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**The Security Dimension of the European
Neighbourhood Policy:
the Case of Security Sector Reform in Tunisia**

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Abstract

The goal of this paper is to analyse the ENP new security dimension and its implementation, by focusing on the neighbouring countries' domestic conditions as well as on the main difficulties that affect its operative implementation on the ground. For this purpose, Security Sector Reform (SSR) in Tunisia is adopted as a case study which serves to show how the ENP security dimension is implemented on the ground and the challenges for its concrete application. The first part analyses the security dimension embedded in the new ENP, by unpacking its security narratives/discourses and by contrasting them with the pre-2011 ENP. The second part focuses on the implementation of the ENP security dimension through the lenses of SSR in Tunisia. The argument put forth in this context is that there is a clear gap between what the EU would like to do in the country and what the latter is actually willing and able to do, on the idea that in its attempt to secure Tunisia, the ENP is missing reality and conditions on the ground.

Keywords: ENP, Security Sector Reform, Tunisia, EU

1. Introduction

Not so many events attracted scholars' attention as the Arab Spring did in the last couple of years (Panebianco, 2012). The wave of protests across the Mediterranean was seen as a moment of historic proportion that profoundly changed the landscape of the region and generated significant consequences at different levels and domains. Politically, the overthrow of the old regimes and the different emerging patterns of change and stability had a big impact on the Arab political systems (Asseburg, 2012: 5) and on their traditional relationship with Europe and the West (Khalifa Isaac, 2013). Economically, the uprisings paved the way to a general economic turmoil marked by macroeconomic instability, high inflation, slow growth and unemployment (Khan, 2014). Finally, in terms of security, the domestic changes and transition processes begun in 2011 inevitably affected the security conditions of the Mediterranean with two major implications in terms of threats and governance.

First, post Arab-Spring countries came to be exposed to a myriad of internal and external security threats. The political vacuums and institutional weaknesses that followed transition processes resulted in poor security conditions and inappropriate structures unable to guarantee citizens' protection and efficient border management. The civil wars in Libya and Syria instigated a further front of instability, triggering weapons flow and the proliferation of terrorist groups with significant repercussions for the entire region (Ammour, 2012). Moreover, the increasing and massive movements of people from/across North Africa towards Europe were soon identified as a security threat, in light of a migration-security nexus (Pinyol-Jiménez, 2012) and of the related risks of trafficking and smuggling. Overall, these challenges did not affect only the security of the populations in the Arab Spring countries, but they impinged upon the broader Mediterranean security landscape (Bauer, 2013a), by potentially evolving into risks for the entire region and the European Union (EU).

Secondly, the Arab Spring directly influenced the governance of security in the Mediterranean, with a redefinition of actors, foreign policy priorities and security concerns. The advent of new ruling coalitions and the reconfiguration of old political establishments, in a precarious balance between change and stability, as well as the rise of Islamist parties who were previously the main target of security forces are all a case in point. From the EU's standpoint, the

toppling of three consolidated authoritarian leaders who had traditionally been allies in the fight against extremism, illegal migration and terrorism, was a major challenge. The unsettling of the familiar political landscape and the emergence of new actors and domestic conditions threatened the existing set of institutional arrangements and brought back to the fore the issue of how to secure cooperation of neighbouring countries in the implementation of EU security policies.

This changing landscape in terms of threats, actors and governance poses a bulk of questions on the implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and its security dimension as reviewed after 2011. By establishing a clear link between neighbours' internal problems and EU security threats, the post-Arab Spring ENP increased the importance of the Mediterranean dimension in EU's internal security (Wolff, 2012). Moreover, by attaching security to political reforms as mutually reinforcing each other -with the former being a constitutive element of "deep democracy" and the latter being at the base of a "sustainable stability" (Bauer, 2013b)- it made of Security Sector Reform (SSR) a key pillar of its new security dimension.

The goal of this paper is to analyse the ENP new security dimension and its implementation, by focusing on the neighbouring countries' domestic conditions as well as on the main difficulties that affect its operative implementation on the ground. For this purpose, SSR in Tunisia is adopted as a case study which serves to show how the ENP security dimension is implemented on the ground and the challenges for its concrete application. At the broadest level, Tunisia poses a number of thorny issues for the EU. In terms of governance, it is one of the countries where a long established authoritarianism-previously considered as an EU ally- was overthrown paving the way to a not easy transition process and to new domestic actors. In terms of threats, the country finds itself sandwiched between the unstable Libya and the difficult Algeria, and its borders have never been so porous. Moreover, in the years after the revolution the country was affected by frequent terrorist attacks.

The paper is organized as follows. The first part analyses the security dimension embedded in the new ENP, by unpacking its security narratives/discourses and

by contrasting them with the pre-2011 ENP. This helps to better understand the rationale behind the EU new promotion of SSR in Tunisia. The second part focuses on the implementation of the ENP security dimension in the country and the main challenges and operative difficulties. The argument put forth in this context is that there is a clear gap between what the EU would like to do in Tunisia and what the country is actually willing and able to do, on the idea that in its attempt to secure Tunisia, the ENP risks to miss reality and conditions on the ground.

2. Between change and continuity: the security dimension of the ENP after 2011

When it was launched in 2004, the ENP emerged as a policy rooted in the EU's need to fight insecurity and instability, as risks that could suddenly stem from enlargement and increased geographical proximity. Hence, whereas the ENP committed to the promotion of political and economic reforms, including democracy and human rights, from the outset security and stability became the main pillars of the policy. Moreover, the European Security Strategy (ESS) launched in the same period deeply influenced the discourse and the practice of the ENP, which became therefore tailored to realize the ESS' security goals in the neighbourhood, at the expense of the promotion of political reforms and democracy. Following the events unfolding in the Mediterranean in 2011, the effectiveness of the ENP and its poor record in terms of reforms came under the spotlight, insofar as “the democratic revolts occurred despite, rather than because of, the actions of Europe” (Keukeleire and Delreux, 2014: 59). The EU recognized that its support in the neighbouring countries had met “with limited results” (European Commission, 2011a) and that the “radically changing political landscape” (European Commission, 2011b) of the Mediterranean called for a new approach to the region. The adoption of the Communications “A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood” (European Commission, 2011a) and a “Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity” (European Commission, 2011b) laid the ground to a review of ENP, in the name of a new vision anchored to the promotion of deep democracy and inclusive economic development.

In this regard, questions arose spontaneously as to whether the new ENP represented a qualitative break with the past and to what extent innovation was truly at the base of its allegedly new vision. In particular, as policy priorities were reordered in favour of deep democracy (Bauer, 2013a), special attention was devoted to explore the role and (re)definition of democracy in the new ENP, by critically analysing the discourses embedded in policy documents and assessing the degree of continuity and change in EU rhetoric after 2011 (Teti, 2012; Teti, Thompson and Noble, 2013). Others focused instead on the general narratives behind the revised ENP (Schumacher, 2015) or examined the new incentive-based approach, by assessing the logic of the “more for more” and whether it rather resembled a “more of the same” (Bicchi, 2014; Ebeid, 2012; Schumacher, 2011; Khader, 2013). By contrast, less attention was paid to the security dimension of the new policy. To put it differently, what is the role and conceptualization of security in the revised ENP and how is it translated in terms of policy programs and actions?

Apparently, in the key documents¹ behind the EU’s reviewed ENP, the role of security is considerably reduced vis-à-vis the pre- Arab Spring period. If until 2011 the ENP’s goals were security-centred, in the new version of the policy security is no longer explicitly included among the general objectives. The purpose of the revised ENP is “to build and consolidate healthy democracies, pursue sustainable economic growth and manage cross-border links”, in “a democratic, prosperous and stable region” by acting as a “catalyst to support democratic change and economic and social development” (European Commission, 2011a; 2011b). However, even if the word security is not directly mentioned, a closer analysis of discourses and narratives reveals that security continues to be strongly implied by the goals and the logic of the policy.

¹ The Commission Communication “A new Response to a Changing Neighbourhood” (2011); the Commission Communication “A partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity” (2011); The Joint Staff Working Document “A Medium Term Programme for a renewed European Neighbourhood Policy (2011-2014)” (2011); and the Joint Communication “European Neighbourhood Policy: Working toward a Stronger Partnership (2013); Joint Consultation Paper “Towards a New European Neighbourhood Policy” (2015).

2.1 For whom? For what? From what? Disentangling the notion of security in the revised ENP

To better grasp the notion of security and its related narratives embedded in the ENP, Baldwin's (1997) conceptualization is an interesting starting point. In order to frame the definition of security, he points out key questions that are extremely helpful to disentangle the security dimension of the ENP after 2011 (Table 1). The first question is referred to the subjects to whom security is addressed, by asking *security for whom?* In the old version of the ENP, the 2003 Communication "Wider Europe" states that "the Union's capacity to *provide* security, stability and sustainable development to its citizens will no longer be distinguishable from its interest in close cooperation with the neighbours". Therefore, security is clearly identified as a *public good* provided to the citizens of the EU in shared responsibility with the neighbourhood. In the revised ENP, the provision of security is implicitly related to the adoption of a new approach, on the idea that "business as usual is no longer an option if we want to make our neighbourhood a *safer* place and protect our interests" (European Commission, 2011a). The beneficiaries of this "safer place" are again the EU and its citizens insofar as the profound transformation processes of the Mediterranean are ripe of consequences "not only for the people and countries of the region but also for the rest of the world and the EU in particular" (European Commission, 2011b). The continuing instability of the neighbourhood after 2011 could in fact directly affect "EU geopolitical, economic and security interests" (European Commission, 2011a) and only "working closely with them on all aspects of their reform and policy agenda will contribute to the EU's *own* security and prosperity" (European Commission, 2013a). In both the two versions of the ENP, therefore, the "security for whom" dimension is rooted in a narrative of threat and interdependence, on the logic that the world is divided into spaces of security and insecurity. In such a context, the EU situates itself at the core of this space of stability feeding a notion of the "self" and struggling not to import instability from the "others" (Schumacher, 2015).

The second question deals with the values that should be protected, i.e. it demands *security for which values?* All the main ENP documents mention key values such as democracy, good governance, human rights and social

development in the immediate vicinity. However, in the ENP version before 2011 security does not emerge as a mean to protect EU core values, but rather it stands out as a value and an end in itself, with the creation of an area of political stability being the main intended goal to be secured. In this sense, the emphasis is predominantly “on designating security-related value on the Union’s exteriority and spatiality” (Joenniemi, 2007: 127) and the main prevailing narrative is therefore the highly debated relationship “security vs. normative values”. In the renewed ENP, by contrast, the relation between security and values appears to be revisited. Whereas the shared commitment to common universal principles is not new and in line with the previous ENP documents, for the first time security becomes key to achieving the much-desired “deep democracy”. In particular, SSR in the neighbouring countries (including the establishment of democratic control over armed and security forces) and the intensification of political and security cooperation with the neighbours are identified as constitutive elements for the definition and the achievement of a deep and sustainable democracy². Therefore, if in the ENP of 2004 there was no real room for values to be protected by security and the latter was an end in itself, in the renewed ENP there seems to be a stronger focus on both realist and normative objectives (Tömmel, 2013), with security as a ground condition for the establishment of democratic values.

The third question refers to the menaces that should be tackled and hence asks *security from what threats?* The transboundary/common/mutual threat narrative has always been a cornerstone of the ENP on the idea that the EU is exposed to multidimensional and border-transcending risks, which imply an interplay between internal and external security concerns. This interplay is even stronger after 2011, as the revised ENP makes a clear connection between the internal problems of the neighbourhood and the security threats at the EU border. The overthrow of long-standing repressive regimes, the persistence of protracted

² According to the Communication of the Commission on the new ENP (European Commission, 2011a), the definition of a deep and sustainable democracy includes: free and fair elections; freedom of association, expression and assembly and a free press and media; the rule of law administered by an independent judiciary and right to a fair trial; fighting against corruption; *security and law enforcement sector reform* (including the police) and the establishment of democratic control over armed and security forces. Moreover, in order to support progress towards deep democracy, the EU shall also establish a partnership with societies together with the *intensification of political and security cooperation*.

military conflicts and the violent crackdown in Syria are all recognized as a direct security challenge to the EU, insofar as they are conducive to other cross-border security threats- namely illegal migration, terrorism and organised crime-which are symptoms of the neighbours' internal problems. Moreover, whereas the original version of the ENP mentioned terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, transnational crime, fraud, pollution and illegal migration as all equally important threats, in the revised ENP the greatest concern appears to be illegal migration. The irregular and illegal movement of people towards Europe is clearly identified as a source of diminished security for the EU and as the root cause of other problems such as smuggling and trafficking. The increased prominence of irregular migratory flows as a security concern reflects how mobility and illegal migration are combined in the new EU approach to the neighbourhood. Whereas mobility is seen as key to promoting mutual understanding and economic development and is one of the additional incentives of the new ENP (together with Money and Market), mobility needs also to be "secured", to make sure that the extension of the freedom of movement does not convert into lessened security for the EU (European Commission, 2011c). This is why cooperation against irregular migration is the premise for the conclusion of any mobility partnerships³. Overall, the revised ENP is informed by a securitizing logic where the recourse to a threat narrative continues to be a key means of justifying why the EU should overhaul and reinforce its engagement in the Mediterranean neighbourhood (Schumacher, 2015).

Finally, the fourth question deals with the means by which security may be pursued, i.e. *security by what means?* All the main ENP documents are underpinned by the interdependence narrative built upon the discourses of "burden sharing", "joint responsibility", "shared interest" and "close cooperation". The underlying logic is that interdependence is both the cause of and the solution for common and transboundary security threats and that only by working closely with the neighbours the EU can manage the issues arising at its external border. Moreover, until 2011, working closely with the neighbours was essentially intended as the adoption of a "stability partnership" that served

³ The mobility partnership are a comprehensive framework to ensure that the movement of people between the EU and a third country is well managed, by providing better access to legal migration channels while handling irregular migration.

both the EU's interests in a stable neighbourhood and the need of Arab regimes to gain legitimacy and financial aids (Behr, 2012; Bauer, 2013a). Security was therefore distinguished from political reforms and pursued by the means of stability and marginalization of the riskier democracy and human rights (Cavatorta, Chari, and Kritzing, 2006). The revised ENP reiterates the interdependence narrative by stressing that "cooperation with the neighbours" and "joint action with ENP partners in key international fora" are key to tackle common challenges and the sources of instability. However, as in the wake of the Arab Spring EU security concerns are seen as the direct repercussion of the neighbours' domestic-grown problems, security is pursued by the means of political reforms and capacity-building measures. In particular, the reform of the security sector and institution building programs are included among the medium-term actions that will contribute to EU's own security and prosperity (European Commission, 2013a; European Commission, 2011c).

Table 1: Conceptualizing security in the ENP

	Security for whom?	Security for which values?	Security from what threats?	Security by what means?
ENP 2004	-Security as a public good for EU citizens - Threat/interdependence narrative	-Security vs. normative values -Security as a value and an end in itself	-Common threat narrative -Interplay between external threats and (EU) internal concerns -Terrorism, migration, fraud, weapons, pollution, transnational crime	-Interdependence narrative -Stability partnership
ENP 2011	-EU's own security - Threat/interdependence narrative	-Security for deep democracy (SSR, intensification of political and security cooperation)	-Common threat narrative -Interplay between internal threats (neighbours) and EU's threats -Illegal Migration	-Interdependence narrative -Political Reform and SSR

Overall, three main observations can be made as to what concerns the security dimension of the post-2011 ENP. First, the increased preponderance of democracy vis-à-vis the previous version of the ENP is confirmed by a content analysis of the main ENP policy documents (2004-2007 vs. 2011-2013)⁴, which reveals that the word “democracy” is much more frequently used (see Figure 1). Moreover, if anything has changed at the level of discourses, it is the relationship between security and democracy/political reforms, as mutually reinforcing each other. Security emerges as a constitutive element for deep democracy, while the latter -and more broadly political reforms- emerge as key

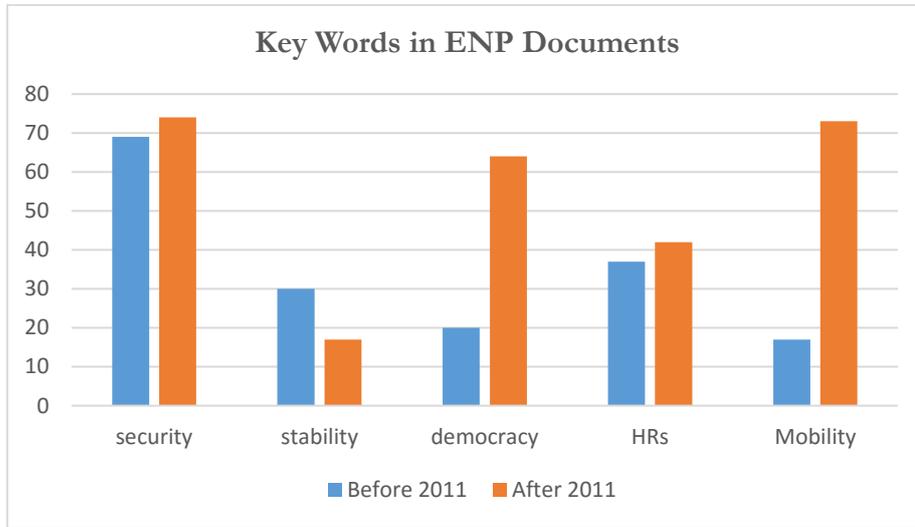
⁴ The content analysis was based on a word-frequency count, on the assumption that the words that are the most often mentioned are the words that reflect the greatest concerns. The analysis was based on the following documents. Period 2007-2010: Communication of the Commission “A Wider Europe” (2003); Communication of the Commission “ENP Strategy Paper” (2004); Communication of the Commission “Strengthening the ENP” (2006), Communication of the Commission “A strong ENP” (2007). Period 2011-2015: See note 1.

to achieving security. In both cases, SSRs acquire a big significance within the ENP new security dimension. A content analysis of the post- 2011 ENP documents confirms that SSR appears for the first time as a key sphere of security cooperation in the neighbourhood. This is further confirmed by the latest Joint Communication released in November 2015⁵ on the review of the ENP. Whereas this document was not included in the content analysis carried out in this paper (as at the time of writing it had not been released yet), it confirms and reiterates the results of this research, insofar as it officially points to SSRs as a “new focus” of the ENP security dimension.

Secondly, the analysis of discourses and narratives shows that security and stability continue to be closely associated with the neighbourhood and that the 2011-ENP is underpinned by a security dimension that is not so much different from the prevailing logic of its predecessor (Schumacher, 2015; Seeberg and Schteiwi, 2014). The goal to protect EU’s own security and prosperity, the need not to import the instability stemming from the Arab Spring and the interdependence and cooperation with the neighbours remain key elements embedded in the ENP notion of security. The importance of security is further confirmed by the content analysis, which reveals that the use of the term security not only has not been reduced, but even slightly increased vis-à-vis the period 2004-2007 (see Figure 1).

⁵ Joint Communication To The European Parliament, The Council, The European Economic And Social Committee And The Committee Of The Regions, Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy, 18/11/2015.

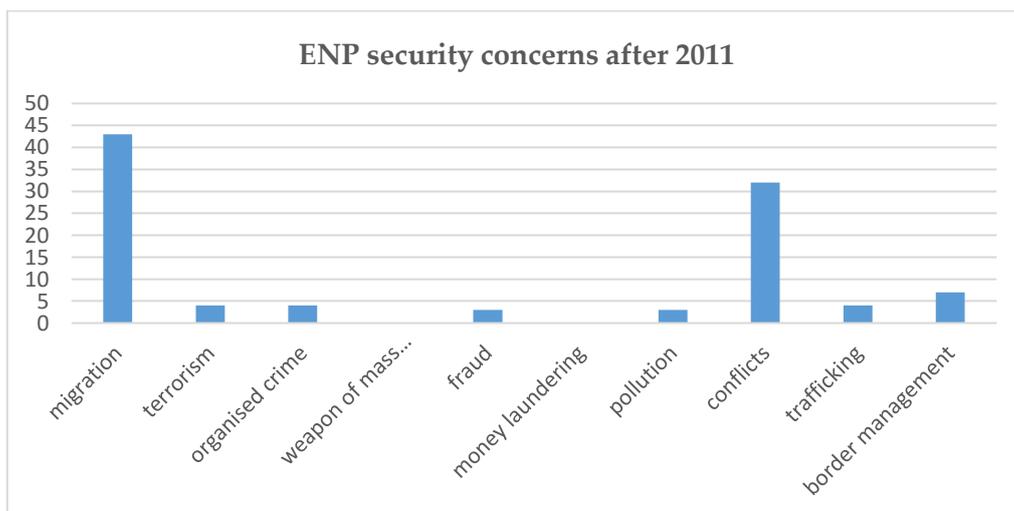
Figure 1



Source: Author's elaboration

Thirdly, mobility and illegal migration stands out as two relevant dimensions of the ENP's security after the Arab Spring, influencing the perception and the framing of threats. In this regard, Figure 1 shows the rising frequency of the word mobility in the ENP policy documents after 2011, whereas Figure 2 demonstrates how illegal immigration comes out as one of the ENP most important security concerns.

Figure 2



Source: Author's elaboration

3. The implementation of the ENP security dimension after 2011: the case of SSR in Tunisia

The implementation of the ENP in all its dimensions is a big challenge for the EU and its partners. Indeed, the implementation of the policy relies not only upon EU's actorness, but also upon the interaction with the neighbours that are the final beneficiaries of the policy, and whose will and capability to cooperate with EU are key to guaranteeing implementation on the ground. This is particularly true for the ENP security dimension, where neighbouring countries emerge as fundamental actors in the governance of Euro-Mediterranean security. For example, in the case of migration management, domestic actors are central into the strategy of "remote control" (Zolberg, 1999), based on the externalization of EU security policies and on the cooperation with sending and transit countries in order to manage migration more effectively. Similarly, in the case of SSR—which is here analysed—domestic actors in the neighbourhood have a key role in that they can favour or hinder the implementation of a reform that touches upon sensitive issues and contrasting interests. In this context, the promotion of SSR in Tunisia serves as an example to show how the ENP security dimension is implemented on the ground and the challenges for its concrete application.

3.1 The ENP Security Dimension in Tunisia: supporting the SSR

Security sector reform aims to improve a country's security and justice services, in order to create a secure environment conducive to good governance. The underpinning logic is to increase the country's ability to prevent threats and address security needs in a manner that is consistent with democratic norms and principles (OECD, 2007). In line with the general ENP approach as revised after 2011, SSR was included among the objectives of the EU—Tunisia Single Support Framework 2014-2017 with the purpose to:

“support the implementation of a reform in the security sector able to address the security needs of the population and guarantee an effective democratic control over security forces” (EU-Tunisia Single Support Framework, 2014).

In the history of EU-Tunisia relations, it is the first time that the SSR is included in an ENP Action Plan for Tunisia, for two main reasons. First, before the Arab Spring the SSR was not considered as a key element of the ENP security dimension. Secondly, to the eyes of the EU, Ben Ali's regime represented a bulwark of stability able to guarantee security in the country (Murphy, 2011), even though at the price of a complete lack of democratic control of security forces as well as of violations of human rights perpetrated by the (political) police and its intelligence agencies. By contrast, when the revolution occurred, Tunisia became paradoxically torn between maintaining its newly found freedom and developing effective security forces. On the one hand, the country reaped the benefits of freedom with the ex-ruling party RCD being soon banned, the political police apparently disbanded⁶ and more than one hundred parties legalized, including the Islamist party Ennahda that had traditionally been the target of security forces. On the other hand, following the dismantling of the regime, the entire country fell into anarchy, with the state no longer being able to exert its traditional pervasive control inside and at the borders. In particular, the porosity of the borders and the difficulty to manage them favoured the proliferation of terrorist groups in the mountain areas close to Algeria as well as the transit of human traffickers and smugglers from Libya (Pierin, 2015). Uncertainty came to prevail with doubts about who had to hold the reins of security, with the army overwhelmed by responsibilities (Kartas, 2014) insofar as it had to complement -and even replace- the police. Moreover, when Ennahda won the country's first free elections, it was soon suspected to turn a blind eye to violent and extremist Islamist groups such as Ansar al-Sharia (Lang, Awad, Juul, and Katulis, 2014).

Aware of the potential consequences of such a troubled context for EU security, the European Council gave instructions to the EU Delegation in Tunis to explore all the possibilities for supporting the SSR in the country, as an important tool to build sustainable security conditions⁷. At the same time, the request for EU help came directly from Essebsi's transition government in September 2011. Faced with the need to tackle quickly the country's precarious security situation, as well as to address people's democratic aspirations, the

⁶ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-12669461>

⁷ Interview with EU Delegation Official, Tunis, February 2015.

interim government demanded international support to design a program that could help Tunisia in the improvement of its security conditions while signalling a clear break with the past. In this context, it was not so difficult for the EU to include a sensitive sector such as the SSR in its programming for Tunisia: “Everything was a priority for them, and it was even difficult to narrow their huge shopping lists of actions”⁸. A peer review on security sector reform and an EU identification mission were therefore formally conducted with the purpose to launch an ENP SSR support program of €23 Mil by the end of 2015. The goal is very ambitious, i.e. to help Tunisian government in the adoption of an SSR by the end of 2016, and to implement it by 2017 (EU-Tunisia Single Support Framework, 2014).

The decision to include for the first time the SSR in the Tunisia Action Plan is not merely a consequence of Tunisian changing political landscape and its request to reform its security sector. Rather, it clearly mirrors the security dimension of the post-2011 ENP and its components, as already sketched above. The EU support to the SSR in Tunisia is in fact perfectly in line with the logic of not to import the instability of the Arab Spring, on the idea that any security concern at the EU border might be a symptom of Tunisian internal insecurity (i.e. the dimensions “security for whom?” and “security from what threats?”). Moreover, through the establishment of law enforcement reform and democratic control on security forces, the implementation of the SSR is conducive to Tunisian potentially democratic political transition (i.e. “security for what values?”). At the same time, as the SSR starts with the constitution (Wolff, 2015), the adoption of key political reforms is in turn conducive to the establishment of an appropriate SSR (i.e. “security by what means?”) (see Table 2).

⁸ Interview with EU official from Delegation in Tunis, February 2015.

Table 2 - The dimensions of ENP security applied: the SSR in Tunisia

	Security for whom?	Security for which values?	Security from what threats?	Security by what means?
SSR in Tunisia	Tunisian internal security as a guarantee for EU security	To sustain the country democratic transition	Terrorism, Migration, as originating from Tunisian instability	Political Reforms Adequate Juridical Framework Democratic Control over security forces

However, many challenges lie ahead for the implementation of the SSR in Tunisia and therefore for the ENP security dimension. The first of these challenges is related to the closure and resistance by different fringes of Tunisian administration, which are still strongly linked to the ancient regime. Whereas the revolution has brought substantive changes in political and institutional veto players, Tunisian administration has been particularly resilient to the revolutionary troubles (OECD, 2015), in light of its attachment to the past and of the fear of changes and loss of power. This is particularly true in the case of the SSR and for the Ministry of Interior, which represents the black box of Tunisia’s security sector (Hanlon, 2012) and is particularly hard to be penetrated. The difficulty to access the Ministry’s premises, as well as the lack of clear interlocutors and information-sharing were in this sense a major obstacle for the EU identification mission, which took more than two years to deliver its results⁹.

The second challenge is rooted in Tunisian broader transition processes and in particular in the rhetoric “change vs. continuity with the past” that opposes different segments of society and that inevitably comes up every time policy reform is on the table. The SSR is a case in point. Few months before the request of an EU peer review on the reform of the security sector, the Interior Minister Farhat Rahji initiated for the first time concrete steps for the reform of the Ministry, by dissolving the political police, removing 42 cadre from the security apparatus and establishing the respect of civil liberties by security forces

⁹ Interview with EEAS Official, Brussels, May 2014.

(Kartas, 2014). However, these efforts were nipped in the bud not only by the gradual “autonomization” of security forces which organized themselves in new police trade unions (ibid.), but also by the alleged attempt to pose a serious risk to the Minister’s life ¹⁰. Since then, every effort for an SSR by the following Ennahda’s government has been particularly cautious. From the EU standpoint, the fact that the current Prime Minister Essid is the same one who asked for EU help and for an identification mission in 2011- when he held the post of Interior Minister under Essebsi’s transition government- raises hopes for the future implementation of the reform and of the EU program.

Finally, the recent terrorist attacks on Tunisian territory have triggered new anxieties on the capacity of the government to handle security threats, as well as on the possible return to old authoritarian methods. In this regard, the launch of the EU program occurs in a key moment when Nidaa Tounes’ government is confronted with contradictory goals, namely the necessity to reform and improve the security sector, while being tempted to return to a police state; the choice to govern with the Islamists of Ennahda, while condemning extremism (Pierin, 2015).

Conclusions

The content analysis of the main ENP discourses and narratives after 2011, shows that security considerations still constitute the basis of the EU approach in the neighbourhood, with the narratives of threat and interdependence continuing to prevail. Whereas the Arab Spring was depicted as an opportunity and a new policy window to change EU approach and to support deep democracy, the uprisings are also framed as a new source of instability which paves the way to a clear linkage between neighbours’ internal insecurity and EU safety. Moreover, SSR emerges as a new focus in the ENP security dimension which reflects the mutually reinforcing relations between security and political reforms.

¹⁰ Interview with EEAS Official, Brussels, May 2014; Interview with Tunisian Official, Tunis, February 2015.

The case of the SSR in Tunisia served as an example to show the constitutive dimensions of ENP security after 2011 and how they are concretely applied. The decision to identify an ENP program to support the SSR in Tunisia stemmed from the fear to import the instability of the Arab Spring (security for whom? from what threats?) as well as because it potentially served the goals of the transition (security for which values? and by what means?). However, the analysis revealed also that the application of the ENP security dimension is highly dependent from the conditions on the ground in the neighbouring country. The post-revolutionary priorities made it easier for the EU to launch the identification mission for the ENP program, insofar as the transition government approach was informed by the eagerness to break with past and to quickly address the country's needs. Yet, the resistance of key actors and the need to move cautiously in a sector that is extremely sensitive made the identification mission really hard to be accomplished with retards for the definition and launching of the program. More generally, it seems that the EU attempt to apply the renovated security dimension of the ENP through the SSR is rooted in the (wrong?) assumption that Tunisia is "ready" and well suited to proceed with key sensitive and complex reforms. Yet, the gap between the ambitious program and the situation on the ground (both in terms of lack of willingness as well as of challenging conditions) in the country casts a shadow on future implementation. Properly engaging with realities on the ground and taking them for what they are (Carp and Schumacher, 2015) is key if the ENP and its security dimension are not to miss "the real world" (Roy, 2012).

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