

**Policy Workshop of the EU-Middle East Forum (EUMEF)
Middle East and North Africa Program**

“Deconstructing Islamist Terrorism in Tunisia”

NEW DATE: 25-27 February 2016

Tunis

Concept Note

Deconstructing Islamist Terrorism in Tunisia

I. General Outline

The increasing number of terrorist attacks in Tunisia has cast a shadow on the progress and transition that was sparked by the uprising in 2011. Since the ouster of autocrat Zine el Abedine Ben Ali, extremist groups, particularly in the border regions to Libya and Algeria, have continuously targeted military personnel and national security forces. Among the most active terrorist groups are Ansar al-Shari'a in Tunisia (AAS-T) and Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). More recently, attacks have also targeted civilian and particularly tourist hotspots, resulting in the deaths of 21 people at the Bardo Museum in Tunis and 38 people at the popular touristic beach town of Sousse. Both attacks were later claimed by the so-called Islamic State (ISIS), which has attracted many Tunisians to join the war in Syria. Tunisia boasts one of the largest numbers of ISIS recruits as well as fighters returning. In addition, the turmoil in bordering Libya has facilitated the influx of illegal weapons and radicals aiming to recruit young Tunisians.

In response to the increased number of attacks, the Tunisian government has introduced new anti-terrorism laws, reintroducing capital punishment for terrorism and granting increased powers of surveillance, interrogation, and prosecution to various government agencies. In addition, border security was heightened in an effort to thwart the influx of radical ideologies and to limit weapon supplies. However, the new laws have been strongly criticized by a large number of human rights organizations for being too broad and vague, making them very vulnerable to abuse. Despite the government's efforts and intensified security cooperation with European states and the US, terrorist attacks continue to destabilize the country and severely damage its already weak economy. The question of effectiveness of measures and adequate counter-insurgency strategies is hence vital for the country itself, but also for the wider region and Europe.

This policy workshop aims to analyze, deconstruct, and better understand the multiple facets of Islamist extremism within Tunisia in an interdisciplinary setting. It attempts to explore the intricacies of different Islamist groups, particularly their agendas and affiliations, the reasons for their appeal and their recruitment strategies as well as their financial structures. The Tunisian government's adopted measures as well as Western policies aiming to tackle terrorism in the country should be critically assessed and concrete recommendations for short- and mid-term policies to address this crisis be developed.

II. Subjects

The workshop will examine Islamist terrorist tendencies in Tunisia by looking at several factors. First, the workshop will **1) identify the main actors**, in order to get a firm grasp of the current situation and the main groups in Tunisia. Who are these organizations and what is the profile of their members? What is their agenda? To what extent are they connected? What are their affiliations (particularly with ISIS and Al-Qaeda)?

The current trend of radicalization in Tunisia begs the question of the **2) reasons for their emergence**. What are the economic, social, political, and regional factors that provided a fertile ground for terrorist groups in Tunisia?

Closely linked is the question of the **3) reasons for these groups' appeal, particularly to young people, and their methods of recruitment**. Despite the government's attempts to tackle radicalization and to clamp down on extremism, Tunisia has seen staggering numbers of people joining Islamist groups. Who is prescribing these recruitment initiatives and how are they being financed? Islamist terrorist organizations sustain substantial expenses not only for recruitment but also for weapons, equipment, and media and propaganda, which poses the general question: How do these organizations finance themselves and how organized is their structure of finance? How do these financial flows bypass authorities?

The Tunisian regime has responded with different means, including new anti-terrorism laws and heightened border security, in order to tackle terrorist threats. Therefore, the workshop will also **4) scrutinize policies of the Tunisian state and measures undertaken by other political and societal actors**. To what extent have they succeeded or failed? How have the taken measures influenced radicalization? Based on this analysis the conference aims to give **5) recommendations for future actions**: What can Tunisia do to effectively combat terrorism? What can be learned from the measures taken thus far? How can non-military measures such as de-radicalization programs be realized successfully? The international community has proclaimed its intentions for supporting Tunisia in its fight against terrorism. What can and should Western countries contribute to counterweigh the terrorist trend in Tunisia?

III. Objectives

The key objectives of the workshop are to:

- Analyze Islamist terrorist groups, their emergence, their appeal, their recruitment methods, and their financial structures
- Deliberate on and develop potential policies for dealing with the growth of Islamist terrorism in Tunisia (military and non-military measures such as de-radicalization measures)
- Bridge academic and non-academic discourses by bringing together researchers, policy makers, and other practitioners
- Establish a network between Arab and European researchers, think tanks, activists, and officials involved in the study of Islamist militancy in Tunisia

IV. Target Group

The main protagonists and hence target group of the workshop are mid-level professionals (aged around 30-40) from academia, politics, the media, the private sector, and civil society organizations, who deal with issues related to the topic of the workshop. Participants should ideally come from Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco, Turkey, Germany, the UK, France, Spain, Italy, and Greece. The working language of the workshop is English.

V. Methodology

The three-day policy workshop will be held in Tunis and is composed of 1) three to four senior experts' inputs in the plenary and 2) two working groups running in parallel sessions. Each participant will present a brief input statement (around 2000 words) related to one or more of the indicated subject areas in his/her working group. These input statements, which do not have to be purely academic papers but can also be presentations of practical work and ongoing projects, are commented on by experts/discussants who will also act as facilitators of the working group discussions. During joint plenary sessions, participants will get an overview of the status and collective findings of the debates in each working group, allowing for intensive discussion and exchange among the whole group.

The tasks for each participant will hence include:

- preparation and presentation of a concise written input statement addressing one specific aspect within the scope of the above-mentioned topics (around 2000 words)
- active participation during working group and plenary sessions

Participation in all workshop sessions is mandatory.

VI. Application Process

Kindly fill out the attached application form and send it back together with a CV, a one-page outline of your intended contribution and a short email outlining your motivation to participate in the policy workshop to eumef@dgap.org no later than **29 November 2015**.