

ENGAGING with Political Parties

European Union

European Instrument for
Democracy and Human Rights 2011



The events in Tunisia in December 2010 had dramatic and well documented consequences across the Arab world. For Tunisia itself it meant the ousting of long-time President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in January 2011 and, nine months later, a ballot in the hand of Tunisian electors.

These, first ever, free and democratic elections, were essential so Tunisian electors could decide who will represent them at the constituent assembly in charge of elaborating the future social pact of the country. They were also highly crucial, being the first organised vote in a country of the Arab Spring.

More than 100 political parties have emerged in this brief period and civil society has been boosted by the emergence of a variety of organizations. The vast majority of the new political parties have limited political or organizational experience and no deep grassroots support in Tunisian society – in some regions of Tunisia the political process is just beginning. In Tunisia's post revolution environment it is necessary to improve the knowledge, understanding and capabilities of what are often embryonic political parties and ensure they embody and promote democratic values.

An EU project implemented by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, the Arab Human Rights Institute (Institut arabe des droits de l'homme, IADH) and the Press and Information Science Institute (Institut de presse et des sciences de l'information, IPS), is developing a programme that strengthens these emerging political parties. The project also addresses long-standing mistrust between the different actors and therefore seeks to create a climate of consensus, transparency and exchange, by working towards the adoption by political parties of a Code of Conduct, an innovative step in the Tunisian context.

The project has been key in promoting dialogue surrounding issues such as the electoral process, freedom of expression and political tolerance through the organization of debates and trainings, bringing together the key concerned actors, be they political parties, NGOs or institutions. It has also supported more pragmatic, but pivotal, aspects for political parties such as the role of a party and its organizational structure in a democracy, covering topics such as the selection of candidates, the role of women, and keeping MPs and party leaders in touch with the electorate. The programme has also included a course in political marketing, dealing with issues such as voter analysis, electoral alliances, fund-raising, and interaction with the media.