

## Successful Together

Mokhtar, Wissem and Hichem have been friends since the Manager Training Programme and also have close business links. With each other – and with the German business sector.



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Mokhtar Habbachi and Wissem Smiri

Mokhtar Habbach and Wissem Smiri dived together in summer 2020. Where? Into the impressive underwater world around Mahdia, a small coastal town in Tunisia. Together the two friends saw colourful seascapes, came across rare fish species and discovered mysterious ship wrecks. “That was a fantastic experience”, Wissem recalls. Mokhtar says: “You can’t dive with everyone. Under water, you have to be able to trust the other person blindly.”

## The Programme Creates the Basis

The two built this fundamental trust in each other during their joint training in Germany. “We have experienced a lot together; that creates a strong bond”, says Mokhtar. And Wissem adds: “We are more than friends; we are a family.” Since the Manager Training Programme (MP), Hichem Mokni, who was in the same training group, is also a member of the family. The paths of the three alumni have crossed regularly since then – not only at the private, but also at the business level.

## Vocational Training in Tunisia Improved

Mokhtar runs a garage for car repairs and has 20 employees. “I have been working in the automobile sector for decades. Today there is so much more technology in cars than there used to be”, he says. The entrepreneur laments the fact that young skilled workers in Tunisia are not adequately qualified. He wants to contribute to improving the qualification of technicians with his own training centre. When he participated in the MP, he had already completed the building for the training centre and faced the challenge of setting up infrastructure and courses.

The business owner found a partner in Germany with whom he has collaborated in developing his training modules. In addition, he has received funding from Germany for equipping the centre. This serves to promote the development of the private sector in Tunisia. The measures that needed to be implemented in order to receive this funding included the digitalisation of the training centre. So that more young people can participate in the courses and thus the job opportunities for young Tunisians improve.

Mokhtar turned to his friend Wissem when it came to realising digitalisation. The IT expert helps companies to find solutions to their digital challenges. His passion lies in the Internet of Things; with “[Elibot](#)”, he founded a start-up in the area of Industry 4.0. The digitalisation of the training facility coincided with the start of the Corona pandemic. The benefit of the measure has become particularly evident during times of contact restrictions as Mokhtar was able to quickly switch to e-learning.



Trainees of the STC during a practical lesson

In the meantime, the [Spider Training Center](#) (STC) has become a popular training facility at which state recognised qualifications can also be obtained, for example as an automotive electronics technician. Mokhtar is proud of his achievements. Besides technical courses, STC provides training in other areas as well as co-working space, an idea generation laboratory and a founder and conference centre.

In October 2020, Mokhtar held an open day. He presented the Spider Training Center as a successful model of Tunisian-German cooperation. Wissem and Hichem were also invited. What Hichem didn't know: Mokhtar had named the largest classroom “Avionav” after his friend Hichem's firm. “With that, I want to motivate the apprentices”, Mokhtar says. “For us, Avionav represents the Tunisian dream.” Despite numerous challenges for



STC before and after Mokhtar Habbachi's participation in the MP

local companies in Tunisia, the manufacturer of lightweight aircraft has managed to assert himself.

## A Soaring Career

Hichem studied in Aachen and worked at Fraunhofer Institute in Wachtberg in Germany for several years before joining [Avionav](#) as a Research and Development Engineer. However, he lacked know-how on doing business and running a company; something he seems to have learned in the MP. Recently, the computer scientist founded a spin-off, which he manages as CEO. The start-up [NextAV](#) converts Avionav aircraft so that they can be used as exploration aircraft, for example for the maintenance of power grids or railway networks. “Just in Germany alone, there are over 35,000 kilometres of power grid”, Hichem explains. His innovative idea, for which artificial intelligence is used, was awarded prizes in two competitions in 2021. He won first prize at the “Tunisia IoT & AI Challenge” and second prize at the Arabian equivalent.



Representatives of the STC and Avionav

Before Hichem can put his planes to use, he has to certify them in a complex process. He is currently doing so in Germany, together with a consultant he got to know during the MP. The project is supported by GIZ. “The German certificate is very good and is recognised in many countries”, says Hichem, who plans to market his planes in Tunisia and northern Africa for a start.

## Together in the Future too

Hichem recently met with Mokhtar. When the two talked about the challenges for the new firm, Mokhtar spontaneously offered his friend space to set up a landing strip on his firm’s premises. The new CEO greatly appreciates his friend’s offer. “This is right at the top of our agenda for the next investment phase”, the business founder says. Mokhtar could also be of help in a further matter: the training of qualified technicians. Lasting friendships often develop during the MP. A really invaluable asset.

Photos: @ Mokhtar Habbachi

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