

## WORKSHOP

### THE MIDDLE EAST DIRECTIONS PROGRAMME

## *EXPLORING TUNISIA'S FUTURE IN A CHANGING GEOPOLITICAL CONTEXT*

Scientific Organiser: Hamza Meddeb | European University Institute (EUI)

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 @medirections

**17 DECEMBER 2018**

### ■ INTRODUCTION

Since 2011, it has become increasingly apparent that to achieve long-term stabilisation and democratic consolidation, Tunisia needs to rethink its geostrategic positioning and to explore new opportunities with international partners. It is all the more important that political elites find answers to different situations and constraints. These include: the negotiation of a future strategic partnership with the EU; pressure from the private sector and economic elites who are attempting to explore potentially promising markets in sub-Saharan Africa; the exacerbation of regional conflicts and rivalries in North Africa; and challenges relating to Libya's stabilisation and reconstruction.

However, despite the success to preserve the precarious democratic experiment, Tunisia seems to be ill-equipped to deal with these diverse situations. Focusing on Tunisia and broadly on the Maghreb, this workshop's aim is two-fold: to explore the risks and opportunities associated with these developments; and to understand the impact of the rapidly changing geo-economic and geopolitical situation on the future of this region, and the consolidation of Tunisia's nascent democracy.

## ■ DRAFT PROGRAMME

09.15 - 09.30

### **Welcome Remarks**

**Luigi Narbone** | Director, MEDirections, EUI

**Hamza Meddeb** | Research Fellow, MEDirections, EUI

09.30 - 11.00

### **Session 1: Navigating the troubled waters of democratic transition**

Tunisia is at a critical juncture in its contemporary history. Its democratic transition has entered its eighth year amid economic hardship, fragile political arrangements and social tensions. While elections and the peaceful transfer of power continue to mark political life, economic challenges have increased; and the regional environment has deteriorated, threatening the viability of this nascent democracy. Meanwhile, a long-term vision for moving the country out of these hardships is conspicuously absent.

Tunisia cannot but react to this long list of challenges. International donors are offering recommendations, imposing conditionality and determining how to react to the economic and social imbalances; regional politics have entered a critical moment threatening Tunisia's stability. However, Tunisian policy-makers feel the urgent need for a clear direction that could put an end to the short termism and erratic reactions that aggravate problems.

This session will examine how Tunisia has tried to respond to these challenges. What are the trends that will shape the future of the country? What are the priorities for a strategic vision that would be able to address the security and economic woes?

#### **Speakers**

**Nejmeddine Hamrouni** | Former Secretary of State in charge of strategy and prospective, Tunisia (tbc)

**Michael Ayari** | International Crisis Group, Tunisia (tbc)

11.00 - 11.30

Coffee break

11.30 - 13.00

### **Session 2: The prospects of Libya's stabilisation and its impact on Tunisia and Maghreb countries**

The chaos engulfing Libya is proving to be particularly destabilising for Tunisia. The Libyan predicament has been affecting Tunisia's weak economy and its precarious political arrangements, as the polarisation within the country is fuelled by the actions of regional and international players who threaten to spread their rivalries across North Africa. The country's marginal role in the efforts to find a diplomatic solution, as well the difficulties it has been facing in finding reliable interlocutors and establishing a mutual framework for cooperation in border security, show that Tunisia is directly affected by a situation in which it has no real role or leverage.

This session aims to understand the ways Tunisia has managed to deal with the instability in its neighbouring country and to explore the conditions for achieving Libya's stabilisation. What are the settlements that could eventually sustain a process of long-term stabilisation? How can Tunisia and more broadly Maghreb countries take advantage of the reconstruction of Libya?

### **Speakers**

**Hamza Meddeb** | MEDirections, EUI

**Virginie Collombier** | MEDirections, EUI

13.00 - 14.30

Lunch

14.30 - 16.00

### **Session 3 | Looking for new partnerships: Tunisia and the rising powers**

In addition to the importance of the EU as a political and economic partner, Tunisia has been looking to engage with new economic partners – China, Russia, Turkey, India as well as promising African economies. In 2018, Tunisia joined the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and the Chinese flagship initiative, The Belt and Road Initiative. This activism reflects Tunisian elites' increasing awareness of the cost of Tunisia's over dependency on the EU, as well as their willingness to progressively adjust to the geo-economic dynamics that are shaping the world. This session will discuss the changing geo-economic context in the Mediterranean and how Tunisia is engaging with the EU and other global or regional powers.

### **Speakers**

**Youssef Cherif** | Deputy Director, Columbia Global Centers, Tunis (tbc)

**Mondher Khanfir** | Vice-President, Tunisia Africa Business Council (TABC) (tbc)