

ifa ECP Monitor Country Report

# Tunisia

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## 1. External cultural policy objectives in geopolitical context

Tunisia, the smallest country in North Africa by area, is the only democracy to have emerged from the Arab Spring in 2011. The post-revolutionary road, however, has been a bumpy one for Tunisia. For the country to become a more consolidated democracy it must balance the interests of different social groups that have participated in the revolution, especially youths and citizens from underdeveloped peripheral regions (Steuer, 2022). Tunisia's incapacity to settle this core issue, coupled with COVID's heavy impact on its economy, has led to a possible authoritarian regression. On July 25, 2021, President Kais Saied declared a state of emergency and suspended parliament. The quasi-coup has exposed Tunisia to greater political uncertainty, with far-reaching implications for its national identity and external cultural relations (Yerkes, 2021; Gbadamosi, 2022).

Against the backdrop of socioeconomic stagnation over the last decade, Tunisia adopted a new progressive constitution that set the path for comprehensive decentralization of the country in 2014.<sup>1</sup> In 2016, Tunisia also launched a development plan for 2016-2020, in which Tunisia ambitiously set its aim to attain an annual growth rate of 4%. These policy initiatives were intended to create more opportunities and a more favorable context for the cultural sector as well (CREACT4MED, 2021, p.15). What is more, non-governmental and civil society organizations were encouraged to contribute to the country's artistic and cultural creativity (Yazaji, 2015). However, Tunisia has not met its policy goals.<sup>2</sup> While it is still uncertain how decentralization will impact Tunisia's ECP in the longer term, it is clear that Tunisia's current domestic situation impedes its soft power capacity and poses challenges to its cultural exchange and international engagement.

**Table 1: The geopolitical and geoeconomics position**

Geopolitical position	2019	2015
Hard power rank	74 <sup>th</sup> (2022)	n/a
World trade indicators / ranking (\$ million)	14,933 (exports) 21,555 (imports)	14,073 (exports) 20,221 (imports)
Soft power rank	n/a	n/a
Diplomacy rank	n/a	n/a

<sup>1</sup> Decentralization affirms elected local and regional governments as being autonomous institutions with financial and administrative autonomy. For more information about decentralization in Tunisia, see Yerkes and Muasher (2018).

<sup>2</sup> Between 2011 and 2019, Tunisia's GDP grows at an average rate of 1.7%. Even several years before the revolution, its GDP was not growing more than 4%. In 2020, Tunisia's GDP growth was contracted by more than 8.8%. See GDP growth (annual %) - Tunisia | Data (worldbank.org).

The Tunisian government's priority for culture in external relations consists of developing ties with Europe, its direct neighbors in the Maghreb, and the Arabic-Islamic world at large. Tunisia has been an active member of several regional organizations, such as the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALESCO), Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ICESCO), and Arab Maghreb Union (AMU).

As a key partner to Tunisia, the European Union is responsible for 50% of Tunisia's imports and 70% of its exports (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2022). Tunisia is also a strategic priority in the EU's enlargement and outreach policy. It holds bilateral and regional cooperation with the EU under the frameworks of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) and the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) (Council of Europe, 2018). While most of the projects and programs Tunisia is involved in center on socio-economic developments, some focus on cultural, educational, and scientific exchange. Most notable examples include Horizon 2020 in research, TEMPUS and ERASMUS in tertiary education, EU-Tunisia Action Plan and Tfanen Tunisie Créative in culture and tourism (Statista, 2022).

**Table 2: Economy of Tunisia**

	2019	2015
Population (millions) / ranking	11.7 / 77 <sup>th</sup>	11.2 / 78 <sup>th</sup>
GDP number (ranking)	94 <sup>th</sup>	85 <sup>th</sup>
GDP per capita (\$)	3,317	3,862
Cultural economy (%GDP)	0.26	0.23
Education economy (%GDP)	4.83	4.51
R&D economy (%GDP)	0.60	0.63
Media economy (%GDP)	n/a	n/a

Sources: World Bank, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Education, National Institute of Statistics

For Tunisia, like in many other countries in the region, tourism and heritage play an important role in nation branding.<sup>3</sup> As opposed to oil-dependent economies in the MENA region, Tunisia has a service-oriented economy and heavily relies on foreign investment (Statista, 2022). Its tourism industry has been steadily contributing to Tunisia's overall GDP since 2010, ranging between 10 to 15 percent (Statista, 2021a). Despite the impact of terrorism, political turmoil, and the pandemic, cultural tourism remains the centerpiece of the narrative of the 'new Tunisia' (Rivetti, 2014).

Education is a state priority in forming national identity in Tunisia. The country's expenditure on education is among the highest in the MENA region. However, while Tunisia used to invest at least a fifth of the public budget in education before the revolution, the figure shrank to 13.7% in 2018 (Statista, 2021c; *Tunisia Education Spending 1992–2022*, n.d.).

<sup>3</sup> For more information, please refer to a study done by the Japanese government regarding tourism in Tunisia. See JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency, n.d.).

Declining education spending has contributed to growing regional disparity, high unemployment of graduates, and increasing migration of talents. In 2019, 38% of the Tunisian population was under 25 years old, and 36.3% of the youth (15-24 years old) were unemployed, well above the regional average of 26.9% (Statista, 2021b; Universities UK International, 2019; World Bank, 2022).

**Table 3: Government spending on ECP fields as a percentage of total outlays**

	2019	2015
Culture	0.92	0.87
Education	13.7 <sup>(2018)</sup>	15.1
R & D	5.0	6.8
Media	n/a	n/a

Sources: Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Education

The data of this report comes from budget documents by ministry published on the website of Tunisia's Ministry of Finance and sources from the EU and other international organizations. Official websites of Tunisia's ministries are constantly under maintenance. Although Tunisia adopted one of the world's strongest laws regarding access to information after 2011, most data remain missing due to technical difficulty and low data transparency in practice (Dreisback, 2017).

## 2. External cultural policy: an overview

Tunisia's overall outlook on its cultural policy lacks an explicitly international dimension. According to country report "Tunisia" of the Preparatory Action 'Culture in External Relations', the budget of the Ministry of Culture for international relations amounts to around 425,000 euros in 2016 (Helly, 2014). Although there are many outward-facing cultural institutions, the state, so far, has not sought to promote its culture through a strong institutional presence overseas. For Tunisia's embassies abroad, the cultural relations network is limited as they organize mostly community-based cultural activities through sociocultural centers, which target mostly Tunisians abroad.<sup>4</sup> The picture looks more scattered in related cultural and creative industries, with NGOs, private companies, and academia acting upon their own initiatives (CREACT4MED, 2021). Overall, the main trends in state structures and the independent scene reflect the complexity of the country's political stage, with fragmentation and transformation under high degrees of uncertainty.

Since 2000, the Office for Tunisians Abroad (Office des Tunisiens à l'Étranger; OTE) has been establishing a network of social attachés and socio-cultural centers known as Dar El-

<sup>4</sup> For more details about the centers and activities they conduct, see <https://ote.nat.tn/representations-etranger/les-centres-socioculturels/>; <https://ote.nat.tn/activites/>.

tounsi (House of the Tunisian) to strengthen ties with Tunisians abroad. As of 2019, the OTE has 31 social attachés in Tunisian embassies in 11 countries and 10 Dar El-tounsi in six countries (Pouessel, 2020; Office for Tunisians Abroad, 2019). These countries are usually the most popular countries for Tunisian emigration like France, Italy, Canada, Belgium, and Germany. The network built by the OTE provides and facilitates a number of activities, including social, educational, and inter-cultural mediation.<sup>5</sup>

Additionally, Tunisia has benefited from many bilateral programs initiated by its most important strategic partners like Europe and the United States in the ECP fields. For example, the European Union has supported Tunisia's culture sector with programs such as the Tfanen Tunisie Créative with a budget of 9.6 million euros funded by the EU Delegation as part of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) (EUNIC, 2016; FutureLearn, 2021).<sup>6</sup> Since 2014, the U.S. has committed 5 million dollars to the Fulbright Tunisia Tech+ Scholars program and about 1 million to establish three new university linkages between U.S. and Tunisian educational institutions.<sup>7</sup>

**Table 4: Key ECP statistics for Tunisia**

	2019
Number of countries with ECP activities <sup>a</sup>	over 52
Total number of institutions abroad	House of the Tunisian (Dar Tounsi; socio-cultural centers): 10 Tunisian National Tourist Office (ONTT): 16 Social Attaché: 31
Total number of FTE staff engaged in ECP activities	n/a
ECP freelance and local contract staff	n/a
Government financial support (€ million)	n/a
Financial scale of all ECP activities	n/a
Comparative ECP ranking	minor

<sup>5</sup> Tunisians' four main countries of emigration in Europe are Germany, Belgium, Italy, and France. See Bel-Air & ICMPD (2020).

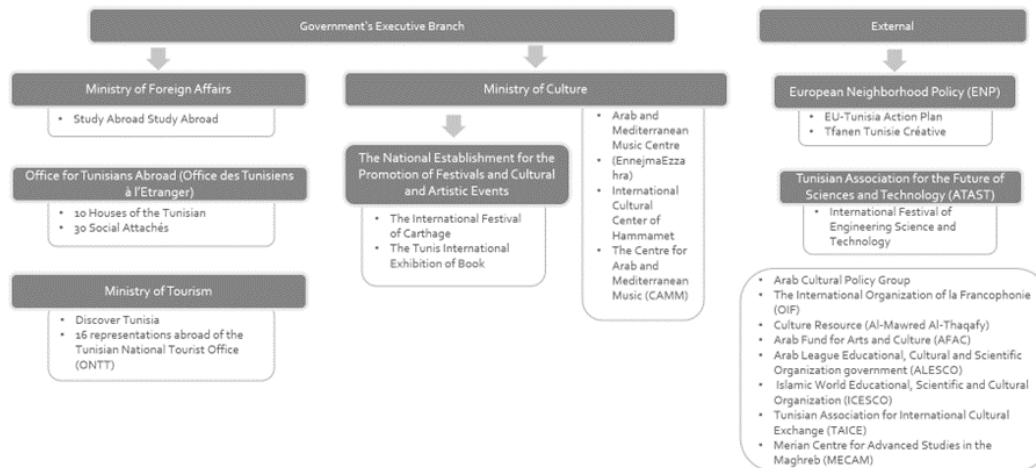
<sup>6</sup> Tfanen was co-created by the EUNIC cluster and the EUD and has been managed by the British Council in cooperation with the EUNIC cluster.

<sup>7</sup> For more information about cultural and educational ties, see U.S. Embassy in Tunisia (2016).

<sup>8</sup> The figure is the number of countries that have an active cooperation agreement with Tunisia in cultural tourism. The actual figure may be larger, taking into consideration of activities in other ECP fields. See Ministry of Tourism. (n.d.).

### 3. Fields of ECP

**Figure 1: Institutional map of Tunisian ECP**



#### 3.1. Culture and the arts

Tunisia's external cultural policy is marked by participation of civil society and cooperation between the Ministry of Cultural Affairs and the Ministry of Tourism. ECP activities are operated on a limited state budget and carried out by outward-facing institutions situated under the ministries of foreign affairs, cultural affairs, higher education, etc. In addition to major ministries that take roles in organizing and coordinating international exchange in relevant ECP fields, many organizations like the EU have also involved Tunisia in programs and projects to enhance its cultural engagement regionally and internationally. Tunisians abroad are a key component of the country's ECP, with activities directed mainly under the Office for Tunisians Abroad, which is supervised by the Ministry of Social Affairs.

**Table 5: Key statistics on culture and the arts**

	2019	2015
Number of countries present	6	n/a
Number of institutes	House of the Tunisian (Dar Tounsi; socio-cultural centers): 10	n/a

First of all, Tunisia's cultural policy within Tunisia, like other areas, is undergoing decentralization. The culture and arts sector involves state actors like the Ministry of Cultural Affairs as well as non-governmental and civil society organizations (Lettau & Knoblich, 2017). The state's most important means for showcasing its culture to an international audience are festivals and cultural centers. There are more than 200 cultural centers across Tunisia and 500

festivals each year attracting artists from around the world (Souli, 2016). Some of the most famous festivals include the International Festival of Carthage, Hammamet International Festival, International Festival of Symphonic Music in El Jem, Tabarka Jazz Festival, etc.

In 2019, the total expenditure on cultural events and festivals was 34.9 million TND (10.7 million euros), 11.6 percent of the overall budget of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs (Ministry of Finance, 2018a, p.71). In particular, the National Establishment for the Promotion of Festivals and Cultural and Artistic Events (والة الثقافة والتظاهرات والمهرجانات لتنمية الوطن المؤسسة) had a budget of 17.29 million TND (5.3 million euros) for organizing cultural events that attract an international public. These events include the International Exhibition of Book of Tunisia and the International Festival of Carthage (Ministry of Finance, 2018a, p.28). So far, the most important projects for the ministry in its one of the five main subfields, cultural work (الثقافي العمل),<sup>9</sup> were the International Cultural Center in Hammamet (with a budget of about 1 million euros), City of Culture,<sup>10</sup> and six houses of culture spreading over Tunisia (Ministry of Finance, 2018a, p.80). Other outward-facing institutions also include the Center for Arab and Mediterranean Music (CAMM), which was established to show Tunisia's commitment to Mediterranean cultural cooperation as part of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership agreement (Aboudi, 2013).

In 2013, it was estimated that roughly 80 percent of the international cultural exchange was carried out by independent actors against 20 percent supported and managed by the public sector (Helly, 2014). Therefore, Tunisia's independent cultural sector plays a crucial role locally as well as abroad. Some of the well-known examples in the independent scene are the Théâtre Phou,<sup>11</sup> which is the first independent theatre company in Tunisia, CinéMadart, and Muzaq.<sup>12</sup> Beyond Tunisia and among Tunisian diaspora in France (Marseilles), Belgium (Hainaut), and Italy, NGOs also actively engage public and private stakeholders in cooperation initiatives between communities (Helly, 2014).

### 3.2. Language

The official language of Tunisia is Arabic, and most speak a dialect of Tunisian Arabic. Although French is taught in school and used at work in Tunisia, it has seen a decline in usage due to increasing Arabization and arguably the influence of fundamentalist Islam (Guellou, 2016). Notably, English is also gaining ground over Arabic and French in schools in the context of globalization and increasing use of technology in Tunisia.<sup>13</sup> The Tunisian government currently does not seek to promote the Arabic language overseas other than offering language courses to the Tunisian diaspora.

The Tunisian House, supervised under the OTE, is the most important player in strengthening language ties with Tunisians abroad. Arabic language programs targeting different groups were carried out to build a network of talents, and registration for the courses

<sup>9</sup> The other four are heritage, book and reading, arts, and leadership.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.citedelaculture.gov.tn/en>.

<sup>11</sup> Many of its productions and performances are featured at international festivals in the Palestinian territories, Egypt, Venezuela, Colombia and Europe.

<sup>12</sup> It is an NGO that launched the Dream City, see <https://tasawar.net/dream-city-program/>.

<sup>13</sup> The internet users in Tunisia have increased from 46.5% of the population in 2015 to 66.7% in 2019. See Individuals using the Internet (% of population) - Tunisia | Data (worldbank.org).

is possible on the website of the OTE.<sup>14</sup> In addition, every consulate abroad provides Arabic courses free of charge to citizens abroad. In France, for instance, the Tunisian House in Nice offers Arabic courses for Tunisian children 6–15 years on a weekly basis.

### 3.3. Primary and secondary education

Since 2011 Tunisia has taken part in the eTwinning program that focuses on primary and secondary education. Co-funded by the Erasmus+ and the European program for Education, Training, Youth and Sport, the e-Twinning program offers a platform for teachers and educators to develop projects to foster democratic participation at school (Licht et al., 2019). As of 2022, Tunisia has had 2089 projects that involve 2,294 teachers at 952 schools (eTwinning, n.d.). Additionally, the Tunisian government also receives funds and loans from multiple organizations like the World Bank, African Development Bank, Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, and European Development Bank, to fund projects like the Foundations for Learning in Tunisia Project (PREFAT).

So far, Tunisia does not have a network of primary and secondary schools abroad nor does it intend to extend its model of education abroad.

### 3.4. Tertiary education and science

**Table 6: Key figures on tertiary education and science**

	2019	2015
Number of countries	-	-
Number of domestic higher education institutions <sup>15</sup>	277	266
Number of students		
Number of foreign students	Inbound: 2,768 Outbound: 24,248	n/a

In 2018, Tunisia's gross domestic expenditure on research & development (GERD) accounted for 0.6% of GDP and had been stagnant for several years. The Tunisian higher education and scientific research system consists of 13 public universities encompassing 203 higher education institutions and 39 research centers. All of Tunisia's research entities rely heavily, if not exclusively, on public funding. The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MESRS) is the major actor in making policies and pushing scientific and educational exchange. In the latest five-year plan (2017-22), Tunisia set the ambitious goal to increase the funding of scientific research to 1% by 2020 (MESRS, 2017). Although increasing

<sup>14</sup> <https://ote.nat.tn/activites/enseignement-langue-arabe/>.

<sup>15</sup> In Tunisia, there are following types of higher education institutions: universities (*aljamiat*), higher institutions (*almaahid*), faculties (*al-kuliat*) and ecoles (*al-madaress*). While the number of public tertiary institutions has stayed at 203 for 2015-2019, the number of private ones has increased from 63 to 74. 203 public tertiary institutions are encompassed under 13 public universities in Tunisia.



international cooperation is not among Tunisia's top priorities in Science and Technology, it has nevertheless committed to diversifying the network of international partnerships and making more progress in existing partner programs like the Horizon 2020, the previous EU research and innovation program (2014-2020).

Starting from the year 2002, Tunisia has officially joined the Tempus program and participated in 31 capacity-building projects. Since 2016, Tunisia has been associated with Horizon 2020. It was the only African and the only Arab country associated with Horizon 2020. Through Horizon 2020, Tunisia received €13.13 million of direct EU contribution (European Commission, 2022). In addition, all the Tunisian Higher Education Institutions have been involved in the former Tempus, Erasmus Mundus programs as well as Erasmus+ programs. Its top Tunisian universities like the University of Tunis El Manar are also involved in international programs and projects like ENI CBC Med, Italy-Tunisia ENI CBC Program, etc.<sup>16</sup> In particular, the Merian Center for Advanced Studies in the Maghreb (MECAM) was founded in Tunisia in 2022.<sup>17</sup> As one of five international centers for advanced studies in the humanities and social sciences funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), the MECAM aims to promote regional and international scientific exchange.<sup>18</sup>

Tunisia is working to internationalize its higher education system. Regionally, Tunisia has solid cooperation with neighboring Maghreb countries. It has a well-established student exchange program with Morocco and Algeria. Furthermore, Tunisia is building new cooperation opportunities with both North and South African countries in higher education and scientific research (MERIC Network, 2019). In 2021, the director-general of international cooperation at the MESRS claimed at the 2021 Going Global conference that Tunisia seeks to have 10% of its total higher education student body coming from other countries by 2025. As he mentioned, while, for now, students from more than 40 African countries are receiving government scholarships, the MESRS will aim to provide more funding opportunities (Stacey, 2021).

In addition, Tunisia is also involved in programs initiated by the United States, including Partnership for the Enhanced Engagement in Research (PEER), Fulbright, Tech+, and Thomas Jefferson. In early 2016, the MESRS and the British Council signed an agreement to reinforce English-language teaching in public universities by providing students with internationally recognized training and certifications.

<sup>16</sup> Some examples include <https://univ-sfax.tn/index.php?cible=projets>;  
<http://www.utm.rnu.tn/utm/fr/cooperation--projets-h2020>;  
<http://www.um.rnu.tn/fr/coop%C3%A9ration/strat%C3%A9gie-d'internationalisation/comit%C3%A9-relations-internationales/>.

<sup>17</sup> <https://mecam.tn/the-merian-initiative/?lang=en>.

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.giga-hamburg.de/en/research-and-transfer/projects/merian-center-advanced-studies-maghreb-mecam-imagining-futures-dealing-disparity>.

## Science and Research

**Table 7: Key figures on tertiary education and science**

	2019	2015
Number of projects	28 <sup>(2018)</sup> <sup>19</sup>	-

Tunisia now faces two large and interconnected challenges in higher education and scientific research. One is the “brain drain” caused by the emigration of many educated and talented people, especially after 2011. The other is the high unemployment rate for college graduates (Volk, 2021). These two problems have forced the Tunisian government to adopt a diaspora engagement policy and seek connections with Tunisians abroad (EUDiF, 2020).

In recent years, countries like France are establishing joint universities in Tunisia to attract Sub-Saharan and Mediterranean students and enhance Tunisia’s education status. For example, the French-Tunisian University for Africa and the Mediterranean (French; UFTAM), the first of its kind, was founded in 2019.<sup>20</sup> With French diplomas, it will be easier for Tunisian graduates to work in France.<sup>21</sup> Notably, France is one of the thirteen countries that concluded bilateral social security agreements with Tunisia so that Tunisians are eligible for French social security benefits.<sup>22</sup> France has welcomed the largest number of Tunisian residents abroad so far (Bel-Air & ICMPD, 2020).

To solve Tunisia’s current dilemma in higher education and employment requires the country to develop a new viable economic model that is more knowledge-orientated so that more high-skill jobs can be created and filled by college graduates (Berlin Global, 2017). Tunisia’s education is undergoing a series of reforms as part of the Strategic Plan for the Education Sector 2016-20 with a measure of cost of about TD 4.1 billion (1.7 billion euros). The MESRS also announces a 10-year tertiary educational development plan, known as the Strategic Plan for the Reform of Higher Education and Scientific Research 2015-25 (Oxford Business Group, 2017).

<sup>19</sup> Ministry of Finance (2018b), p. 49. See the indicator 1.3.2: Number of projects accepted under competitive international cooperation programs (النتافسية الدولية التعاون رمج اب إطار في المقبولة المشاريع عدد : 1.3.2 المؤشر).

<sup>20</sup> There are already two Tunisian-based French campuses, including ESMOD (École supérieure des arts et techniques de la mode) and Paris Dauphine University. See <https://cbert.org/resources-data/intl-campus/>.

<sup>21</sup> France is putting more pressure on Tunisia to structure its education system to better meet France’s need for skilled workers. See Middle East Institute, (2022).

<sup>22</sup> These countries include France, Belgium, Italy, Luxembourg, Germany, Austria, Spain, the Netherlands, Algeria, Morocco, Egypt, Libya, and Portugal. The bilateral agreements uphold the principles of equality of treatment and transfer of rights to the country of residence. See also Office for Tunisians Abroad (2019).

### 3.5. Foreign Media

**Table 8: Key figures on foreign media**

	2019	2015
<b>TV:</b>		
Number of languages	-	-
Number of channels	-	-
Digital & social media audience	-	-
Budget (€ million)	-	-
<b>Radio: <i>Radio Tunis Chaîne Internationale RTCI</i></b>		
Number of languages	5	-
Number of frequency bands	-	-
<b>New Media</b>		
Social networks users (million) <sup>23</sup>	Facebook: 7.3 Messenger: 4.1 Instagram: 1.9 Twitter: 0.115	-
Social networks following	Discover Tunisia: 20,900 (Youtube); 11,200 (Twitter); 508,875 (Facebook)	-

Tunisia's audiovisual media has long been under the control of the *Établissement de la Radiodiffusion-Télévision Tunisienne (ERTT)*. The sector was only opened to non-state actors after 2003. After the Arab Revolution, Tunisia's media landscape underwent a rapid transformation, with even more private companies entering the industry. Now Tunisia's radio and television sector hosts 11 TV channels and over 21 radio stations (9 public and 12 private) (Miladi, 2020). *Tunis Chaîne Internationale*, regulated under the ERTT, is broadcasted at 16 frequencies with 8 international programs in 5 languages – French, Italian, English, German and Spanish.<sup>24</sup> Although Tunisia's state mostly watched TV broadcasters, *el Watania 1* and *2*, do not have any international outreach, private channels like *Nessma TV* are accessible to a Maghreb-wide audience.

However, the regulation and quality of the audiovisual and media sectors are poor, and this largely impedes Tunisia's ability to exercise its influence abroad. Despite massive international

<sup>23</sup> Key figures for Social Network, Tunisia, 2019 (Routledge Arab Media, C 36).

<sup>24</sup> <https://radioenligne.france.com/radio-tunis-chaine-internationale>.

support, professional journalism is largely nonexistent (Helly, 2014, p.6). Media pluralism and freedom of expression are guaranteed in the new constitution, but in practice, Tunisia's media sector still functions in a legal quasi-vacuum (Buckley et al., 2013, p.36). Due to repeated failures, the polarization of the political scene, and the lack of serious training policies, Tunisia has not yet had the talents needed to sustain a robust media sector. Its state and private authorized media companies buy TV programs from the international markets. In 2019, it is claimed that Télévision Tunisienne and the Ministry of Cultural Affairs will work together on two broadcast productions ("TUNISIA / Télévision Tunisienne," 2019).

## 4. Challenges and Future Outlook

Tunisia's ECP has shown two major trends. One is the high participation of non-state actors. The other is the proactive inclusion of Tunisia by the EU into a network of educational and academic exchanges. Tunisia's move toward decentralization has also created more space and encouraged more cooperation in the cultural sector. Civil society and international donors are crucial players in pushing progress in Tunisia's external cultural relations.

Although Tunisia's performance in the five ECP fields concerned in this report has been lackluster, the country shows strong initiatives in promoting diaspora diplomacy, which is central to Tunisia's development agenda after the 2011 Revolution when the emigration of young Tunisians skyrocketed. Now a number of governmental agencies were charged with strengthening ties in social, cultural, and educational fields. And Tunisia's diaspora presents a viable channel of diplomacy for fostering cooperation with local agents.<sup>25</sup>

In addition, in collaboration with the African Development Bank, Tunisia launched the National Strategic Plan (NSP) of "Digital Tunisia 2020" in 2016. The plan aimed to improve ICT access and usage in the country and make Tunisia an international digital destination.<sup>26</sup> Enhancement of e-business can also boost the development of Tunisia's digital cultural and creative industries.

Tunisia has great potential for soft power due to its unique status as the beacon of democracy in the MENA region. Tunisia's successful transition into a democracy could signal an alternative to the long-standing split dividing the Arab-Islamic world on political Islam (Slimane, 2021). However, sustaining democracy and developing soft power still depends on Tunisia's ability to overcome its socio-economic challenges, including political instability, and the burden of a divided society (Ratka, 2017).

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<sup>25</sup> However, cornerstone agencies like the OTE still lack the effectiveness and innovation to utilize the resources. See also Natter (2022).

<sup>26</sup> For more recent data and indicators of Tunisia's ICT sector, see also [https://www.mtc.gov.tn/fileadmin/user\\_upload/TIC\\_en\\_Chiffres\\_\\_Decembre\\_2020.pdf](https://www.mtc.gov.tn/fileadmin/user_upload/TIC_en_Chiffres__Decembre_2020.pdf).

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