has therefore become a frequent topic amongst democratic theorists, who are shifting away from simplistic assessments of populism as purely dangerous to democracy. (Ruth-Lovell and Grahn 2023)

As Acemoglu and Robinson originally argued, populism has a place in the democratic process. (2001) Bugarcic describes populism as “Janus-faced” in that it provides the impetus for inclusive and equitable resource distribution by challenging the universality of neoliberal capitalism, but has exclusionary political implications. (2019) Bluhdorn and Butzlaff seek to elaborate upon the philosophical conditions which fuel the recent rise in populist activity. They describe populism as a product of a third modernity, which is not a desire for political regression, but a complex pastiche of group and individual identities that reject a first universal modernity or second individualized modernity. The populist then must define themselves through an exclusive group identity that entails them to economic welfare within an identified sovereign state. (Bluhdorn and Butzlaff 2019) This corrective instinct of the people to restore power to themselves is not inherently undemocratic but can be destructive if unimpeded by checks and balances. Pasquino differentiated populism from liberal democracy by describing the former as direct and circumventing institutional channels, and the latter as defined by the routinized adherence to institutional channels for

the purpose of pluralistic representation. (Pasquino 2008) Interestingly, Ruth-Lovell and Graham's quantitative analysis of the correlation between populism in power and democracy, noted that populism in power was inversely correlated to measures of electoral, liberal, and deliberative democracy, but also did not positively correlate with increases in egalitarian or participatory democracy. (2023) Herein lies a discrepancy between the corrective instincts powering populist uprisings and the resulting failure of populist governance. Mansbridge and Macedo offer a sophisticated response to this discrepancy, in which they emphasize that populism in opposition contributes positively to the presence of pluralistic governance and vertical accountability, whereas populism in power simply establishes a new and morally righteous hegemony, often without the political experience to meaningfully enact change. (2019)

The theories of populism discussed above circle back to the original propositions of Acemoglu, Robinson, and Bermeo: without an element of populism, democratic transition is impossible, but as in any organic system, all elements must cooperate and an imbalance in one aspect, in this case the responsiveness of the elites, can lead to catastrophic consequences in another aspect. (2001) (1997) Thus, I argue that while external actors should identify and engage elites in the process of democratic transition, it is the satisfaction of populist grievances through the redistribution of elite wealth and influence that guarantees democratic state consolidation. Sole engagement of external actors with domestic elites can contribute to a renewed clientelism that prevents redistribution of resources and results in a state overrun with populist inspired instability. By analyzing the EU's democracy promotion in Tunisia as privileging Euro-centric norms among an ineffectual clientelist elite, I theorize that the EU has inadvertently helped prevent a redistribution of political and economic opportunity within Tunisia. Lack of effectual redistribution allowed corrective liberal



populism to evolve into an illiberal populist coup, apathy towards the Tunisian political process in youth, and a widespread skepticism towards the EU that threatens its future normative capacity.

## **2. Empirical Context**

### ***2.1. Theory in the Tunisian Context***

Upon closer inspection, the patterns referenced in these theories of democratic transition are recognizable in Tunisia's process. Pre-Arab Spring Tunisia can be defined as consisting of a non-elected wealthy elite class with a disenfranchised and impoverished majority. (Boubeker 2015) Consistently, under both the dictatorial regimes of Bourguiba and Ben Ali, government ministers hailed from the wealthy northeastern and coastal regions of Tunisia, such as the major cities of Tunis, Monastir, Sousse and Sfax. (Carboni 2023) Tunisia also has a history of technocratic government involvement that managed to survive the dictatorial transition between Bourguiba and Ben Ali with little change of the old guard. (Carboni 2023) Historically, the southern and western inland populations were politically under-represented, as well as economically under-served, which reflects the present reality. Education relative to unemployment has been highest in the less represented and less wealthy areas of Tunisia, with 1 in 3 young men in rural areas unemployed compared to 1 in 5 in major cities. It was in these rural, southern and western regions that unrest reached the fever-pitch that would trigger the spreading of the "Jasmine Revolution" throughout the country, primarily through social media. (Lefevre 2017) The internet was considered a tool towards democratization for young Tunisian activists whose grievances included unemployment rates in addition to nepotism and corruption at government levels, classifying Tunisia's revolution as fundamentally counter-elite, and therefore populist in nature. (Karolak 2020)

Tunisian elites did capitulate to revolutionary pressure, and once Ben Ali had been successfully deposed, members of the prior government went on to form major democratic political parties in Tunisia such as Nidaa Tounes. Despite opposing each other in theory,

once elected to parliament these parties containing pre-established elites cooperated so much so that law-making stagnated due to compromise. Boubekeur described the emerging parliament as ineffective and solely dedicated to a thorough co-opting of post-revolutionary resources through informal arrangements between ministers. (2016) In the spaces where political parties failed to achieve, the technocrats who enjoyed the prestige of ministerial positions under Ben Ali continued to access governmental power, representing five of eight selected government heads in post-revolutionary Tunisia up to 2020. Although non-partisan, these technocrats often emerged from the ranks of public administration, having distanced themselves from Tunisia's previous dictatorial regimes. They regularly took up un-elected appointments that proved the inability of political party performance to meet administrative needs. (Carboni 2023) These technocrats, alongside Tunisia's weak, consensus driven political parties, were not opposed to each other, but instead were the same educated elite, re-branded. Attempts to improve electoral participation of the youth through youth quotas on election ballots have not proved effective. (Dobbs 2020)

Civil Society, on the other hand, boasted great potential for capturing the revolutionary zeal of young activists who sought to be a part of Tunisia's new state-making process. The number of registered Tunisian civil society organizations (CSOs) rose to 15,000 in 2011, and later to 18,000 in 2013, increasing to this day. (Marzo 2020) Many formed without specific missions, purely out of desire to influence the direction of policy. This new generation of CSOs, like the Jasmine Revolution activists preceding them, makes use of digital communication and social media to spread their messages. (Weilandt 2019) Yet the older generations of CSOs, which had survived the Ben Ali Regime, did not step aside and surrender influence. Instead CSOs such as the general labor union, UGTT, played a surprising role by participating in the Jasmine Revolution. Although mistrust exists between

the younger and older generations of activists, all of these CSOs were crucial to ensuring progress in the democratic transition, engaging in widespread voter outreach campaigns and serving as watchdogs for corruption. (Marzo 2020) Notably, the Tunisian National Dialogue Quartet earned the 2015 Nobel Peace Prize for bringing opposing secular and Islamist political parties to the negotiation table when Tunisia faced the possibility of democratic collapse. (Lefevre 2017) The National Dialogue managed to produce a new Tunisian constitution, but younger civil society members were not included in the National Dialogue process. In spite of international recognition for their work, the older generation of participating CSOs were accused by critics of entrenching the technocratic elite of the old regime. (Weilandt 2019) As this review of Tunisian political and civil society developments demonstrates, while the Jasmine Revolution began in earnest as a populist youth movement, opportunities for state-making influence were exceedingly co-opted by elites, delegitimizing the process of democratization in the eyes of younger non-elite Tunisians. (Mansouri 2020)

## ***2.2. EU Achievements in Tunisian Democracy Promotion***

As an external actor engaged in democracy promotion, the EU has always recognized the importance of engaging with elites in Tunisia. The EU's choices regarding engagement, investment, and negotiation exemplify the normative power of the EU in its democracy promotion efforts. Manners explains that the existence of the EU, being a union unlike any other in previous history, is ideologically bound by "core" values which it imposes as universal through normative power. Manners argues that in spite of a claim to universality, the core of these values has historical precedence within Europe. (Powel 2009) Bicchi goes further to demarcate the difference between normative power, and an exclusive, unreflexive

“civilizing power,” decriing the EU 's tendency as an external actor to impose norms upon the domestic elite and non-elite without taking domestic priorities into account. (2006) Both Bicchi and Powel recognize the European Neighborhood Policy as a vehicle of a normative (even civilizing!) power which clashes with the sensibilities of Mediterranean neighboring states. As an example, Powel described the hesitation of the EU to recognize the output legitimacy of Islamist political actors prior to the ousting of the Ben Ali regime, which was secular and preached economic liberalism. In Powel’s view, the EU 's normative power is exercised as a means to maintain a neighboring state’s stability as a guarantee of broader regional security. (Powel 2009) Whether this approach is purposeful and therefore instrumentally rationalist, or an inevitable product of historical institutionalism is up for debate. (Bicchi 2006) Principally, this section addresses the fruitfulness of the EU’s normative power in post-revolutionary Tunisia.

A review of EU support for democratic transition in Tunisia as an external actor reveals the inadvertent entrenchment of some old elites, as well as the creation of new elites, and an unintentional disregard of the very grievances that brought about Tunisia’s Jasmine Revolution. Nevertheless, the EU has positively influenced meaningful strides towards democracy promotion in Tunisia. Given the immense amount of support the EU has offered, it is arguable that Tunisian democracy may not have lasted the decade it did without EU aid and training. (Marzo 2020) Before exploring potential missteps in democracy promotion, it is crucial to understand what the EU has managed to accomplish in Tunisia in regards to democratic promotion.

Immediately after Ben Ali stepped down, the EU moved to make Tunisia a “privileged partner” of the Euro Mediterranean Partnership and doubled their annual funding to the country between 2011-2018. (Cohen-Hadria 2018) Transitional political elites

lacked the financial backing and skills to create a democracy in Tunisia after Ben Ali's ousting, and the EU was eager to provide assistance in both institution building and shaping norms. (Marzo 2020) The EU initiated political party training and fair election monitoring to create a legitimate and cooperative parliament. Training of high-level party members and youth members alike emphasized multi-party dialogues to allow for a plurality of perspectives in parliamentary processes. (Marzo 2020) The EU has also funded anti-corruption initiatives, and has advocated for the establishment of a constitutional court. Funding has been conditionally tied to promises of Tunisian officials to commit to tax and labor market reform. (Council of Europe)

The E.U has not limited its focus to the transitional elites in the political sphere. Cautious of interfering with burgeoning democratic elections, it instead spent the majority of its funding as aid to civil society organizations. (Marzo 2020) From the beginning, the EU held structured consultations with civil society members before deciding on new policy goals. (Mouhib 2014) In 2014, the EU declared its intentions to pivot funding away from economic stabilization and even further towards civil society support as part of an updated Neighborhood Partnership plan. (Johansson-Nogues and Rivera Escartin, 2020) A 2018 focus group across 26 civil society partners reported both EU funding and training as instrumental to their development and outreach. Critics have claimed this funding has created an opportunistic industrialization of the NGO sphere so that it no longer represents a meaningful path towards elite resistance, but embodies an elitism of its own. (Marzo 2020)

As previously stated, the E.U's efforts thus far have been inspired by a greater European Neighborhood Policy whose intention is to stabilize bordering states and therefore assure the EU is not negatively affected by proximal instability. Keeping these stated goals in mind, the EU's approach to Tunisian democracy promotion has existed within the

security-stability nexus. The stated philosophy is that individual human security assures little possibility of radicalization and the destabilization that terrorist cells inflict upon the state. To create human security, and protect stability, the EU promotes human rights and the rule of law as normative in its Neighborhood engagements. (Dandashly 2018) Therefore, even more so than the reform of institutions, the EU has heavily prioritized the development of shared democratic norms between Tunisia and itself. Among these, human developments, rights, and freedoms have been particularly important as markers of legitimate democracy from an EU perspective. (Mouhib 2014)

To this end Tunisia has been encouraged to adapt Council of Europe conventions and protocols against domestic violence, sex trafficking, and abuse of private data. (Council of Europe) The promotion of free trade as a viable economic path towards human development has been another central argument to the EU's democracy promotion rhetoric. The EU spent many years campaigning for the acceptance of a Deep Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement between itself and Tunisia, with little success. (Johansson-Nogues and Rivera Escartin, 2020) Issues of migration between Tunisia and the EU provide a prime example of the EU's security concerns, as the EU has encouraged Tunisia to close off informal migration routes. A survey of Tunisian civil servants has reported that pro-human rights migration reform has not come to pass, and that the new regimes have made no efforts to amend the restrictive migration policy that existed under previous regimes. (Natter 2022)

### **3. Empirical Analysis**

#### ***3.1. EU and Tunisian Civil Society***

While much academic focus has been given to the EU 's policies and stated goals in democracy promotion, historically little attention has been paid to how that translates into interactions with local elites. (Weilandt 2022) The first topic for analysis will be the perceived failures of the EU's engagement with the Tunisian political and civil society elite, from the Tunisian perspective. EU civil society consultation and funding initiatives have been fundamental to EU democracy promotion. Within CSOs reports of the inefficacy of the consultation and funding models arise surrounding issues of paternalism and inclusiveness. (Khakee and Weilandt 2022) Therefore neither of these efforts can be considered wholly successful. Most importantly, while external actors are expected to engage with elites to assure political transition, a lack of redistribution of influence and opportunity following initial elite capitulations to a grassroots revolution thrusts a newly democratic state into continued instability (Acemoglu and Robinson 2001). Taking surveyed CSO members at face value, the EU 's CSO approaches have contributed to the entrenchment and creation of old and new elites who are unable to effectively improve the lives of the aggrieved non-elite.

Ragnar Weilandt's work sheds light on the complicated reality of dealings between the EU and Tunisian civil society members. His case study consists of 103 interviews of Tunisian civil society members who are on the receiving end of EU assistance and participate in EU consultations alongside Tunisian government members. These "tripartite" consultations are informative for EU delegates who may not have a deeper awareness of which issues most urgently concern locals. (Weilandt 2022) Although the EU intends to discuss policy possibilities on equal footing with other consultation members, the presence



of Tunisian government officials can lead to a united influence against civil society suggestions. In other instances the EU may align with CSOs against government officials' wishes. Likewise, without being overt, the EU. exerts influence simply by inviting CSO members of its choosing. Often, EU delegations invite CSO members who are considered politically relevant and already wielding meaningful influence. (Weilandt 2022) This practice tends towards entrenching "elite" NGOs whose interests may align with the EU (Mouhib 2014) and whose recognition extends prior to the Jasmine Revolution. Notably, most CSOs invited to EU consultations represent secular society. Many other regularly included NGOs are internationally active, and staffed by expats as well as what Weilandt refers to as "Europe-oriented Tunisians."(2022) International NGOS are able to depend on external donors and support that allow them considerable efficacy, and the EU delegation views them as desirable partners for cooperation. Weilandt also reports significant overlap between whom the EU delegates invite to consultations and whom they socialize with while living in the capital city. (Weilandt 2022)

The unfortunate outcome of these consultation invitations being based on recognition and previous cooperation is that it allows an elite class of CSO members and international NGOs to repeatedly dominate policy negotiations during consultations, preventing the induction of grassroots organizations. These consultations are based in Tunis and the EU does not provide travel funding, meaning that not only are the consultations socially exclusive, but logistically exclusive to the wealthier northeastern regions of Tunisia. (Weilandt 2022) The NGOization of Tunisia, wherein an industry of CSO careers has been established, tends to be the domain of Tunis-based office workers, academics, lawyers, or those privileged enough to volunteer, all more than likely French speaking. (Weilandt 2019, 2022) Those who are based in the southern and western Tunisian inlands, whose financial

position may be more precarious and whose French may not be as strong, have little likelihood of inclusion. (Mansouri 2020)

The consultations themselves are described by surveyed CSO invitees as informal, without topic information always being provided ahead of time to allow preparation. When information is provided, the documents are often in French, which may limit comprehension for Tunisian invitees. Several Tunisian CSO members described EU delegates as "paternalistic" in their recommendations, and some consultations concern issues that have already been decided by EU policy prior to any discussion. (Khakee, Weilandt 2022) The EU delegates have no guarantees of influence on EU policy and are thus unable to make any binding commitments to the CSO members present at the consultations. For issues such as mobility surrounding Tunisian visa schemes in 2018, CSO members were not invited at all, and closed conversations were held between the Tunisian government and EU delegates. (Weilandt, 2022)

CSO funding, originating from the EIDHR, follows a similar pattern to consultations. Despite claiming to prioritize local CSOs, both local and international organizations are eligible for EU funding. (Mouhib 2014) Tension is said to exist between local and international CSOs because the complicated application process to receive one of EIDHR's substantial grants may require the technical expertise of previous experience. In this way professional NGO staff and international CSOs are at a major advantage. (Weilandt 2019) The complexity of the application process often encourages Tunisian CSOs to have a foreigner on staff to aid with navigating it, and to become a mediator between EU delegates once the application is approved. Whereas the professionalization of the NGO space may have increased the efficacy of output, critics claim that EU funding has created a career culture in CSOs that distances activists from the reality of laborers in the workforce, and

may unduly influence CSO objectives. (Weilandt 2019) EU funding selectively pours into Tunis where recognized CSOs with either professional NGO staff or foreign staff are central to procuring grants. A good number of these professionals hail from the older generation of activists present in the Ben Ali regime who often had to compromise human rights values to accomplish their goals within the dictatorship. These “Historiques,” as the younger generations of activists refer to them (Weilandt 2019) , are criticized for having co-opted what was primarily a youth-driven, social media dependent revolution while neglecting youth input. (Mansouri 2020) In spite of its best intentions, the EU’s existing tripartite consultation structure and funding mechanisms have managed to entrench some elites further, and create new elites without truly being able to offer binding commitments to cooperation. As a result of the EU’s narrow forays in CSO engagement, the populist element which inspired revolution in Tunisia has not been appeased, and has developed distrust towards EU cooperation.

### ***3.2. Tunisian Perceptions of EU Norms***

This distrust is not only present in the practical cooperation between the EU and CSOs. It is rooted in a fundamentally different value system guiding the Tunisian perception of socially just governance. Although the EU cannot be held solely responsible for the entrenchment of old elites within the Tunisian political sphere that emerged post-Arab Spring, an argument can be made for a failure to grasp the appeal and applicability of EU norms among political factions. (Weilandt 2022) As part of the security stability nexus the EU emphasizes human rights and freedoms, rule of law, and economic liberalization as determinants of human security and resulting in state stability. (Dandashly 2018) Accordingly, EU democracy

promotion in Tunisia consists of funding conditions, policy design, and institution building reflecting these norms. (Mouhib 2014) Khakee and Wolff emphasize that norm diffusion has traditionally been studied from the perspective of the initiating party, but local elites serve as gatekeepers to accept or reject norms. (2021) Weilandt elaborates that the process of incorporation of norms within the political elite's sphere of influence is not necessarily a binary choice and that some norms may be accepted while others will be contested. He describes the political cleavages within Tunisian society and their differing approaches to EU democratic norms. (Weilandt 2022) With no clear consensus between Tunisian elites, non-elites, and the EU 's vision for democracy, any political movement blindly acquiescing to EU norms risks jeopardizing output legitimacy. Moreover, by insisting on an inflexibly idealistic norms system that does not reflect Tunisian priorities, the EU risks losing legitimacy as a positively viewed external actor. (Bicchi 2006)

Because of Ben Ali's secular and economically liberal rhetoric, the EU was hesitant to criticize his authoritarian regime. Historically, the geographical proximity of Tunisia, and the supposedly shared values of the Ben Ali regime, primed Europe to see Tunisia as the most Europeanized state in North Africa. The EU only cautiously declared support of Tunisia's democratic revolution once Ben Ali had fled, but the optimism about the potential for a Europeanized democracy quickly took hold. (Weilandt 2022) Besides widespread support for universal suffrage, and fair elections, Tunisian views of political output legitimacy would differ from EU expectations almost immediately. In the wake of the fallen dictatorship, Islamist party Ennahda appeared a legitimate alternative to the secular officials who had thrived under Ben Ali and were considered less trustworthy. Ennahda stood to gain support with religious Tunisians as they were initially viewed as having been uncompromising in their values even under threat of the prior secular dictatorship. (Powel

2009) This possibility alarmed the EU whose secular norms are socially progressive in regards to gender and sexuality relative to those of Islamist Ennahda. However, the EU pragmatically approached Ennahda as one of the many parties it offered political training to. (Voltolini and Colombo 2018) Ennahda proved to be more flexible than originally feared, readily compromising with secular party Nidaa Tounes to form a coalition government from 2015-2018, and outwardly projecting themselves as a moderate Islamist faction, despite opposition to gender equality measures. Although Ennahda contests EU norms promoting the universality of human rights, they readily accept movements towards economic liberalization, as they prioritize Tunisian economic growth. (Weilandt 2022)

The older political elites, such as those who were incorporated into Nidaa Tounes, do not outright reject EU norms, but praise them only in theory. These secular conservatives persist in advocating for traditional social and gender roles and harken back to Bourgiba's authoritarian regime as exemplary of secular state strength, while claiming Tunisia is not ready for democracy. Most notably, they oppose anti-corruption and transitional justice initiatives which threaten whatever influence and wealth they managed to salvage from the collapse of the Ben Ali regime. (Weilandt 2022) The secular progressives, who are represented by the youthful activists and politicians rising to prominence post-Arab spring, declare support for human rights and equality as universal values. (Weilandt 2022) They are eager for transitional justice to hold participants in Ben Ali's regime accountable, and oppose the nepotism and corruption insidious to Tunisian politics. (Mansouri 2020) Yet, the secular progressives were highly suspicious of the EU's push for trade liberalization through the DCFTA, which they considered self-serving. (Weilandt 2022) No singular political faction supports all EU democratic norms and therefore they are each only selectively appropriated.

Weilandt also discusses the perception of EU norm legitimacy from the perspective of non-elite Tunisians. Perhaps most worryingly, the EU's narrow-sighted insistence on human rights, and free trade clash with the Tunisian non-elite's desire for socioeconomic security above all else. (Weilandt 2022) This chasm between normative priorities has served to progressively alienate the Tunisian population at large. As economic conditions worsen, ideals of universal human rights strike Tunisians as superficial. Ridge's survey reveals a strong preference for effectiveness in providing socioeconomic stability that outweighs interests in political self-determination. According to her results, 90.4% of respondents believe it is the government's responsibility to provide food and shelter to the needy, whereas 79.1% believe the government should limit the income gap between rich and poor. This interest in lessening wealth disparity hints at a social perception of justice and equity yet to be addressed by the European human rights paradigm or economic liberalization proposals. (Ridge 2022)

Tunisia has also become perceptively less safe to its citizens in the aftermath of the revolution. Rising trends of Islamic radicalization have inspired domestic terrorist attacks and record numbers of Tunisians joining DAESH, leaving the vast majority of Tunisian citizens concerned with the country's security. (Gunay and Somavilla 2019) Secular conservatives emphasize that prioritizing human rights in dealing with radicals could pose a security issue. (Weilandt 2022) Meanwhile conservative Tunisians resent the implication that EU values, especially those concerning women and the LGBTQ community, must be implemented in their country. (Weilandt 2022) The presence of Islam as a shaper of normative political values also influences the Tunisian public's approach to economic issues. As Dimitrova and Novakova explain in their prescient analyses of the EU's development paradigm, an Islamic development paradigm considers social justice and solidarity at its

core. The idea of a wealthier country alone does not entice Tunisians, as political Islam encourages them to question its distribution. Traditional Quranic practices such as the zakat tax, and prohibitions on usury influence the islamist approach to property ownership and investments. Therefore, parties such as Ennahda may not oppose trade liberalization, but are hesitant to agree to the totality of EU trade and investment regulations. (Dimitrovova and Novakova 2015) Many Tunisians are even less convinced by the proposed economic benefits of liberalization. As Tunisia's government deepens its commitment to political Islam under President Kais Said, the EU may struggle to consolidate an exclusively neoliberal trade deal. Overall, growing skepticism towards EU democracy norms reflect that it is perceived increasingly as exerting a civilizing power, (Bicchi 2006) rather than a positive normative power on Tunisia.

### ***3.3. Migration, Trade, Debt, and EU Self Interest***

#### **3.3.1. Migration**

Migration, trade liberalization, and debt represent three of the most pressing areas of policy in which EU norms are envisaged as only selectively applicable by Tunisian elites. (Johansson-Nogues Rivera Escartin 2020) The EU's stance on migration stems ideologically from the stability security nexus which has historically prioritized the stability of neighboring regions as the answer to preventing irregular migration. Within the EU ideological framework such stability can be promoted through expansion of human rights in cooperation with origin countries serving a two-fold purpose: firstly, to discourage citizen migration through development of quality of life standard, and secondly to increase the

likelihood that third country nationals traveling through Tunisia are likely to settle there. (Dandashly 2018)

The logic of the security stability nexus originated in response to deepened concern following a spate of internationally recognized terrorist attacks from Islamic extremists in the early 2000s. Prior to 2001, issues surrounding irregular migration of Tunisians into the EU were not prominently discussed, but by 2004 the EU was in cooperation with the Ben Ali regime to prevent migrant influx. This cooperation provided the Ben Ali regime with leverage over negotiations determining EU assistance levels while securing visa opportunities for Tunisian jobseekers within the EU. (Zardo and Cavatorta, 2019) The EU's cooperation served in turn to legitimize Ben Ali's authoritarian leadership in Tunisia as enhancing stability and security. The contradictory nature of the EU's migration policies and its supposed dedication to the expansion of human rights and democratic institutions carried on without reassessment until the Arab Spring in 2011. (Roman 2019) During the initial revolutionary wave. Some 70,000 Tunisians fled the country towards underprepared Italian and French territory. (David and Marouani 2015) As the Jasmine Revolution wore onwards, would-be democratic reformers voiced skepticism towards the sincerity of EU support, referencing EU migration policy patterns and subsequent EU complicity with the Ben Ali regime. This resistance towards cooperation on migration policy was understandable from the perspective of the new Tunisian elite, many of whom had required political asylum to escape the repression of Ben Ali, and were only able to return to Tunisia once he lost power. (Natter 2022)

From a financial perspective, Tunisian political grievances towards stringent EU migration policies ran even deeper. Remittances from Tunisians living and working abroad represented 4% of the Tunisia economy in 2012, and have been directly linked to job creation within



Tunisia. (David and Marouani 2015) Considering the high levels of unemployability amongst even educated young Tunisians, EU labor market accessibility far outweighed EU security concerns for the new generation of Tunisian politicians and civil society members. (Roman 2019) Freedom of mobility and emigration possibilities became a commonly expressed goal for newly democratic Tunisia which united lawmakers and civil society members alike. (Natter 2022) However, developments connected to the unfolding of the Arab Spring strengthened EU resolve in repurposing the security-stability nexus and calling for containment of migration stemming from the Mediterranean south. In Tunisia's neighbor Libya, the Arab Spring eventually led to the NATO enforced overthrow of Muammar Qaddafi and the collapse of the state. As Libyan refugees poured into Tunisia, EU migration policy evolved to represent the interests of containment under new circumstances by embracing the rhetoric of human rights promotion and economic development within Tunisia. Such rhetoric belied EU motives to encourage Libyan refugees to embrace opportunities in Tunisia instead of traveling further to EU borders. (Spijkerboer 2022)

In tandem with these containment motives, the EU began a major shift in reframing the responsibility of preventing migration from an EU concern to a Tunisian concern, thus externalizing reform targets. A crucial point in this externalized reframing was the EU directed push towards Mobility Partnerships, which required reabsorption of third country nationals into the country from which they embarked on the final leg of their journey to Europe. Under the Mobility Partnership scheme the EU would no longer be responsible for repatriating third country nationals to their country of citizenship. In return for cooperation, migratory Tunisian job seekers would be granted a limited quota of visas to enter the EU workforce. (Limam and Del Sarto, 2015) These initial conditions proved unattractive to the newly elected Tunisian democracy. Furthermore they did little to inspire Tunisia's

burgeoning civil society, whose concerns were primarily focused on strengthening Tunisian democracy and quality of life. Not only was there a lack of interest within civil society to address migration containment, but there was also a lack of experience. (Roman 2019) Moreover, the stresses of transition into democracy severely weakened the governmental apparatus of Tunisia, which no longer had the ability to leverage cooperation in migration containment over the EU to achieve funding and visa privileges.

The EU adapted its approach to this mixture of civil society disinterest and governmental vulnerability by implementing a conditionality to the access of EU funds, inadvertently undermining the EU's professed commitment to democracy promotion. (Limam and Del Sarto, 2015) In 2012 Tunisia agreed to a five year Privileged Partnership with the EU that expressed the conditionality of the partnership as based around migration management and reduction of irregular migration. After a series of political assassinations left the elected governing party of Ennahda in crisis in 2013, the future of Tunisian democracy seemed more dependent on external support. Yet the EU did not heed the wishes of local politicians and civil society to enhance mobility, and instead seized an opportunity to emphasize the conditionality of EU support, ultimately securing a Mobility Partnership with Tunisia in 2014, while Tunisia was under the control of an unelected, technocratic interim government. As of 2018, the EU-Tunisia Strategic Partnership goals reiterate the importance of migration management, readmission policies and criminalization of irregular migration entry to the EU. (Mitra 2023) To date, preferential communication surrounding migration policy is directed towards the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Justice, and the Ministry of Defense, which are staffed by older Tunisian elites who were trained within the Ben Ali regime and technocrats whose interests do not reflect those of grassroots civil society. (Zardo and Cavatorta, 2019)

To claim that civil society has been completely excluded from mobility negotiations with the EU would be inaccurate. Yet despite committing to better CSO engagement on migration in 2016, EU civil society funding displays a pattern of clientelism which privileges organizations that strive for EU sanctioned goals. These organizations on the receiving end of EU funding primarily consisted of the remaining elites who governed migration policy under the Ben Ali regime, and international organizations such as UNHCR, IOM, and Red Crescent. The closeness of cooperation between the EU and UN organizations leaves little room for grassroots civil society influence on migration policy in Tunisia. In 2011 the UNHCR was granted the exclusive ability to determine refugee status on behalf of migrants entering Tunisia. The UNHCR and IOM received 42% of all migration management funding from the EU in 2021. (Spijkerboer 2022) Thus, the EU has neglected an important opportunity to empower younger generations of local civil society members and undercut the very democratic institutions the EU claims to support.

This paradoxical approach to migration policy on behalf of the EU can in part be explained by issues at the core of EU institutional delegation. Although the EU outwardly addresses its support for Tunisian democracy as a function of the European Neighborhood Policy, whose jurisdiction falls within the European External Action Service, policies regarding migration have been monopolized by the Department for Growth. The DG approaches migration under the Global Approach to Migration and Mobility which does not concern itself with individual diplomacy between nations. Under the GAMM, migration is presented as an internal issue solely affecting member states, thus ruling out opportunities for diplomatic negotiation that would be better facilitated by EEAS. (Carrera et. al 2012) Some improvement in this area is evidenced by an increase in bi-lateral migration

agreements between states since the end of Europe's migration crisis in 2016, but the logic behind these new agreements often shares the same inflexible Euro-centrism. (Veron 2020)

Similarly, the resulting policy implementation has led to paradoxical outcomes. EU effort to enhance civil society participation in discussions of migration has regularly excluded local perspectives, but initiatives of the UNHCR and Red Crescent towards containment have fallen flat. Regularly, third country nationals who receive initial funding from UNHCR to encourage settlement within Tunisia choose to spend the funds on attempts to migrate towards Europe. Meanwhile local CSOs advocating for migrant rights within Tunisia from a humanitarian perspective report higher successes with resettling third country nationals within Tunisia. (Cuttitta 2020) Even so, despite recognizing the right to asylum in the now defunct 2014 Tunisian constitution, no meaningful changes were made to increase accessibility of migrants in Tunisia to education and the workforce, preventing successful resettlement. (Mitra 2023) This is in part because of a differing understanding of migration among the Tunisian populace. The Tunisian political landscape did not mirror the increase in the politicization of migration within the EU following the refugee crisis of 2014-2016, and irregular migration from Tunisia has not peaked since the initial wave in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. Surveyed Tunisians civilians consistently frame migration as an unfortunate economic necessity. (Roman 2019) Irregular migration has also shown little decrease, as stricter EU vigilance has only served to discourage documented forms of travel into EU territory and increase smuggling. (Spijkerboer 2022) Finally, studies have suggested that improvement of economic factors and educational access increase rates of migration, defying the very logic of the EU's current iteration of the security stability nexus. (Jung 2022) Amongst local CSOs, criticism remains widespread of the Mobility Partnership's externalization of responsibility for third country nationals in exchange for so few visa

opportunities. (Roman 2019) When considering the EU's misguided advocacy for a security-stability framework of migration, it is apparent that the EU has prioritized notions of internal security at the expense of economic and political stability through representation of Tunisian interests. In order to promote democracy within Tunisia in good faith, the EU must embrace the flexible mobility of migrants, as containment policies delegitimize EU influence and weaken civil society while providing little in the way of tangible results.

### **3.3.2. Trade**

The EU has also demonstrated a willingness to prioritize its own interests over those of Tunisian democracy on the subject of trade. The establishment of free markets and globalized trade constitute fundamental tools within EU democracy promotion policy, both of which the EU advocates as universally beneficial towards sustainable development. (Johansson-Nogues and Rivera Escartin 2020) In the case of democracy promotion in Tunisia this has culminated in an unwavering push towards a Deep Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement. This push does not represent a novel development, as the first attempts to liberalize trade with Tunisia began in the 1980s, resulting in the 1995 Association Agreement under which Tunisia pledged to do away with tariff barriers on manufactured products imported from the EU. The AA was a benchmark set by the Barcelona Process, European Mediterranean Partnership, which preceded the current European Neighborhood Policy. (Langan 2015) To account for possible vulnerabilities in Tunisian markets, Tunisia was granted 12 years to do away with tariff barriers on manufacturing products in return for a partial liberalization of agricultural imports to the EU. Initial hopes of increased profit and employment rates did not materialize from this imbalanced agreement. Between 1996-2008,

Tunisia experienced a loss of revenue totaling 4 billion dollars, and its manufacturing industry was subsumed. (Langan 2015) Exports to the EU increased 38% compared to a 46% increase in EU imports from 2004-2013, further highlighting the imbalance in beneficial trade under the AA. (Dimitrovova and Novakova, 2015) Yet as of 2021, the ENP still insists upon promoting trade liberalization as the best possible solution to Tunisia's socioeconomic difficulties. (Khakee and Weilandt 2022) The DCFTA calls not only for the elimination of tariff and non tariff barriers on products imported into Tunisia from the EU, but on services as well as liberalization of foreign investment opportunities. (Langan 2015) Having been burned before and facing record levels of youth unemployment Tunisian civil society members and the majority of Tunisian political parties have presented a united front against the DCFTA since 2015. (Khakee and Weilandt 2022)

The arguments behind the Tunisian resistance to trade liberalization deserve careful consideration, which this section will attempt. Upon closer inspection obvious contrasts appear between the European Consensus on Development and the predicted impacts of the DCFTA. (Grumiller 2018) Tunisian concerns rest primarily on the imbalance between the EU and Tunisian markets in interdependence. While the EU is the source of 50% of Tunisian imports and 80% of Tunisian exports, Tunisia only accounts for 0.6% of the EU's international trade. (Langan and Price 2020) (Rudloff and Werenfels 2018) In this light, it would appear that Tunisia stands to gain far more from trade liberalization, but the DCFTA offers few incentives to encourage Tunisian exports. Two of Tunisia's major economic sectors, agriculture and textiles would be particularly threatened by the implementation of the DCFTA. (Grumiller 2018)

Tunisia's agricultural sector's largest export is olive oil which accounts for 40% of the agricultural sector's profit. Unfortunately, due to the agricultural interests of southern

EU state members, the production and sale of olive oil is protected by the EU Common Agricultural Policy. Currently the EU enforces quotas limiting the import of Tunisian olive oil, preventing Tunisia's naturally more competitive production capabilities from profiting at the expense of EU member states. (Rudloff and Werenfels, 2018) Tunisian olive oil is often blended with EU produced olive oil, thus erasing the Tunisian claim to the production process and full profits. (Rudloff 2020) The DCFTA does not address these stringent quotas or protectionist policies, although the EU did eventually offer to raise the quota in 2018 in exchange for agreement to the DCFTA, proving again the conditionality of EU development support. (Rudloff and Werenfels 2018) Quotas are not the only barrier preventing the Tunisian agricultural sector from profiting off of the DCFTA. The EU-wide agricultural product regulation standards create a significant barrier for the marketability of agricultural products from less developed markets. (Khakee and Weilandt 2022) Yet from the EU's perspective, trade liberalization offers new avenues for profit. For example, the EU's own Trade Sustainability Impact Assessments (SIAs) estimate Tunisian imports of meat, for example, will increase 33%. (Langan 2015)

The Tunisian textile sector is similarly challenged by the provisions of the DCFTA. At present the Tunisian textile sector provides 4% of the country's GDP. (Langan 2015) Due to the Pan Euro Mediterranean Convention fabrics sourced from the EU and Turkey are preferred for transformation into ready made apparel and export from Tunisia, doing away with any potential benefit in trade to be gained by liberalization for the textile and apparel sectors. (Grumiller 2018) The SIA predicts that the value added to the Tunisian textile sector will decrease by 15.6% and 2.4% for the apparel sector. (Langan 2015) CSOs and majorly influential Tunisian political parties such as Nidaa Tounes, have expressed fear that the DCFTA would allow EU exports to flood Tunisian markets and outcompete domestic

production, causing layoffs. As Nidaa Tounes is composed of old Tunisian elites, resistance to the DCFTA is present in the most influential sectors of Tunisian society, as well as among the public. (Rudloff and Werenfels 2018) These fears are not unfounded, as the EU's SIA indicates that the DCFTA would cause industry within Tunisia to shrink by 65% and even with creation of new jobs, an overall loss of 8% of Tunisian jobs is expected. (Langan 2015) Many of these job losses, especially those in the agricultural and textile sectors, would disproportionately affect women, contradicting EU sustainable development goals to increase women's participation in the labor market. (Grumiller 2018)

The effects of the ensuing rise of unemployment in the DCFTA's wake would prove a challenge to Tunisia's social safety net, as tariffs supply 15.9% of Tunisia's annual fiscal revenue. (Langan 2015) Smaller sectors, such as Tunisia's food, beverage and tobacco sector, also stand to decrease in production up to 94.1% (Langan and Price 2015) Overall, Tunisia's real GDP is anticipated to decrease 0.52% according to the predictive economic model produced by the Austrian Foundation for Development Research. (Grumiller 2018) These figures are unable to take into account effects on Tunisia's gray and black markets and losses may be higher. (Dimitrovova, Novakova, 2015)

The EU's defense of the DCFTA suggests that such losses would be offset by an increase in Foreign Direct Investment, (FDI,) and that there are built in provisions to support Tunisia through the economic transition. (Dandashly 2018) The track record of similar provisions executed within the AA has not been promising. Despite incurring \$4 billion in losses since the AA's implementation, EU support for transition amounted only to \$428.4 million under MEDA from 1995-1999. The Southern Regional Investment Facility added \$128 million to this underwhelming amount between 2007-2010. DCFTA candidate states such as Tunisia are eligible for only \$75 million annually to support market transition.



(Langan 2015) Increases in FDI are perceived as a mixed blessing by Tunisian political actors who have welcomed the possibility but simultaneously expressed hesitation surrounding oversight of these investments. Laws governing foreign investment in Tunisia are already considered lax and officials in even pro-liberalization parties, such as Ennahda, aim to ensure long-term quality investments which are not subject to tax evasion. (Dimitrovova and Novakova, 2015) Adopting the DCFTA may undermine Tunisian sovereignty, depriving elected Tunisian officials of the authority to regulate investment and protect public services such as electricity and water from privatization. (Dimitrovova and Novakova, 2015) Trade unions such as UGTT point out that there is no way to guarantee these FDIs benefit the interior and southern Tunisian regions which face the most financial disparities relative to the rest of the country. (Dandashly 2018) It was these very disparities in areas such as employment and income, likely worsened by the liberalization experience by the AA, that inspired the Jasmine Revolution originally. (Langan 2015)

There are further hesitations towards the DCFTA surrounding the ability of Tunisian industry to match EU market requirements surrounding labor protections and environmental standards. Because labor conditions are a human rights issue championed by the EU as crucial to the socioeconomic development inherent to democratization, Tunisia's adherence determines the conditionality of EU support and market access. (Rudloff and Werenfels 2018) The EU has offered a ten year reprieve from tariff and non tariff removal to allow development standards within Tunisia to catch up, all the while offering EU market access. (Langan and Price, 2020) Yet under the AA, 12 years was not enough for the Tunisian domestic industry to adjust to losses incurred from liberalized trade in manufacturing. (Khakee and Weilandt 2022) For these myriad reasons, the DCFTA has not been passed in

the 8 years since negotiations began. It has proved wildly unpopular within Tunisian public discourse. (Johansson-Nogues and Rivera Escartin 2020)

To counteract this lack of popularity CSOs have called for transparency and public consultations in DCFTA negotiations but thus far their input has been limited, in part due to the linguistic and technical inaccessibility of the EU consultation documents. (Weilandt, 2022) These negotiations fall within the jurisdiction of the Directorate General of Trade, which CSOs have accused of universalizing a neoliberal economic approach that does not consider Tunisia's unique needs. (Khakee and Weilandt 2022) To support this claim, one need only to examine earlier drafts of the DCFTA offered to Tunisia in which South Korea is mistakenly referred. (Khakee and Weilandt 2022) Civil society members also report feeling dismissed by the DG Trade's chief negotiator who in a 2019 meeting with CSOs refused to take notes, made comparisons between Tunisia, Latin America and South East Asia, and left early. (Khakee and Weilandt 2022) Public and political resistance following incidents such as these resulted in suspension of DCFTA negotiations by Prime Minister Youssef Chahed later in 2019. (Johansson-Nogues and Rivera Escartin 2020) Negotiations are not expected to resume under President Kais Said. In spite of having witnessed over a decade of near universal resistance towards the DCFTA, EU spending in Tunisia through the ENPI has pivoted heavily towards economic realignment and reform within Tunisia. From 2011-2013 30% of ENPI spending was directed towards trade and investment reform. Over the same period spending towards socio-economic development decreased from 27-20%. (Dimitrovova and Novakova, 2015) Again, the priorities of the EU in trade reveal a profound disinterest in the realities of the Tunisian concerns that triggered the democratization process and display a shallow encouragement of democratic self-

determination, weakening the respectability of EU influence and preventing the creation of mutually beneficial trade deals. (Johansson-Nogues and Rivera Escartin 2020)

### **3.3.3 Debt**

The EU's insistence on applying neoliberal economic practices in the Tunisian context extends to how EU member states handle Tunisian debt repayments. In the aftermath of the Jasmine Revolution EU member states demanded repayment of the approximately \$15 billion owed to foreign creditors under the Ben Ali regime. (Johansson-Nogues and Rivera Escartin 2020) This immediate and insurmountable burden forced the fledgling Tunisian democracy to agree to stringent austerity measures in order to receive IMF loans in 2013 and 2016. Austerity measures enacted under IMF bailouts cut public spending and sparked an increase in unemployment without significantly stimulating the Tunisian economy as expected. The national outrage over the negative effects of the austerity measures led to mass protests in 2019 organized by Tunisia's largest labor union, UGTT. (Johansson-Nogues and Rivera Escartin 2020) The refusal of EU states to delay loan repayment demands that were accrued under a defunct government placed undue strain on the newer democratic class of Tunisian policymakers. It is possible that Tunisia's need for a bailout would have been better met through the European Investment Bank (EIB) which has less stringent conditionalities in loan agreements. As of 2023, the Tunisian economy has never regained its footing and is on the brink of defaulting on foreign debt again, which could create catastrophic consequences for the state's ability to pay all publicly employed Tunisians in the midst of ongoing food shortages. (Pavia 2023) The IMF has offered a \$1.9 billion loan to avoid the collapse of the Tunisian economy, under the condition that the Tunisian government stops

subsidizing food and fuel during the shortage. Although this could benefit the Tunisian economy in the long term, previous attempts to do away with food subsidies caused a 100% rise in staple food prices such as bread, leading again to protests. This time, the IMF's conditional austerity measures and the history of political destabilization that followed has influenced Kais Saïd to reject their loan offer. (Pavia 2023) Though the relationship between Tunisia and the IMF is fraught with distrust, the EU has recently allowed the IMF to mediate another possible loan to Tunisia of up to \$900 million. (Hayden 2023) If the EU does not tread carefully in curbing the neoliberal impulse to manipulate Tunisian domestic policy, those who suffer most will contribute to destabilizing populist backlash. Under Kais Saïd, Tunisia has also been making overtures towards other countries to secure financial support which may demand less conditionality such as fellow MENA states. (Cherif 2021) Should Tunisia pivot away from EU economic dependency, any efforts made by the EU to achieve democracy promotion through conditionality will undoubtedly hold less weight.

### ***3.4. Consequences of Neglecting the Populist Element***

The EU's success in democracy promotion in Tunisia has likely been limited by failure to follow through on empowering the roots of Tunisia's democratic revolution. By projecting EU liberal norms onto Tunisian democratic transition the EU has alienated political elites and Tunisian civilians alike. Furthermore the EU has engaged in clientelism by providing overwhelming support to international NGOs which reflect the EU's interest in Tunisia while dismissing the interests expressed by Tunisians within local CSOs. (Weilandt 2022) Because the EU is Tunisia's largest source of both aid and trade, the differences between EU norms and policy goals and the socioeconomic priorities that shape the Tunisian political

landscape have potentially stalled progress within the transition. (Grumiller 2018) If no trade deal can be negotiated, if no migration policy benefits Tunisian workers, and if no aid and opportunities are available to Tunisia's southern and interior regions, the Tunisians who first rose up and demanded change will not see it reflected in democracy. The election of Kais Said in 2019 demonstrates the growing frustration with Tunisia's lack of improvement under democracy thus far. (Wolf 2019)

### **3.4.1. Surveys of Tunisian Civilians**

However, the Tunisian preference for populism had been growing alongside political discontent for years prior. Surveys of Tunisian civilians portray an alarming shift away from wide support for the democratic system in response to lack of tangible change as early as 2016. As of 2017, the unemployment rate in Tunisia was 15.6%. Among educated youth, this figure more than doubles. By 2017, economic growth was similarly sluggish at 1% a year, which was an improvement upon the economic contraction experienced between 2011-2014. (Lefevre 2017) In 2012 62% of Tunisians expressed optimism about the country's future. By December of 2016 this optimism had dropped to 21%. The same survey revealed perceptions of corruption had grown for 78% of Tunisians interviewed. (Lefevre 2017) In the municipal elections of May 2018, both of Tunisia's major political parties, Nidaa Tounes and Ennahda, lost out to independents.

It was in this context of increasing disappointment that populist outsider Kais Said was able to secure the role of president in June 2019 and begin unraveling Tunisian democratic institutions. Yet Said's suspension of parliament in 2021 did not restore Tunisian faith in democracy. (Ridge 2022) Blackman and Nugent conducted a survey in which 80%

of Tunisian respondents felt that the statement “The president’s actions hold corrupt politicians accountable and help ordinary Tunisians” was more accurate than the statement “The president’s actions undermine [dimuqratiyya] and threaten the rights of the Tunisian people.” (Ridge 2022) In her own August 2021 survey which sampled a population representative of Tunisian demographics, Ridge found that less than half of respondents believed democracy was the best form of government, which signifies a dramatic decrease from the Arabometer’s measurement of 70.2% support for democracy in 2011. (Ridge, 2022) In another 2020 survey of Tunisians 62.9% stated that it was acceptable for a leader to bend rules to accomplish goals, and 55.8% strongly agreed that democracy was not necessary for a leader to maintain stability in Tunisia. (Ridge 2022) Ridge goes on to observe that not all liberal values are endangered, considering that 78.4% of Tunisians support the right to political association and 82.7% support the right to protest. Tunisians are also supportive of civil society as a concept, although 2/3 are underwhelmed by its performance post Arab-Spring. Only 5.9% of Ridge’s respondents are civil society participants. (2022) Distrust in civil society as well as rates of political disengagement, are even higher among Tunisia’s youth. A 2020 survey of Tunisian youth reveals that despite approximately 86% of respondents describing themselves as fairly or somewhat knowledgeable of Tunisia’s democratic process, 74% feel youth have low levels of engagement in the political system, and 91% feel youth have no influence over Tunisian political leadership. (Mansouri 2020) Although this survey contained civil society members, many pointed out the lack of accessibility to civil society participation for those outside coastal regions as a major deterrent for youth engagement in the country’s interior regions. (Mansouri 2020)

### **3.4.2. An Illiberal Populist Coup**

The loss of Tunisian faith in the democratic process has allowed President Said to advance his authoritarian tendencies with minimal challenges. On July 25, 2022, Kais Said successfully passed a new Tunisian constitution which expanded presidential powers over parliament and the constitutional court. Since the 2022 parliamentary elections, which have been described by major political parties and CSOs as rigged and had record lows in voter turnout, Said has initiated a crackdown on his opposition. (Grewal 2022) Prominent politicians, outspoken regime critics, and independent journalists have been arrested and charged with terrorism. Said's regime has begun denying demonstration permits to local organizations, and has even prevented European activists who demonstrate solidarity with unions from entry into Tunisia. All the while Said has defended these steps as necessary security measures. (Human Rights Watch 2023) Following predictable patterns of authoritarian populism elsewhere, Said has started campaigning against sub-saharan African migrants present in Tunisia, asserting on February 21 that they were criminals with the intention of demographically replacing Tunisians. Human Rights Watch has since reported an uptick in violence against African migrants in Tunisia, as well as evictions, and job losses. (Human Rights Watch 2023) Access to jobs, education, and security were already challenges for African migrants within Tunisia, especially since Tunisia's older and newer constitutions never specified what the rights of refugees and asylum seekers are. (Mitra 2023) Should the Tunisian government continue to incite violence and discrimination within its citizens towards migrants, the Mobility Partnership agreement to send third country nationals back to Tunisia becomes laden with human rights concerns.

Simultaneously, in 2023 the Tunisian economy stands on the brink of collapse, as Said's government attempts to secure further foreign funding to prevent defaulting on

foreign debt, which has grown 250% between 2010-2020. (Bouabidi 2023) Considering the EU provides 85% of existing FDI to Tunisia, such a default would have financial ripples across the Mediterranean. Both France and Italy stand to be impacted as they each engage in billions worth of trade with Tunisia annually. (Carbonaro 2023) Most importantly, in light of these trying political and economic circumstances Tunisians seem to have lost their will to fight back. Not only are electoral turnouts and public opinion of the government low, but a recent survey from Tunisia's National Observatory of Migration indicates 65% of Tunisians are desperate to leave the country. For those younger than 30, 90% claim they would do anything to leave. (Carbonaro 2023) Unsurprisingly, irregular migration from Tunisia to the Italian coast has increased, with 75,000 migrants arriving by boat to the EU this year compared to 31,900 in the same timeframe in 2022. (Macauley 2023) With Said at the helm, it may be that Tunisian democracy is breathing its last, and the consequences are already being felt by the EU.



## 4. Policy Recommendations

Now that Tunisia has backslid from its initially promising democratic transition, the question remains what can the EU do to deepen support for Tunisia's weakened democratic institutions? Thus far this thesis has sought to analyze possible missteps stemming from misguided choices in EU funding and policy priorities. After having spent more than \$8 billion, the trust of Tunisians in the intentions behind EU guided reform is precarious at best. (European Commission 2023) However it may be possible to repair that trust and salvage EU influence over Tunisian democracy if the EU chooses to adopt a more sensitive approach to Tunisian grievances in all areas of democracy promotion. This section will provide a brief overview of alternative policy options which may enhance the spirit of compromise and mutual understanding between the EU and Tunisians.

Civil society is one of the fundamental institutions that promotes stronger democratization. (Khakee and Weilandt 2021) Therefore, in spite of criticism, the EU should continue to make funds available to CSOs while adjusting the criteria for how funded CSOs are selected. Inefficiencies in Tunisian government spending of aid make the funding of CSOs all the more valuable. (Cherif 2021) The process for applying for EIDHR funding should be simplified, made available in French and Arabic in smaller amounts so that it is navigable by those who are not career civil society members at international organizations, and purposefully seek out younger potential CSO members with grassroots initiatives. Similarly, tripartite consultations should be sure to invite lesser known CSOs to foster diversity of discussion as well as to provide relevant policy documents far in advance of meetings. (Weilandt 2022) Correspondences should be accessible in Tunisian Arabic. Recently Said has drafted a law that has the potential to grant the government undue oversight of CSO funding and action, but Tunisia's economic vulnerability gives the EU the

unique ability to push back and implement conditionality of funding on the protection of civil society. (Human Rights Watch 2023) (Hertel 2022) The UNHCR's lack of success in settling migrants in Tunisia may indicate that greater success could be found through financially empowering local CSOs to address migrant rights and access to employability and healthcare. (Cuttitta 2020) At the moment, 80% of the EU Emergency Trust to Africa goes towards migration management, while only 20% is directed towards socioeconomic integration. (Veron 2022) Correcting this imbalance at local levels would reaffirm the EU's commitment to human rights issues in the area.

The EU has made it clear that irregular migration stemming from Tunisia is the most pressing issue from the perspective of member states, with leaders such as Italian President Meloni indicating a willingness to cooperate with President Said on policy development that borders on complicity in authoritarianism. (Carbonaro 2023) However, recent developments present the chance for the EU to adopt a more nuanced strategy involving bilateral negotiation, as opposed to falling back on a decontextualized, global migration policy. As of July 14 2023, The EU Commission has agreed to grant Tunisia €105 million towards combating irregular migration and an additional €150 million in budgetary aid. Tunisia is currently in talks with the EU to secure a further €900 million in loans over the next decade, which would be negotiated through IMF recommendations. (Hayden 2023) Although Kais Said has attempted to reposition Tunisia geopolitically by seeking aid from other MENA states such as the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, the EU has a greater ability to assist and therefore influence Tunisia due to EU dominance as Tunisia's major trade partner and source of FDIs. (Carbonaro 2023) Even so, Saudi Arabia's recent \$500 million soft loan to Tunisia exemplifies the need for decisive EU action in navigating the conditionality of its own loan terms. (Reuters 2023) The EU may have more difficulty in effectively influencing

policy under Kais Said, but Tunisia's economic crisis and inherent mistrust of the IMF may make the EIB a preferable alternative in any forthcoming loan negotiations. (Pavia 2023) This would allow the EU to negotiate conditionality terms, but such terms must be more favorable in the eyes of the Tunisian populace.

For Tunisian debt to be ameliorated while preventing the growth of nondemocratic state influence, the EU should reassess its “carrot and stick” methods. (Triandafyllidou and Dimitriadi 2014) Since 2021, Tunisia has been troubled with medicine shortages and since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Tunisia has experienced food shortages affecting dietary staple such as bread and sugar. (Pavia 2023) Efforts to reign in Kais Said’s authoritarian excess through sanctions risks harming struggling citizens and further destabilizing Tunisia. (Cherif 2021) In turn, further unrest would only heighten the already rising rates of irregular migration to the EU. If the EU intends to enforce sanctions it would be well-advised to target only Tunisian elites complicit in Tunisia’s democratic backsliding. (Hertel, 2022) However, the urgency of addressing the outpour of irregular migration from Tunisia’s northern shores may preclude antagonizing Kais Said’s regime. (Carbonaro 2023) The EU’s path in maintaining cooperation with Said, and stabilizing Tunisia will be a challenging balancing act in avoiding accidental legitimization of his authoritarian tendencies. (Carbonaro 2023) Firstly, for the recently signed and somewhat opaque Comprehensive Strategic Partnership regarding migration to be effective, the EU must strongly condemn the racist and inflammatory rhetoric Said has propagated against African migrants in Tunisia. (Human Rights Watch 2023) Otherwise, Tunisia cannot be considered a safe destination for deporting third country nationals. In addition, the EU should contend with the benefits of opening channels for legal migration of Tunisian laborers into the EU. (Veron 2023) While politically controversial, attempts to prevent migration into the EU have only encouraged those

determined to migrate to depend on more dangerous illegal routes, leading regularly to preventable human tragedy. (Spijkerboer 2022) The illegal migrants who do arrive then become more difficult to track, support, and return. EU willingness to openly negotiate with Tunisian CSOs and policymakers round migration could build further goodwill. From the political perspective of Tunisians, migration is considered a financial necessity that provides substantial remittances for the country and creates Tunisian jobs. (Roman 2019) Providing avenues for temporary migration would ensure more effective EU monitoring over migrant arrivals while benefiting particular EU sectors in which Tunisia has an excess of skilled laborers, such as in IT and Communications. (Rudloff and Werenfels 2018) In return for enhancing migratory mobility for Tunisian laborers the EU may request codified agreement on refugee and asylum policies within Tunisia to better address the needs of African migrants arriving in Tunisia. (Veron 2023) To achieve such a compromise, bilateral negotiations should be held as a function of the EEAS so as to highlight specificities of the Tunisian context, rather than under the blunt instrument of GAMM wielded by DG. (Triandafyllidou and Dimitriadi 2014) From the side of EU internal affairs, Commission initiatives such as Talent Partnerships can pinpoint labor market shortages where Tunisian laborers may prove useful. (Veron 2022)

More than anything, lack of economic opportunity lies at the core of Tunisian unrest, and the EU should seek to alleviate this through regionally sensitive investment that prioritizes the historically neglected Tunisian interior. (Cherif 2021) The DCFTA might be a lost cause considering the amount of negative press and widespread opposition it faces, and there are no current indications that negotiations regarding the DCFTA will recommence under Kais Said. (Rudloff 2020)

If by some miracle, the DCFTA was resurrected, serious adjustments would need to be made on behalf of the EU negotiation strategy so as to better appeal to Tunisians. Firstly, only a handful of sectors are especially vulnerable to the implications of free trade under the DCFTA such as agriculture and textiles. Investments that target the agricultural sector and renewable energy infrastructure could create jobs while helping to modernize Tunisian production so that it could aspire to EU market standards. (Grumiller 2018) Yet identical standards may not be necessary for the EU to guarantee market access. Alternatively, the EU could agree to mutual recognition of production processes as it has in trade dealings with Israel. (Rudloff and Werenfels 2018) It would also be reasonable to consider allowing Tunisians to develop a protectionist policy around the agricultural sector, while liberalizing other sectors for trade. (Rudloff 2020) Tunisia's major agricultural product, olive oil, is difficult to liberalize fully as it would threaten EU based olive oil production. However, the EU is amenable to slightly raising the import quota on Tunisian olive oil. (Rudloff and Werenfels 2018) Tunisia would benefit not only from a raised quota of olive oil sales, but even more so from a specific marketing of Tunisian brand olive oil. The value of establishing a recognizable Tunisian olive oil in the EU market and the pricing increase that such marketing would provide could help to compensate for the limitations imposed by the quota. Other Tunisian agricultural products, such as dates, could achieve similar results with the right branding campaign. (Grumiller 2018) Since small farms within Tunisia consistently demonstrate high yields, they could be targeted for support. Research suggests that niche production in the organic produce industry would be well-suited to these farms. (Rudloff 2020) If it is not possible to negotiate through the DCFTA, these deals might be arranged as mini-trade packages, whose acceptance would strengthen EU and Tunisian trade cooperation. (Rudloff and Werenfels 2018) The Tunisian food and beverage industry faces high risk from trade liberalization with the EU. At the moment Tunisian production is not

incentivized to expand its capacities because of EU tariffs on fully processed food products. The EU may choose to reduce tariffs so that value chains within Tunisia have the opportunity to expand, helping to protect the food and beverage industry and creating jobs simultaneously. (Rudloff 2020) Investments from the EIB could assist in developing the infrastructure for greater processing capacity. The profitability of Tunisia's textile sector would improve if Tunisia was excluded from PEM, and allowed the option of sourcing fabrics within Tunisia under a "single transformation" process, but such an accession is unlikely as it would undermine the status of PEM with other trade partners. It may be possible to increase the profitability of the apparel sector instead through value chain capacity increasing investments. (Grumiller 2018) Any agreements reached or reforms made should be subject to socioeconomically sensitive monitoring to guarantee it is positively effectual for rural Tunisians, unemployed Tunisians, young Tunisians, and food insecure Tunisians. (Steur 2022) (Rudloff 2020) This type of analysis has been severely lacking Tunisian perspectives, as only  $\frac{1}{3}$  of SIAs commissioned by the EU surrounding DCFTA measures have directly involved Tunisian input. (Rudloff 2020)

## 5. Conclusions

At the outset of this thesis I aimed to corroborate the following claims concerning EU democracy promotion in Tunisia:

1. The EU has invested selectively in established and centralized CSOs, unintentionally contributing to disenfranchisement in regional and youth populations.
2. The EU has prioritized an agenda of democratic norms and human rights over socioeconomic development, helping to leave the main drivers of social unrest unaddressed.
3. The EU has at times prioritized its own concerns around migration, security, trade, and debt at the cost of providing consistent support to the economic and human rights development of Tunisia.

My meta-synthesis confirms the EU's opaque and clientelist CSO funding and consultations, prioritizing of individualist human rights values over socioeconomic security, and inflexibility on migration, trade, and debt. Each corroborated claim depicts the dissonance between the EU and Tunisian envisioning of democracy. Part of the Tunisian insistence in centering impacts on vulnerable society members as a measurement of policy quality stems from their culturally different value system. The widespread presence of political Islam can be reflected in the Tunisian desire for social justice and equity. (Dimitrovova and Novakova 2015) Unlike the EU, Tunisians do not necessarily equate democracy with economic liberalization. Prosperity is measured at the level of life quality, and the Tunisian social contract, influenced by Islamic values, expects that quality to be a social responsibility upheld by the government. (Ridge 2022) Issues of human rights as

individualistic and inalienable or economic growth as GDP do not entice the Tunisian political imagination if the steps to achieve these ends violate the social contract. To assess Tunisia as culturally incompatible with democracy would be a mistake, and Tunisians surveyed do not feel that this is the case. Tunisia's tendency towards populist uprisings displays a deeper commitment to internationally shared democratic values, such as a desire for consistent rule of law, anti-corruption measures, and demands for governmental representation, freedom of association, and expression. (Ridge 2022) In order to build a better relationship between the EU and Tunisia, the EU must be willing to adopt a more flexible outlook on democratic values, and demonstrate an ability to compromise its individualistic human rights and neoliberal economic paradigms. Simply injecting money into Tunisia is not enough to encourage democratic transition, nor is it enough to engage only elites in the process of democratization when the nature of the Tunisian democratic revolution was populist led. (Hanelt 2022) (Karolak 2020)

Now more than ever, it is crucial that the EU not abandon Tunisia to instability under Kais Saïd's leadership, as the EU is still capable of wielding meaningful influence over the future of Tunisian democracy. To accomplish this, the EU would be wise to strategize in practical matters such as how the EU approaches civil society, how the EU implements conditionality, and considering realistic compromises in matters of migration and trade. Fundamentally, the EU must reflect deeply upon how exclusive projection of EU-centric neoliberal values deny Tunisians their sovereign right in shaping a true democracy. By centering Tunisian well-being at the heart of ENP decisions, EIDHR and EIB funding, and DG and EEAS negotiations, the EU can empower Tunisian democracy by guiding its roots towards a liberal populism while affirming its own sustainable development goals.



This meta-synthesis of wasted investment and policy potential in Tunisia imparts a deeper lesson with ramifications towards improving the theoretical understanding of external democracy promotion. Recent years have witnessed populist fervor rocking the foundations of both transitional and consolidated democracies. Rather than outright dismissing populism as an illiberal and eroding influence on democracy, populists should be understood as an organic part of democratic transition. External democracy promoters should seek to balance corrective populist yearnings and elite reform within a transitioning state. It is possible that the EU's projections of Euro-centric democratic values and practices served at times to disrupt the natural process of democratic transition within Tunisia by privileging a clientelist elite. Awash in external resources, these elites, whether in politics or civil society, were less incentivized to respond to corrective populist pressure, and only partially incentivized to replicate EU economic and migration models. In Tunisia, neglect of redistribution of political and economic resources inflamed the populist element until corrective pressure had transformed into eroding influence. The EU's ability to externally facilitate elite-level reform addressing the roots of populist unrest could potentially contribute to successful and long-lasting democracy promotion. Reflection and reassessment are necessary to reinvent the EU's civilizing external democracy promotion into something normative.

## List of References

1. Acemoglu, D., and Robinson J. A. (2001) “A Theory of Political Transitions.” *The American Economic Review* 91, no. 4 : 938–63. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2677820>.
2. Bermeo, N. (1997) “ Myths of Moderation: Confrontation and Conflict during Democratic Transitions.” *Comparative Politics*, 29(3), 305–322.  
<https://doi.org/10.2307/422123>
3. Bicchi, F. (2006) “‘Our Size Fits all’: Normative Power Europe and the Mediterranean,” *Journal of European Public Policy*, 13:2, 286-303, DOI: 10.1080/13501760500451733
4. Blühdorn, I., and Butzlaff, F. (2019). “Rethinking Populism: Peak Democracy, Liquid Identity and the Performance of Sovereignty.” *European Journal of Social Theory*, 22(2), 191–211. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1368431017754057>
5. Bouabidi, M. (2023) The surge in Tunisia foreign debt: causes and possible ways out. *SN Bus Econ* 3, 66 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43546-023-00443-2>
6. Boubekour, A. (2016) “Islamists, Secularists and Old Regime Elites in Tunisia: Bargained Competition,” *Mediterranean Politics*, 21:1, 107-127, DOI: 10.1080/13629395.2015.1081449
7. Bugaric, B. (2019). “The Two Faces of Populism: Between Authoritarian and Democratic Populism.” *German Law Journal*, 20(3), 390-400. doi:10.1017/glj.2019.20

8. Carbonaro, G. (2023) “Why Tunisia’s Political and Economical Crisis is Europe’s Problem Too.” Euronews. <https://www.euronews.com/2023/05/19/why-tunisias-political-and-economical-crisis-is-europes-problem-too>
  
9. Carboni, A. (2023) “Non-Party Ministers and Technocrats in Post-Revolutionary Tunisia,” *The Journal of North African Studies*, 28:1, 151-178, DOI: 10.1080/13629387.2022.2034502
  
10. Carrera, S., et. al. (2012) “EU Migration Policy in the Wake of the Arab Spring: What Prospects for EU-Southern Mediterranean Relations?” MEDPRO. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2135477>
  
11. Cherif, Y. (2021) “Has the EU Failed Democratic Tunisia?” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/12/16/has-eu-failed-democratic-tunisia-pub-85946>
  
12. Cohen-Hadria, E. (2018) “The EU-Tunisia Privileged Partnership – What Next?,” IEMed, <http://www.iemed.org/publication/the-eu-tunisia-privileged-partnership-what-next/>
  
13. Council of Europe. “Tunisia” <https://www.coe.int/en/web/programmes/tunisia>
  
14. Cuttitta, P. (2020) “Non-Governmental/Civil Society Organisations and the European Union-Externalisation of Migration Management in Tunisia and Egypt.” *Popul Space Place*. 2020; 26:e2329. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.2329>
  
15. Dandashly, A. (2018) “EU Democracy Promotion and the Dominance of the Security–Stability Nexus,” *Mediterranean Politics*, 23:1, 62-82, DOI: 10.1080/13629395.2017.1358900

16. David, A.M. and Marouani, M.A. (2015), Migration and Employment Interactions in a Crisis Context. *Econ Transit*, 23: 597-624. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ecot.12074>
17. Dobbs, K. L. (2020) “Youth Quotas and “Jurassic Park” Politicians: Age as a Heuristic for Vote Choice in Tunisia’s New Democracy,” *Democratization*, 27:6, 990-1005, DOI: 10.1080/13510347.2020.1763312
18. European Commission (2023). EU Aid Explorer. [https://euaidexplorer.ec.europa.eu/explore/recipients\\_enf](https://euaidexplorer.ec.europa.eu/explore/recipients_enf)
19. Grewal, S. (2022) “Tunisia’s Parliamentary Election Draws a Collective Shrug,” The Brookings Institution, <http://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2022/12/21/tunisias-parliamentary-election-draws-a-collective-shrug/>
20. Günay, C. and Somnavilla, F. (2020) “Tunisia’s Democratization at Risk,” *Mediterranean Politics*, 25:5, 673-681, DOI: 10.1080/13629395.2019.1631980
21. Grimm, S., and Weiffen, B. (2018) “Domestic Elites and External Actors in Post-Conflict Democratisation: Mapping Interactions and Their Impact,” *Conflict, Security & Development*, 18:4, 257-282, DOI: 10.1080/14678802.2018.1483556
22. Grumiller, J. et al. (2018) : “The Economic and Social Effects of the EU Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) with Tunisia,” Research Report, No. 9/2018, Austrian Foundation for Development Research (ÖFSE), Vienna, <https://www.oefse.at/publikationen/research-reports/detail-research-report/publication/show/Publication/The-economic-and-social-effects-of-the-EU-Free-Trade-Agreement-DCFTA-withTunisia/>

23. Hanelt, C. (2021) “Analysis—The EU’s role in Tunisia and the Struggle for the Arab Model Democracy.” Bertelsmann Stiftung. <https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/en/our-projects/strategies-for-the-eu-neighbourhood/project-news/default-0a1e52a3bf>
24. Hayden, J. (2023) “EU Finalizes Migrant Deal with Tunisia.” POLITICO. <https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-migration-deal-tunisia-migrants-africa-european-commission/>
25. Hertel, L. (2022). “With Tunisia's Democracy Slipping, the EU Must Act.” Georgetown Journal of International Affairs. <http://gjia.georgetown.edu/2022/02/09/with-tunisia-democracy-slipping-the-eu-must-act>
26. Human Rights Watch. (2023) “In Tunisia Talks, EU Should Privilege Human Rights Over Politics” <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/02/24/tunisia-wave-arrests-targets-critics-and-opposition-figures>
27. Human Rights Watch. “Tunisia: Racist Violence Targets Black Migrants, Refugees.” (2023). <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/03/10/tunisia-racist-violence-targets-black-migrants-refugees>
28. Johansson-Nogués, E., and Rivera Escartin, A., (2020) “Supporting the Tunisian Transition? Analysing (In)consistencies in EU Democracy Assistance with a Tripartite Nexus Model,” *Democratization*, 27:8, 1376-1393, DOI: 10.1080/13510347.2020.179288

29. Jung, A. (2022) “Depoliticisation through Employability: Entanglements between European Migration and Development Interventions in Tunisia,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 48:19, 4811-4828, DOI: 10.1080/1369183X.2022.2080650
30. Khakee, A., and Wolff, S. (2022) “EU Democracy Projection in the Southern Mediterranean: A Practice Analysis,” *Mediterranean Politics*, 27:4, 419-434, DOI: 10.1080/13629395.2021.1883283
31. Khakee, A., and Weilandt, R. (2022) “Supporting Democratic Participation Beyond Democracy Promotion? EU Relations with Moroccan and Tunisian Civil Society in the Areas of Trade and Anti-Corruption,” *Mediterranean Politics*, 27:4, 456-482, DOI: 10.1080/13629395.2021.1883282
32. Karolak, M. (2020) “Social Media in Democratic Transitions and Consolidations: What Can We Learn from the Case of Tunisia?,” *The Journal of North African Studies*, 25:1, 8-33, DOI: 10.1080/13629387.2018.1482535
33. Langan, M. (2015) “The Moral Economy of EU Relations with North African States: DCFTAs under the European Neighbourhood Policy,” *Third World Quarterly*, 36:10, 1827-1844, DOI: 10.1080/01436597.2015.1071660
34. Langan, M., and Price, S. (2020) “Imperialisms Past and Present in EU Economic Relations with North Africa,” *Interventions*, 22:6, 703-721, DOI: 10.1080/1369801X.2020.1718540
35. Lefèvre, R. (2017) “The Roots of Growing Social Unrest in Tunisia,” *The Journal of North African Studies*, 22:4, 505-510, DOI: 10.1080/13629387.2017.1343429

36. Limam, M., and Del Sarto, R. A. (2015) "Periphery Under Pressure: Morocco, Tunisia and the European Union's Mobility Partnership on Migration" Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2686505> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2686505>
37. Mansouri, F. (2022) "Youth and Political Engagement in Post-Revolution Tunisia," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 49:1, 104-120, DOI: 10.1080/13530194.2020.1765142
38. Marzo, P. (2020) "International Democracy Promoters and Transitional Elites: Favourable Conditions for Successful Partnership. Evidence from Tunisia's Democratization," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 33:3, 307-329, DOI: 10.1080/09557571.2019.1636765
39. Macaulay, C.(2023) "Tunisia-EU migration: Deal Signed to Strengthen Borders," *BBC News*.<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-66222864>
40. Mitra, A. (2023) "Examining the 'Developmentalisation' of Humanitarian Response: the Politics of Migration and Development in Tunisia," *Third World Quarterly*, 44:2, 337-355, DOI: 10.1080/01436597.2022.2147058
41. Mouhib, L. (2014) "EU Democracy Promotion in Tunisia and Morocco: Between Contextual Changes and Structural Continuity," *Mediterranean Politics*, 19:3, 351-372, DOI: 10.1080/13629395.2014.966984
42. Natter, K. (2022) "Tunisia's Migration Politics throughout the 2011 Revolution: Revisiting the Democratisation–Migrant Rights Nexus," *Third World Quarterly*, 43:7, 1551-1569, DOI: 10.1080/01436597.2021.1940126

43. Dimitrovova B., Novakova, Z. (2015). Re-thinking the EU's Development Paradigm: Views from Morocco and Tunisia. European Policy Centre
44. Pasquino, G. (2008). "Populism and Democracy. Twenty-First Century Populism," 15–29. doi:10.1057/9780230592100\_2
45. Pavia, A. (2023). "Tunisia Was Right to Reject the IMF Deal." Foreign Policy. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/04/19/tunisia-imf-loan-bailout-deal-economy-saied/>
46. Powel, B. T. (2009) A Clash of Norms: Normative Power and EU Democracy Promotion in Tunisia," Democratization, 16:1, 193-214, DOI: 10.1080/13510340802575924
47. Reuters. (2023) "Saudi Arabia to give Tunisia \$500 million as soft loan and grant," <https://www.reuters.com/world/saudi-arabia-give-tunisia-500-mln-soft-loan-grant-2023-07-20/>
48. Ridge, H. M. (2022) "Dismantling New Democracies: the Case of Tunisia," Democratization, 29:8, 1539-1556, DOI: 10.1080/13510347.2022.2093346
49. Roman, E. (2019). "EU's Migration Policies in the Eyes of "Partner" Countries' Civil Society Actors: the Case of Tunisia." Global Affairs, 1–17. doi:10.1080/23340460.2019.1643758)
50. Rudloff, B., and Werenfels, I. (2018.) "EU-Tunisia DCFTA: Good Intentions Not Enough. Shift Needed from Deep to Deliberate, Comprehensive to Coherent and from Free to Fair Trade," SWP Comments 49/2018, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), German Institute for International and Security Affairs.



51. Rudloff, B. (2020) : "A Stable Countryside for a Stable Country? The Effects of a DCFTA with the EU on Tunisian Agriculture," SWP Research Paper, No. 2/2020, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), Berlin, <https://doi.org/10.18449/2020RP02>
52. Ruth-Lovell, S. P., and Grahn, S. (2023), "Threat or Corrective to Democracy? The Relationship Between Populism and Different Models of Democracy." *European Journal of Political Research*, 62: 677-698. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12564>
53. Sato, Y., and Wahman M. (2019) "Elite Coordination and Popular Protest: the Joint Effect on Democratic Change," *Democratization*, 26:8, 1419-1438, DOI: 10.1080/13510347.2019.1645127
54. Steuer, C. (2022) "Tunisia in 2022: Reforming the Institutions Amidst Turmoil," Institute of International Relations Prague <https://www.iir.cz/en/tunisia-in-2022-reforming-the-institutions-amidst-turmoil-1>
55. Spijkerboer, T. (2022) "Migration Management Clientelism," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 48:12, 2892-2907, DOI: 10.1080/1369183X.2021.1972567
56. Triandafyllidou, A., and Dimitriadi, A. (2014) Deterrence and Protection in the EU's Migration Policy, *The International Spectator*, 49:4, 146-162, DOI: 10.1080/03932729.2014.956280
57. Veron, P. (2022). "Finding the Right Balance: The Conundrum of Building a Mutually-Beneficial Partnership with Tunisia." EuroMeSCo. [https://www.euromesco.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/9.-EuroMeSCo-survey\\_Pauline-Veron.pdf](https://www.euromesco.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/9.-EuroMeSCo-survey_Pauline-Veron.pdf)

58. Voltolini, B., and Colombo, S. (2018) "The EU and Islamist Parties in Tunisia and Egypt After the Arab Uprisings: A Story of Selective Engagement," *Mediterranean Politics*, 23:1, 83-102, DOI: 10.1080/13629395.2017.1358901
59. Weilandt, R. (2022) "EU Democracy Projection in Tunisia: The Case of Civil Society Consultations," *Mediterranean Politics*, 27:4, 483-504, DOI: 10.1080/13629395.2021.1883281
60. Weilandt, R. (2022) "Acceptance in Principle, Contestation in Practice: EU norms and Their Discontents in Tunisia," *Democratization*, 29:3, 507-524, DOI: 10.1080/13510347.2021.1888930
61. Weilandt, R. (2019) "Divisions within Post-2011 Tunisia's Secular Civil Society," *Democratization*, 26:6, 959-974, DOI: 10.1080/13510347.2019.1576034
62. Wolf, A. (2019) In Search of 'Consensus': the Crisis of Party Politics in Tunisia," *The Journal of North African Studies*, 24:6, 883-886, DOI: 10.1080/13629387.2019.1675249
63. Zardo, F., Cavatorta, F. (2019) "Friends will be Friends? External–Domestic Interactions in EU-Tunisia and EU-Morocco Security Cooperation After the Uprisings." *Int Polit* 56, 678–696 <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-018-0158-9>