Chapter 5

Tunisia

Ömer Esen
Muş Alparslan University, Turkey

Celil Aydın
Muş Alparslan University, Turkey

ABSTRACT

Turkey has been providing considerable political and economic support to Tunisia, which has recently been struggling with economic, social, and political crises. In this process, mutual diplomatic visits have become intense on one hand, and economic relations and commercial affairs have gained momentum between the two countries on the other hand. The political and economic support of Turkey has been playing an important role in the alleviation of problems such as unemployment, lack of investment, and socio-economic problems in Tunisia. However, another challenging process is awaiting Tunisia in the following period. Hence, the positive contributions to be made by Turkey will keep on playing a significant role there. In this regard, it is highly important to explore the possible areas in which Turkey will contribute to the solution of problems in the troublesome process Tunisia is very likely to experience and to make efforts for the improvement of bilateral relations.

INTRODUCTION

Tunisia stands out as the first Northern African country that has successfully changed its regime after the Arab Spring. In this process, Tunisia has been going through a deep and challenging democratization process. In this period, Turkey has been making significant contributions to the democratization process of Tunisia as well as the solution of socio-economic problems and the establishment of stability there. Turkey is also expected to carry on playing a key role in the upcoming period for social, economic, and political life in Tunisia to normalize, for stability to be established, and for democratization to continue successfully.

In this process, the government bodies and non-governmental organizations of the two countries have frequently come together, and many agreements, protocols, meetings, workshops, and activities have been held for cooperation. Turkey has continuously expressed its wishes to help Tunisia in every
matter and share its experiences with it, and Tunisia has emphasized that it wants to better its relations with Turkey and benefit from its experiences.

Through these developments, economic relations between Turkey and Tunisia have gained momentum. Investments and trade volume have increased on one hand, and the number of economic agreements has risen. Although there has been a quick economic improvement since 2011, structural economic problems still cause socio-economic dissatisfaction in the country. In addition to the support given to the democratization process, improved economic relations between Turkey and Tunisia have been playing a positive role in the solution of economic problems in Tunisia. Especially the economic investments made by Turkish investors in Tunisia create employment and thus alleviate the problem of unemployment, facilitate the reformation of the economic structure, and contribute to overcoming economic stagnation.

As Turkey has historical and cultural bonds with Tunisia, ensuring an economic integration between the two countries will benefit both countries. Such an integration will contribute to peace in the region and in the world as well. The administrators and the people of these two countries have reached a consensus on the stable and balanced improvement of the relations between the countries based on mutual respect and trust and common interests.

This chapter aims to examine the economic, social, political, and cultural relations between Turkey and Tunisia, which have a long history of diplomatic relations. The study attempts to analyze and explain the diplomatic relations between Turkey and Tunisia, cooperation in the fields of military and security, the importance of Turkey for education in the region, scientific and cultural relations, the potential and current issues of economic and commercial relations between the two countries, and Turkish companies operating in Tunisia as well as their investments and the problems they encounter.

With its common history and cultural characteristics with Turkey, Tunisia has a potential to be one of the strategic partners to Turkey with which it can improve cooperation in Northern Africa. Turkey can also be an important market for Tunisia. The present study makes an attempt to analyze the diplomatic, military, cultural, economic, and educational relations between Turkey and Tunisia with a reference to the international economic and political importance of Tunisia.

THE GENERAL SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC SITUATION OF TUNISIA

Demographic and Socio-Political Structure

Located in Northern Africa, Tunisia is a strategically important country. Being considered as a door in Africa that opens onto the Mediterranean, Tunisia has always attracted the attention of larger countries.

The population of Tunisia was about 11.17 million in 2015. It is expected to reach 12.2 million in 2025, and 13.2 million in 2050 (SAE, 2011). The population growth rate was 2.5% in 1995 but it had fallen to 1.1% by 2015. In 2015, nearly 23.35% of the population was under 15, 69.05% was between 15-64 and 7.59% was 65 or older. Approximately 51% of the population consists of women, with men making up 49% (CIA, 2015). About 98.2% of Tunisia’s population consists of Arabs, 1.2% consists of Berbers, who live in the southern part of the country, and the rest are of French and Italian descent. 98% of the population is Muslim (a considerable majority is from the Maliki sect of Sunni Islam), 1% is Christian, while the rest follow other religions. There is also a Jewish minority that immigrated from Spain centuries ago, along with a small number of and European-origin Christians (Turkish Ministry