



TUNISIA NEWSLETTER

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POLITICS

Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies Foued Mebazaa takes over the duties of President of the Republic by interim

TUNIS, Jan. 15, 2011 (TAP) - The Constitutional Council, After reading the letter which was sent to it by the Prime Minister, on January 15, 2011;

and after having read the provisions of article 57 of the Constitution concerning the vacancy of the Presidency of the Republic;

and since it appears from the aforementioned letter that President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali has left the country without delegating his powers to the Prime Minister in accordance with the provisions of Article 56 of the Constitution;

and since he had not submitted his resignation from his duties as head of state;

and given that the departure took place under the current circumstances which prevail in the country and having declared the state of emergency;

and given that the absence of the President of the Republic in this way prevents him from fully discharging his functions, which represents a case of absolute impediment to the exercise of his duties, under Article 57 of the Fundamental Law;

Announces :

-First: the permanent vacancy for the Presidency of the Republic

-Second : the Constitutional requirements are met so that the Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies takes over the duties of the President of the Republic by interim.

-The Speakers of the Chamber of Deputies and the Chamber of Advisers are informed of this announcement.

This announcement will be published in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Tunisia.

This decision was taken during the meeting held at the Constitutional Council in Bardo, on Saturday, January 15, 2011, under the Chairmanship of Mr. Fethi Abdennadher, President of this body and in the presence of members: Mrs. Faiza Kéfi and Messrs. Ghazi Jribi, Mongi Lakhdar, Mohamed Ridha Ben Hammed, Mohamed Kamel Charfeddine, Néjib Belaid, Brahim Barteji and Mrs. Hamida Laarif.

Mohamed Ghannouchi: New government, fruit of national consensus and will to achieve democratic transition

TUNIS, Jan. 27, 2011 (TAP) - Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi announced, on Thursday evening, in an

address broadcast live on national television, the new make-up of the National Unity Government (NUG) which he argued was the fruit of deep and intense consultations carried out among all national political sides and various components of civil society, and which resulted in a broad consensus on the new line-up of the NUG.

After reading out the full make-up of the Government, the Prime Minister pointed out that it comes out from the reshuffle that nine members have kept their ministerial portfolios and twelve members have been replaced, asserting that determination was strong that the chosen ministers be competent, experienced and able to take up the challenges and win the bets posed to the country.

He said that the announced government is a transition, an interim, government whose mission consists in helping the country achieve democratic transition and combine the required conditions for holding the next presidential election, which will offer the country the opportunity to voice its will freely and all guarantees so that this electoral event reflects the Tunisian people's determination.

Mr. Ghannouchi pointed out that the Government pledges itself that the coming election, by means of the chosen directions, take place under the oversight of an independent commission and with the attendance of international observers, so that voting be transparent and credible.

The Prime Minister underlined that the main mission of the interim government is to carry out the needed reforms, on the basis of participation of all sides of the political and civil landscape and competences in the Higher Political Reform Commission's works.

He added that the purpose consists in managing to introduce major and quality reforms which would touch on the different laws regulating public life, notably the Press Code, the Electoral Code, Fight Against Terrorism Act and the law on political parties, in such a way as to achieve review of all those anti-democratic pieces of legislation and broaden the scope and guarantees of freedom and pluralism.

The Prime Minister pointed out that, as part of the intense consultations on the formation of the new government, the different visions and stands had been listened to, and known national potentialities had been called on because of their credibility, experience, scientific ability and radiance, both on the national and international scales.

Mr. Ghannouchi extended, in this connection, consideration to all personalities and competences who responded favourably to the homeland's call and accepted to be member of the government, in spite of their international commitments, driven as they are by the sole purpose to serve Tunisia and promote the Nation.

Given the profound awareness of the hard and delicate situation the country is going through, the Prime Minister emphasised that the duty dictates to join all efforts and pour all energies in saving the country and ensuring return to normalcy under the shortest terms, in such a manner as to face up to the fall-out of the recent events and restore normal pace at all levels of activity, notably through resumption by Tunisia's children—pupils and students—of their courses, underlining that Government is

in the service of all Tunisians, men and women, as well as the interest of the motherland.

He stressed the vital part falling on the three recently formed national commissions which have already, he specified, started operating, as they are the essential foundation on which rests the introduction of radical and deep reforms that would help the country enter a new stage, one during which liberties and democracy would be strengthened and guarantees to Human Rights would be entrenched.

The Prime Minister highlighted, in this regard, that the crucial mission entrusted, in particular, to the Higher Political Reform Commission which includes all sensitivities of the national scene, all parties, recognised or not, civil society organisations and skills, which would certainly help that conclusions coming out from its works be the crowning stage of all Tunisian men and women's consensus, at this decisive stage in the country's progress.

Mr. Mohamed Ghannouchi said that logic requires, at present, to be sincere with the Tunisians by telling them the truth about the delicate nature of the situation, that there are innumerable hardships in several fields and that the circumstances dictate their return to work and perseverance, pointing out that the whole world is watching the Tunisian people's revolution, also expressing esteem and consideration to them and wishing to see the Tunisians devote themselves to work and take up the posed challenges.

He said that Tunisia and its people have now an appointment with History and they are called upon, at all levels, to discharge their missions, as dictated on them by faithfulness to the martyrs of the motherland, in the first place of whom late Mohamed Bouazizi, which would hoist Tunisia, whose children aspire to build it up into a model for a people who practices its sovereignty, in liberty and democracy.

Ensuring democratic transition and economic revival of the country

TUNIS, Jan. 29, 2011 (TAP) - Tunisia is facing two main challenges in the forthcoming period: democratic transition and revival of economic activity to ensure more social justice, said Prime Minister at the Interim Government Mohamed Ghannouchi.

In an interview given, on Friday evening, to TV channel "Nessma," Mr. Ghannouchi said consultations on the new line-up of the Interim Government took into consideration this point, adding that efforts are now focusing on attracting Tunisian highly-qualified skills abroad to meet the challenges faced by Tunisia.

In this delicate situation, he explained, consultations on the new line-up of the Interim Government were stepped up to involve all parties, whether political parties, civil society, political sensitivities, skills, or academics.

Although Tunisia has not a rich experience in democratic transition, he said, it is committed to take up this political challenge, so as to prove to the world that it is the cradle of the Mediterranean civilisation.

Tunisia, a country bearer of a message, has all necessary means to ensure the success of this democratic transition which will help all Tunisians, from all political trends, to express themselves in total freedom and choose their leader after this transitory period, said Mr. Ghannouchi.

The first measures taken fall in this framework, he specified, adding that committees have started their work to introduce political reforms.

The first measure taken by the Interim Government was the general amnesty, reminded the Prime Minister.

Addressing the economic challenge, Mr. Mohamed Ghannouchi said Tunisia, which has always relied on its capacities and its own resources, is called to meet the aspirations and needs of underprivileged regions and its population who live in difficult conditions.

The point, he said, is to boost economic life as soon as possible, achieve greater social justice and benefit all regions, particularly, remote areas, of the fruits of economic growth to remain faithful to the martyrs, particularly Mohamed Bouazizi who prompted this Revolution.

The Government, he said, has ensured that its line-up includes highly qualified Tunisian skills and senior officials operating in major international companies having an experience and a network of acquaintances which, he said, will certainly help Tunisia boost the development process and prompt a return to normalcy.

Regarding the departure of several symbols of the former regime from the new line-up of the Interior Government, the Prime Minister said history will keep the initiatives taken by those officials to preserve the life of Tunisians.

History, he added, will certainly, retain their wish to pull out from this Government in response to the people's call, by placing the interest of the nation above any other consideration to save the revolution and ensure democratic transition.

On the other hand, Mr. Ghannouchi underlined that despite the difficult situation experienced by Tunisia, electricity and telecommunication grids were not cut, thanks to national skills who have ensured the proper functioning of public services and protect vital sites.

Life in different regions, he affirmed, has gradually returned to normalcy, which reflects the maturity of Tunisian people, adding that Tunisian and foreign investors are betting now on Tunisia, all the more so that the new context will be characterised by complete transparency.

Foreign investors, who expressed their desire to invest in inland regions, such as Sidi Bouzid, Kef and Kasserine, he said, are willing to consolidate their investments in Tunisia, adding that several sisterly and friendly countries have expressed as well their willingness to help Tunisia, which will certainly enhance the confidence in the capacity to overcome difficulties and preserve the gains made.

The reactions of sisterly and friendly countries were particularly moving, said Mr Ghannouchi, pointing out that President Obama hailed, before the U.S. Congress, the courage and fervour of the Tunisian people because

"what has been achieved in less than 15 days was a miracle."

These reactions, which praise the Revolution and martyrs, he said, inspire pride and rehabilitate the glory and rich history of Tunisia, as they vest the Interim Government with more responsibility to fulfill their mission fully.

Mr. Mohamed Ghannouchi, in other respects, has shown understanding towards the wave of protests in the recent days, against the first Interim Government, against all those who had assumed positions in the former regime and also against his person, adding that these protests were motivated by the fear of repeating the scenario of 1987 and the confiscation of the revolution.

Efforts, he affirmed, are focused on "breaking with the past and seeking reconciliation on new bases, while being committed to the sovereignty of Tunisia and its people so that it remains faithful to the martyrs and to all who lost their lives, experienced difficult situations or were tortured in the past period."

« We have acted in order to avoid a bloodbath that threatened Tunisia and we are here to try to write a new page in our history», he argued, adding that the current situation requires joining efforts to save the country and the people's Revolution and achieve the consensus sought-after.

"Though dangers and threats exist, there are still favourable opportunities to open a new page that inspires the pride of this small country of 10 million inhabitants which has the ability to create from nothing a model for several nations," he concluded.

Full line-up of new National Unity Government

TUNIS, Jan. 28, 2011 (TAP) - Here follows the full make-up of the new National Unity Government (NUG) announced, on Thursday evening, by Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi:

- Mr. Mohamed Ghannouchi: Prime Minister,
- Mr. Abdelkarim Zebidi: Minister of National Defence,
- Mr. Ahmed Ouneies: Minister of Foreign Affairs,
- Mr. Farhat Rajhi: Minister of the Interior,
- Mr. Lazhar Karoui Chebbi: Minister of Justice,
- Mr. Laroussi Mizouri: Minister of Religious Affairs,
- Mr. Ahmed Nejib Chebbi: Minister of Regional and Local Development,
- Mr. Taieb Baccouche: Minister of Education,
- Mr. Ahmed Brahim: Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research,
- Mrs. Habiba Zéhi Ben Romdhane: Minister of Public Health,
- Mr. Mehdi Houas: Minister of Trade and Tourism,
- Mr. Mohamed Naceur: Minister of Social Affairs,
- Mr. Mokhtar Jalleli: Minister of Agriculture and Environment,

- Mr. Mohamed Nouri Jouini: Minister of Planning and International Co-operation,
- Mr. Mohamed Afif Chelbi: Minister of Industry and Technology,
- Mr. Jelloul Ayed: Minister of Finance,
- Mr. Ezzedine Bach Chaouech: Minister of Culture,
- Mrs. Lilia Laabidi: Minister of Women Affairs,
- Mr. Yacine Ibrahim: Minister of Transport and Equipment,
- Mr. Said Aydi: Minister of Vocational Training and Employment,
- Mr. Mohamed Aloulou: Minister of Youth and Sports, and
- Mr. Elyes Jouini: Minister to the Prime Minister in charge of Economic and Social Reforms and Co-ordination with Concerned Ministries.

Secretaries of State:

- Mr. Radhouane Nouisser: Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs,
- Mr. Néjib Karafi: Secretary of State for Regional and Local Development Minister, - Mrs Fawzia Charfi: Secretary of State for Higher Education Minister,
- Mr. Rifaat Chaabouni: Secretary of State for Higher Education Minister and Scientific Research, in charge of Scientific Research,
- Mr. Lamine Moulahi: Secretary of State for Public Health Minister,
- Mr. Abdelhamid Triki: Secretary of State for Minister of Planning and International Co-operation,
- Mr. Abdelaziz Rassaa: Secretary of State for Minister of Industry and Technology, in charge of Energy,
- Mr. Sami Zaoui: Secretary of State for Minister of Industry and Technology, in charge of Communication Technology,
- Mr. Ahmed Adhoum: Secretary of State for Minister of Finance in charge of State Property,
- Mr. Slim Chaker: Secretary of State for Minister of Trade and Tourism, in charge of Tourism,
- Mr. Salem Hamdi: Secretary of State for Minister of Agriculture and Environment,
- Mr. Slim Amamou: Secretary of State for Minister of Youths and Sports, and -

Mr. Mustapha Kamel Nabli: Tunisia's Central Bank Governor.

PDP Central Committee supports National Unity Government

TUNIS, Jan. 23, 2011 (TAP) - The Central Committee of the Progressive Democratic Party PDP affirmed support to the option of a National Unity Government to ensure transition towards democracy.

In a statement published at the end of an extraordinary meeting held on Saturday under Chairmanship of Mrs Maya Jribi, Secretary General, the PDP noted that "the national responsibilities of the PDP and the party's loyalty to martyrs demand that it supports this transitional salvation government ". The point is also, it added, "to do one's utmost so that the transitional government might break with tyranny and with the old system and start a real democratic experience of citizenship, justice and liberty for all the tunisians ".

Speaking of the different "liberating measures " decided in the political and media fields as well as the draft law providing for general amnesty, the statement calls for " extending the participation of the various tendencies and parties to the political reform commission and for the need to put no red line to the two commissions investigating corruption and abuse and seeing to it that the results of their work be revealed to the media.

The PDP central committee urged the transitional government "to prosecute the former president and his relatives and anyone whose involvement in crimes against the tunisian people has been recognized" and to dismiss the governors and general directors of institutions involved with the former regime in cases of corruption and injustice.

The statement calls for "a break with former practices and advocates emergency actions for the benefit of underprivileged areas and in the first place the governorates of Kasserine and Sidi Bouzid".

While respecting conflicting opinions and supporting the right of all to freedom of expression, the central committee of the PDP urges Tunisia's people "to do everything to face up to the suspension of constitutional and legal institutions and secure the country's transition towards democracy".

* Mr. Ahmed Nejib Chebbi, Former Secretary General of the PDP is Minister of Regional and Local Development in the National Unity Government

Tunisian League for the Defence of Human Rights chairman: new NUG reflects Tunisian people's aspirations

TUNIS, Jan. 28, 2011 (TAP) - Mr. Mokhtar Trifi, chairman of the Tunisian League for the Defence of Human Rights, said the new line-up of the government is positive insofar as it removed symbols of the old regime and met the demands of the people and the political elite in Tunisia.

In a statement to Tunis Afrique Presse (TAP) news agency, Mr. Trifi underlines that the new government team is positive as it includes several figures known for their integrity and their skills in leading this transitory phase, expressing hope that "this transitory period be short."

Mr. Trifi said that most of the government members are technocrat, pointing to the major importance of what they will undertake for the future of the country, as they are called upon to implement a set of reforms. If these reforms are well conducted, he said, they will certainly put Tunisia on the track of balance and fair development

and establish a strong democratic regime based on elected bodies which reflect the Tunisian people's real aspirations and entrench democracy, human rights and the principles of the rule of law.

Mr. Trifi concluded saying that the achievement of these objectives requires speeding up the revision of laws governing political and civil life to further recognise freedoms and hold transparent and democratic presidential election, in the presence of international observers as announced earlier, pending the legislative elections and revision of the Constitution, so that the latter meets requirements of the new democratic stage.

Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT) endorses government led by Mohamed Ghannouchi

TUNIS, Jan. 27, 2011 (TAP) - A well-informed source at the Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT) said the National Administrative Committee of the Labour Organisation, which met on Thursday, accepted to back the provisional government headed by Mr. Mohamed Ghannouchi as Prime Minister and to maintain Messrs. Nouri Jouini and Afif Chelbi as Government members.

The same source told Tunis-Afrique-Presse (TAP) agency that the UGTT administrative committee called, in its final declaration, for reviewing the composition of the three national commissions formed recently in order to involve UGTT in them.

Ettajdid Movement approves Government's new make-up and calls for vigilance

TUNIS, Jan. 28, 2011 (TAP) - The new interim government which includes national personalities known for their high skills and their integrity and who had not been compromised with the former regime are mainly tasked with saving the country and barring the road for any attempt of regression and returning back, the Ettajdid Movement asserted, in a communiqué made public on Friday a copy of which was sent by Tunis Afrique Presse (TAP) news agency.

Reacting to the announcement of the new make-up of the National Unity Government (NUG), on Thursday evening, by Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi, Ettajdid Movement underlines that this government is also entrusted with "retrieving State money which the Mafia which reigned under the Ben Ali regime has despoiled, as well as prosecuting those who ravaged the country, including the ousted president, his family and those who sowed disorder and destruction after their escape."

Additionally, Ettajdid calls on the new NUG to take the necessary and concrete measures to clean up the political climate, enlarge consultation among parties, organisations and independent associations, without exclusion, in order to reassure the people and the investors, restore confidence in the process of the political, economic and social reforms and ensure return of normal economic activity, at a sustained pace with a view to guaranteeing security and stability in the country.

Ettajdid also calls to show vigilance so that the government be equal to people's expectations. Besides, it

urges to rapidly take initiatives to hand compensations and indemnities, create job and any other emergency measures, so as to relieve the burden of poverty and deprivation. The Movement stresses the need to continue pressure, inside and outside the government, until achievement of all the demands for which Tunisian youths made huge sacrifices.

* Mr. Ahmed Brahim, Secretary General of Ettajdid Movement is Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research in the National Unity Government

Unionist Democratic Union S.G. regrets some parties' exclusion from consultations on formation of government

TUNIS, Jan. 28, 2011 (TAP) - The line-up of the new government is a "solution dictated by the current situation," said Mr. Ahmed Inoubli, Secretary-General of the Unionist Democratic Union (UDU).

In a statement to Tunis-Afrique-Press (TAP) news agency, Mr. Inoubli said this "Government is a real salvation and transition government," as indicated by the Prime Minister. He regretted, in this regard, the exclusion of UDU as well as several other parties from consultations on the formation of the National Unity Government.

Tunisian Communist Labour Party demands the resignation of the government

TUNIS, Jan. 28, 2011 (TAP) - Mr. Hamma Hammami, spokesman for the Tunisian Communist Labour Party (POCT) asserted the attachment of his party and all the lifeblood who adhered to the January 14, 2011's Front -- Left, nationalist and progressive forces-- to the resignation of the current government.

In a statement to Tunis Afrique Press (TAP) news agency, Mr. Hammami pointed out that all Front forces, the Kasbah sit- in protestors and demonstrators across all regions of the country demand the resignation of this Government and the formation of a caretaker government supported by a consensus of political and unionist forces and activists from human rights and cultural structures who have adhered to the Tunisian People's Revolution and its goals.

Liberal Social Party interacts positively with new government

TUNIS, Jan. 28, 2011 (TAP) - Liberal Social Party (PSL) Secretary-General Mondher Thabet voiced satisfaction at the party's positive interaction with the new line-up of the National Unity Government (NUG) announced on Thursday.

He pointed out that NUG's mission consists in ensuring management of the State, to restore civil peace, re-launch the national economy and preserve institutions and freedoms. In a statement to Tunis Afrique Presse (TAP) news agency, Mr. Thabet asserted that PSL keeps a certain restraint regarding the way consultations had been carried out in forming both of the former and present governments.

He underlined, in this regard, the imperative of favouring real consultation which commits all national players without exception, specifying that PSL would keep an eye on the new government's action and would assess its output on the basis of its working programme.

Composed of known and respected personalities, he added, the current government is called to devise an agenda of reforms for the establishment of a democratic regime which Tunisian people have been struggling for. Mr. Thabet also laid emphasis on the need to associate all components of the political landscape in the three constituted commissions, in particular that of political reform, the goal is to lay the foundations of a new stage on democratic bases, breaking off with the culture of exclusion and marginalisation.

Head of Congress for Republic Party meets press

MANOUBA, Jan. 22, 2011 (TAP) - Head of the Congress for the Republic Party (CPR) Moncef Marzouki asserted that today all the parties, organisations and members of the civil society are invited to contribute to the efforts of boosting security and stability in the country.

He underlined the importance of restoring confidence between the forces of the national security, the army and all the components of the civil society.

Mr. Marzouki underlined, in a meeting with the press, Saturday in Manouba, that there would be no amnesty for persons guilty of murder and bloodshed or linked in acts of looting and illegal appropriation of funds and properties.

" I ask Ghannouchi and his government to leave because they have no legitimacy since the people refuse them, being at the origin of the state of instability experienced by the country" asserted the CPR President. He went on saying "I also ask Ghariani RCD Secretary-General to dissolve the Rally".

Mr. Marzouki suggested to transform the RCD premises into a space dedicated to parties, organisation and associations.

Then, Head of CPR addressed Interim President, Foued Mebazaa in these terms: "I ask you to appoint a national independent and credible personality for the constitution of a government representing all the political and intellectuals trends".

The Tunisian revolution is peaceful, democratic and does not aim to expand to other countries, he asserted, placing emphasis on the will to strengthen Tunisia's stand in its Maghrebi, Arab, African and Euro-Mediterranean environment.

Mr. Marzouki called for the mobilisation of all the living forces of the country to preserve the revolution.

He stressed the need to show vigilance to prevent all those, among the symbols of the former regime, who seek to neutralise this people's movement "

We are for a new constitution adapted to the principles of the revolution as well as for the formation of a front gathering all the living forces of the country".

"I will bid for the Presidential election when all the conditions of the people's revolution are combined, with the setting up of a climate of freedom and democracy, the adoption of new constitution and the formation of Constituent Assembly", specified Mr. Marzouki.

He emphasised the importance of the freedom of judges, media and Tunisian journalists in the practice of their duties, underlining the need to change the mentalities to promote the political landscape and preserve the gains of the people's revolution.

Democratic Front for Labour and Freedoms holds meeting

TUNIS, Feb. 6, 2011 (TAP) - Mr. Mustapha Ben Jaafar, Secretary-General of the Democratic Front for Labour and Freedoms (FDTL) stressed the need to break with symbols of the old regime so as to put the country on track and build a better future for Tunisia.

Mr. Ben Jaafar added at a meeting held on Saturday in Tunis that the next stage requires reconciliation of all parties and components of the national scene, without exclusion or marginalisation.

He said Tunisia does not need today a saviour but rather the democratisation of its institutions and the establishment of a climate conducive to freedom and self-determination.

Mr. Mustapha Ben Jaafar also said that despite the gains of the Revolution, there still exist retrograde forces that seek to annihilate the fruits of activism and the people's sacrifices for dignity and freedom.

He said the line-up of the first and second Government does by no means reflect a real will to break with the past, saying that members of the new interim Government have already started campaigning for the next elections.

The Secretary-General of the FDTL called for the creation of a higher council for the protection of the revolution which plays the role of counterbalance to the current Government.

He also called to adopt democratic foundations that guarantee all actors in political life the same chances of success in the next elections by ensuring freedom and pluralism of the media landscape.

Regarding the incidents that occurred last Friday in Sidi Bouzid, following the suspicious death of two detainees at the local police station, the Secretary-General of FDTL called for an investigation into the circumstances of this incident which, he said, is "proof of the existence of remnants of the former regime."

Suspension of RCD activities and closing of its premises pending its dissolution

TUNIS, Feb. 6, 2011 (TAP) - Given the extreme urgency and to avoid undermining public order and to preserve the higher interest of the country, the Interior Minister decided, on Sunday, to suspend the activities of the Constitutional Democratic Rally (RCD) and meetings and gatherings of its members.

He also decided to close all premises belonging to or managed by the party, pending filing a request for its dissolution to the competent judicial authorities.

The decision of the Interior Minister is based on provisions of articles 2, 18 and 19 of the Organic Law n°32 of the year 1988, dated May 3, 1988 relating to the organisation of Political Parties.

"Green Tunisia" asserts its right to participate in democratic transition process

TUNIS, Feb. 8, 2011 (TAP) - The "Green Tunisia" party asserted its right to take an effectively part in the transition process experienced by the country on the way to democracy.

In a statement released on Tuesday, "Green Tunisia" denounces the fact that the interim Government had not consulted several political parties and independent associations during the creation of the three fact-finding committees and when appointing governors.

The green party also calls upon citizens and environment associations to show more vigilance to protect natural reserves that underwent recently acts of destruction and degradation and which are an environmental gain for the whole national community.

The politburo of "Green Tunisia" reviewed the outcome of the visit paid by the party's Co-ordinator General Abdelkader Zitouni to several European countries where he had taken part in the Council of Europe of Europe Ecology and several celebration events of the January 14 Revolution held in several European countries.

During his visit in Europe, Mr. Zitouni also met with officials of green parties, particularly from Sweden and Finland.

In another connection, the politburo of the "Green Tunisia" expressed its support to the Egyptian people in their demands for freedom, dignity and democracy.

The "Green Tunisia" party has received its legal visa after the January 14 Revolution.

Extended MDS politburo decides to hold extraordinary congress

TUNIS, Feb. 7, 2011 (TAP) - The extended politburo of the Socialist Democratic Movement (MDS) decided to hold an extraordinary congress, on Sunday May 1, 2011

It called, in a communiqué made public after the meeting, held on Sunday under the chairmanship of Mr. Taieb Mohsni, the Movement's interim Secretary-General, all activists who had been dismissed from the party to return to take part in resumption of MDS activities and promote its action.

It condemned "schemes of suspicious members who occupied the central premises and attacked activists."

In a concomitant communiqué, the MDS executive board, led by Mr. Ahmed Khaskhoussi, said that it had received motions and communiqués from several federations of the Movement (Kasserine, Sidi Bouzid, Jendouba, Sfax, Béja,

Bizerte, Médenine, El Kef and Nabeul) which reasserted their total support to the Movement and their refusal of all forms of takeover and plans contrary to the tenets and principles of MDS.

Ennahdha Movement's files application for the creation of a political party

TUNIS, Feb. 7, 2011 (TAP) - Mr. Rached Ghannouchi, President of Ennahdha said, at the Movement's first meeting after the Revolution, that the first mission of the Movement will consist in translating the objectives of the Revolution in terms of justice and freedom in the daily life of all Tunisians without exclusion.

He added that the Movement was able to launch its "Nahdha" project, only thanks to the commendable sacrifices made by the Tunisian youth and their revolution against the former regime.

He reminded, at a news conference held on Monday in Tunis, that the Movement has filed on February 1, 2011 an application to the Interior Ministry for the creation of a political party, expressing hope that the application will receive a favourable response after its failure to receive approval from the old regime.

Mr. Hammadi Jbeli, Secretary-General of the Movement said the Constituent Committee had elected during its meeting held on Sunday, by secret and direct ballot, Messrs. Ali Laarayedh as Chair of the Committee, and Abdellatif Mekki as Chairman of the preparatory committee for the next congress, along with 13 executive committee members.

Answering a question by one of media representatives on the process of setting up the Constituent Committee and the election of the executive committee, members of the Movement said regions will be well represented and that the Movement's structures will have all cadres they would need in the next stage, along with a better interest in the media aspect.

Regarding the Movement's position on the interim government, Mr. Rached Ghannouchi said the Movement has established a permanent contact with all political partners and had two contacts with the Prime Minister after the fall of the former regime.

He underlined that the Movement is neither with nor against the interim government but considers it as the extension of the previous government. He also expressed rejection of the logic of exclusion adopted during the formation of the government and national committees, as well as the appointment of governors.

In another connection, the Movement admitted its responsibilities in the Bab Souika events, pointing out that they were individual errors committed by some youths of the Movement who were victims of oppression and in the absence of leaders who were forced to exile or imprisoned.

Besides, several members of the Movement reiterated their principled position on the respect for women's rights and the Personal Status Code which is part of "Ijtihad," all the more so that its first draft was prepared by an elite of Ezzitouna Sheikhs.

After this meeting, the movement of Ennahdha released a statement in which it reiterates its commitment to contribute, alongside all national partners, to achieve the national civilisational project and its attachment to the Republican system which relies on separation of branches and independence of the judiciary, democracy and peaceful civil activism.

Several parties and civil society organizations call for setting up "national council to protect Revolution"

TUNIS, Feb. 15, 2011 (TAP) - Delegates of a large number of Tunisian associations, organizations and parties called, at a meeting they held last Friday in Tunis, for the setting up of a "National Council for the Protection of the Revolution", by virtue of a government decree by the Interim President. According to a press release signed by the different participants and sent on Monday to TAP News Agency, this meeting recorded the presentation of suggestions relating to "the setting up of a national council for the protection of the revolution as a token of loyalty to martyrs, in materialisation of the Tunisian people's aspirations and of the principles of their revolution and to spare dangers that could result from its aborting and especially vacuum."

In spite of the difference of their stands and that of the interim government, participants have agreed on a series of principles, including in particular, the need for the aforementioned council to be endowed with "a decision-making power and to see to the drafting and approval of laws relating to the transitional period" as well as "to the supervision of works of the interim government which is assuming the management of current affairs", in addition to "the need to submit the appointment of high government officials to the approval of the council.", says the press release.

The political and civil parties which signed the release have called for "revising the composition and prerogatives of the commissions set up so that they might be the subject of consensus, and seeing to it that the projects they put forward might automatically be referred to the council for approval", and for "making the necessary arrangements in this transitional situation in all fields and more particularly in matters of magistrature and information."

Abdallah Kallel resigns from Chamber of Advisers

BARDO, Jan. 25, 2011 (TAP) - Mr. Abdallah Kallel presented his resignation from speakership of the Chamber of Advisers, TAP news agency learnt from the National Unity Government. Mr. Kallel is presently placed under house arrest.

Deputies pass bill empowering President of the Republic to issue decree-laws

BARDO, Feb. 7, 2011 (TAP) - The Chamber of Deputies passed, on Monday at Bardo Palace, a draft law empowering the interim President to issue decree-laws, in accordance with Article 28 of the Constitution.

The session was chaired by Mr. Sahbi Karoui, the Chamber's interim Speaker, and it was particularly attended by the Premier and the Justice Minister.

This bill is in conformity with provisions of the Tunisian Constitution's Article 28 according to which the Chamber of Deputies is entitled to empower the interim President to issue decree-laws, during a limited period of time set by the Constitution's Article 57, as part of the need dictated by the current situation the country is living through, to enact laws in different fields.

This necessity involves general amnesty, human rights, fundamental freedoms, electoral system, media, organisation of political parties, non-governmental associations and organisations, fight against terror and money laundering, taxation, ownership, education, culture, fight against natural disasters and their dangers, international trade, fiscal, economic investment conventions, international conventions relating to labour and social field and those pertaining to human rights and public liberties.

The Chamber started works by paying homage to the memory of the Revolution martyrs who had sacrificed their lives for the people's freedom and dignity, the Revolution of which youth were the pillar and which was marked by interaction of all classes and regions, to open up a new honourable page in Tunisia's history.

In an opening address, Mr. Sahbi Karoui particularly paid tribute to the National Army and all security structures, the Tunisian people and the different trends that stood up against the acts of violence, criminality, destruction and looting, and faced up all those who sought to undermine the country.

The Chamber's interim Speaker called on Deputies to set aside their political belonging, to take part in the materialisation of the people's will and help facilitate the achievement of the political change hoped for by all Tunisians, in optimum conditions, while being coherent with the people's will and with constitutional legality.

Then, Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi took the floor. He underlined that Tunisia is now going through an historic stage which has its exceptional peculiarities, a stage which requires speeding up the pace of taking legislative steps that help the people express themselves, choose their president, forge ahead on the path freedom and preservation of the rights gained and hoist Tunisia to the rank of the developed countries.

He also reviewed challenges of the transition stage, the most important of which are protections of lives, citizens' security, strengthening of stability and working out the platform adapted for resuming economic revival.

Additionally, he underlined that the bill to empower the interim President of the Republic to issue decree-laws draws its legality from the Constitution. Mr. Mohamed Ghannouchi explained that the problems and challenges, as well as the files which have piled up, dictate on the interim government to settle them.

In this respect, he called on the citizens to strive to preserve Tunisia's Revolution, the revolution of youths, those young people in Sidi Bouzid and the inland regions, the revolution of dignity and freedom.

When discussing the first article of this draft law, several deputies expressed their refusal to delegate all prerogatives set in this article to the interim President, calling to limit empowerment to urgent issues. They said that this empowerment is an indirect dissolution of the parliament.

Deputies also emphasised that the current situation and the higher interest of the Nation require swift enactment of laws.

One deputy said the adoption of this bill implies that the Chamber of Deputies be consulted by the Government on laws related to the electoral system, the press and organisation of parties.

One MP proposed to add the term "in accordance with Article 57 of the Constitution" to the first article of this bill.

Another deputy said the approval of this bill does not prevent constitutionally deputies to pull out this empowerment in case the government would depart from the republican and constitutional principles or violates the laws on the personal status.

One deputy pointed to the reform of the education sector, saying that it is not an urgent issue and does not require accordingly this empowerment, emphasising the need for these reforms to be made away from political issues.

Answering these interventions, Mr. Mohamed Ghannouchi said concerning the general amnesty that several detainees condemned after the events of the mining basin and Soliman were released.

He added that those persons will be supported to recover their material and social rights. He said legitimacy of the transition government is drawn from Article 57 of the Constitution, underlining that on this basis the government will pursue its action to ensure that the situation returns to normal.

Mr. Mohamed Ghannouchi added that the Chamber of Deputies is a constitutional institution to be consulted when discussing several draft laws, such as those related to the creation of institutions, legal procedures, determination of crimes and offences, issuing of currency and different other issues, while stressing that the government's action will be checked.

Regarding regional development, the prime minister said this issue is closely linked to economic development and social promotion, as well as to financial and fiscal aspects. He said steps to be taken by the government in the coming days will show the pertinence of this orientation with the adoption of concrete measures.

The prime minister also pointed out that losses suffered by the Tunisian economy, despite their gravity, can not hide the significant gains made by the People's Revolution. He added that preservation of free national decision-making is connected to financial and political stability, saying that Tunisia has several conventions entitling it to receive credits to carry out needed infrastructure works to facilitate development and investment in regions.

The PM also said that women's rights will be preserved and that they can not be transgressed for whatever reasons.

Article 1 of this bill was adopted, with 16 votes against and one abstention. Article 2 of this draft law was adopted, with 16 votes against and an abstention.

PM answers MPs' interventions

Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi underlined in his answers to Deputies' interventions on the draft law empowering the interim President to issue decree-laws, in accordance with provisions of Article 28 of the Constitution that the most important thing today is to guarantee objective foundation, whether political or legislative, to ensure the country's transition to an advanced stage that arouses pride of all Tunisians and reflects fidelity to martyrs and their sacrifices.

He said that the deposed president's flight took place unexpectedly and occurred without informing any side of the government as there had been no contacts either with the prime minister or with the Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies.

He said that his accession to power was made in accordance with provisions of Article 56 of the Constitution and to avoid the constitutional vacuum and what this might entail in chaos, bloodshed and physical liquidation of some persons.

He said in this context that Article 57 of the Constitution could not be adopted only after consultations with the Constitutional Council allowing the Chamber's Speaker to assume the interim presidency, underlining that all guarantees were provided for the transfer of power in accordance with provisions of the Constitution.

Mr. Ghannouchi said all spoiled property has not been recovered yet and that the judiciary is currently examining complaints and applications submitted to it so that everybody recover their rights.

Answering deputies' questions on the possibility for the interim president to dissolve the Chamber of Deputies and the Chamber of Advisers, the Premier said this procedure is anti-constitutional.

Regarding legal guarantees for the organisation of the presidential and legislative elections, Mr. Ghannouchi said efforts are presently focused on preparing for the free and fair elections with the participation of all political trends and that laws will be amended and revised so that equal chances and opportunities be given to all.

He added that the upcoming elections will be held under the monitoring of an independent authority and in the presence of international observers.

Mr. Ghannouchi also said the next stage will be marked by increasing interest in inland development to guarantee fair distribution of the fruits of development and reinforcement of attributes of security and stability, in addition to consolidation of independence of the judiciary power.

He also reasserted keenness to iron out economic difficulties, preserve jobs and bring down the unemployment rate, along with attracting investment, particularly for the underprivileged regions.

Regarding the line-up of the interim government, the prime minister said several Tunisian skills are today part

of this government to meet the call of the country and duty to contribute thanks to their expertise to attracting investment, saving the tourist season and creating income sources.

He underlined that the decisions taken by the interim government are collective and that all sides, ministers and secretaries of state were involved in preparing them, saying, regarding parties that are not involved in this government, that Tunisia belongs to all. He also said that, along with the interim government, there are committees which will play a major role, particularly the political reform committee whose make-up is still subject to consultations with different partners and sensitivities.

Mr. Ghannouchi stressed the need for all components of the political and civil scene in Tunisia to shoulder their responsibilities and roles to avoid any deviations that would have negative effects on the Revolution and the country.

The Premier pointed out that no one is entitled to confiscate others' ideas and that Tunisia has made gains that should be preserved, such as the Code of Personal Status, in addition to the need to respect human rights and freedom of worship. Mr. Mohamed Ghannouchi called, on the occasion, to show vigilance to avoid errors and place the interest of Tunisia above all other considerations, as part of full implementation of the principles of human rights and respect of laws and institutions. He added that duty commands to all to contribute to the success of the democratic transition process. He said that to enforce law and comply with its provisions, all sides whose guiltiness will be proved will be prosecuted. The PM also emphasised the need to see all parties, journalists, communicators, political parties and organisations combine efforts and show vigilance so that the current government helps the country reach safe haven, reasserting commitment to ensure that laws be enacted to meet the requirements of the current stage, after consultation with all sides to avoid committing errors. Mr. Mohamed Ghannouchi said justice will follow its normal course, reminding that among the measures taken in the second cabinet meeting of the current government there is the call for all government members and officials to present a declaration on honour about their property. In his answer to a call by one MP, the prime minister said that calling a square after late Mohamed Bouazizi and erecting a memorial on which will be engraved the names of all martyrs of the Revolution is the least thing we could do as a token of fidelity to their memory.

Advisers pass bill empowering President of the Republic to issue decree-laws

BARDO, Feb. 9, 2011 (TAP) - The Chamber of Advisers held, on Wednesday morning, a plenary session to look at a bill empowering the interim President to issue decree-laws.

This bill, in conformity with provisions of Article 28 of the Tunisian Constitution, aims to empower the interim President to issue decree-laws during a limited period of time, as part of the needs dictated by the current situation the country is living through.

Participants started the session by reciting the Fatiha to the memory of the martyrs of the Tunisian People's Revolution.

In his opening address, Chamber of Advisers interim Speaker Mekki Aloui said that Tunisia has stepped into a rather sensitive and promising stage, thanks to the Revolution of these young heroes.

He also asserted the Chamber's support to the three national committees and efforts exerted by the caretaker government to make of the Revolution a success, introduce deep reforms in all sectors and combine the attributes of a fair development across the country's various regions, laying emphasis on the need to achieve development projects and urgently create jobs, particularly in the country's interior regions.

Taking the floor, Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi pointed out that Tunisia has been going through a decisive stage in its history, thanks to its people's Revolution triggered last December 17 by the death of young Mohamed Bouazizi, and then spreading to all regions, helping it enter a new stage which opens up wide prospects for the democratic transition.

Besides, he highlighted the difficulties and risks the country ran following the wave of looting, arson and rampage carried out by thuggish gangs bent on terrorising the people. In the face of these dangers and chaos, all Tunisians stood up as a one man, to save human lives and protect their Revolution, by forming district committees in support to security forces and the Army, which helped gradually restore order and stability.

Mr. Ghannouchi pointed out that following the Revolution, claims of various categories of citizens have increased, notably among the underprivileged and the jobless, demanding their rights to work and to a decent life or to improve their professional and social situation, specifying that these claims are legitimate and that the State, all structures and bodies included, are indefatigably endeavouring to meet.

The Prime Minister asserted, in this regard, that the transition Government places the Revolution youth's aspirations to freedom, dignity and employment on top of its priorities and exerts all efforts to provide the objective economic, financial or structural attributes to achieve these legitimate claims.

Besides, he specified that the caretaker government's first mission is to prepare for the organisation of Presidential election, as part of compliance with the law and democracy, through the revision of law on political parties, the press ethics, the associations act and the law on terrorism, so as to help all stakeholders to contribute to the success of this electoral event, away of exclusion and in total transparency, with the ultimate goal of passing on the torch to the new head of state who would be freely chosen by people.

The PM pointed out that an independent authority would be tasked with organising the elections, in the presence of international observers, so that this race consecrates the real democracy and thus mirrors the people's free will.

Besides, Mr. Ghannouchi asserted that the imperatives of this transitional juncture commands to endow the interim

president and the head of the provisional Government with the needed powers to take immediate steps within the framework of legality, so as to gather the optimum conditions for all political sensitivities to take part in the forthcoming presidential elections, without exclusion, provided that they abide by law, the Code of Personal Status and the freedom of worship, all of which are fundamental human rights.

He explained that the bill submitted to the Chamber of Advisers would allow the Interim President to take the necessary measures to make the goals of the Revolution a success; a Revolution which he described as unique of its kind and which would put back Tunisia in its historic process, help it take up challenges and enable it to join the advanced countries.

It is worth pointing out that four resignations from the Chamber of Advisers were reported: they are Messrs. Moncef Chebbi, Chedli Ayari, Mohamed Chendoul and Rachid Sfar.

Furthermore, Messrs. Hédi Baccouche, Béji Ben Mémi and Foued Haouat did not attend this first plenary session of the Chamber after last January 14th events.

PM's answers

Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi pointed out that priority at present consists in striving to guarantee success to the Tunisian People's Revolution and not settling accounts, asserting that only justice is entitled to judge encroachments, on corruption and embezzlement abuses.

Answering the Advisers' interventions on the draft law empowering the President of the Republic to issue decree-laws, the Premier argued that the favourable reception made to the Tunisian Youth's Revolution at the regional and international scale dictate on all sides a great responsibility in carrying out the democratic transition. This transition, he pointed out, should be made in optimum conditions and in compliance with the law and in total transparency.

In this connection, Mr. Mohamed Ghannouchi reminded that several world revolutions were successful experiences thanks to their peoples' awareness. On the contrary, several societies fell into dictatorship as a result of disorder. He emphasised the need to draw on the successful experiences and make the most of this historic opportunity offered by youth to all Tunisians.

He stressed the interim government's keenness to speed up the democratic transition and pass over the torch to the new president who will be freely elected by the people.

The national committees, he specified, have started their work to identify the solutions and reforms not only to help ensure the legal guarantees to the parties during the coming elections, but also indict and bring to justice all those involved in corruption and embezzlement abuses.

The Prime Minister pointed out that the security troubles are beneficial to those who seek to sow disorder in society, hinder efforts aimed to restore stability and carry out reforms.

He specified that the recent events that erupted in several regions of the country were not spontaneous, adding that

investigations are under way to determine responsibilities in these incidents.

The PM asserted the need to go beyond the logic of retaliation witnessed by different regions of the country; this would deviate, he said, the noble targets of the Revolution, democracy and respect of human rights.

He explained that today success is within our reach, despite the losses incurred by the national economy during the last period as a result of the damage wrought by fire, looting and destruction. He specified that Tunisia draws its strength on its human resources, at home and abroad. These latter skills voiced, during the Revolution, their total readiness to make their contributions to overcome the difficult situation and prepare the country's future.

The Prime Minister also underlined that several foreign investors in Tunisia did not wish to leave the country and that these events, on the contrary, helped make better known Tunisia as a tourist destination. It is left to the Tunisians to guarantee security of the visitors, he added.

Regarding the social file, Mr. Mohamed Ghannouchi asserted that employment and regional development are the government's top priorities, indicating that the huge volume of social claims, in all sectors, destabilised the public services' operation, as they are legitimate demands that could only be achieved on a gradual approach.

Besides, he added that the country's foreign currency reserves could not satisfy all claims at the same time, all the more so that the country has invested important funds to improve infrastructure and import such products like hydrocarbons.

In this connection, Mr. Ghannouchi called to show more social solidarity, a key foundation of national unity.

Then, the Chamber of Advisers adopted the draft law unanimously.

Interim President Foued Mebazaa addresses Tunisian people

CARTHAGE, Feb. 9, 2011 (TAPEX) - Interim President Foued Mebazaa expressed, in an address delivered on Wednesday evening to the Tunisian people and aired on Tunisian national TV, his pride at the Tunisian Revolution, the "revolution of dignity and freedom," emphasising that its results have become tangible in the political field, towards materialising the ambitions of the people, which requires from all to defend and support this revolution, in spite of the critical stage the country is living through.

Mr. Foued Mebazaa stressed the efforts exerted by the Army and National Guard, along with the citizens, in establishing security and stability, saying that despite the improvements noted, there are still some areas which are suffering some hardships, which requires the combined efforts of all as part of patriotism to restore stability and ensure security of the citizens and their property.

He pointed out that the "social movements" in different sectors, accompanied at the same time by a set of demands to improve situations, are "plausible facts,"

insofar as "they are the logical culmination of a 23-year legacy."

He called upon citizens to show understanding and patience in the face of the situation experienced by the country and not to stop working, while continuing to demand reforms in a civil, rational and organised way to preserve their rights and safeguard companies.

The Interim President added that citizens have demonstrated their sense of responsibility and a high level of civism, underlining that social negotiations will be the appropriate framework for consultation on ways to improve the conditions of all categories in different sectors.

Mr. Foued Mebazaa emphasised his commitment to achieve the sought-after political transition to democracy, as soon as possible and under optimum conditions" as a token of fidelity to the martyrs, and in accordance with the people's will, while seeking to ensure the participation of all parties in preparing the planned reforms.

It is in this line, he said, that falls the formation of the provisional government which benefits from a wide support and is forging ahead steadily despite difficulties it is confronted with.

He said that the three national committees endeavour, in turn, to ensure and broaden the participation of all sensitivities that reflect the people's will.

The adoption of the law entitling the Interim President to issue decree-laws under Article 28 of the Constitution, he said, will help, during the caretaker presidency, approve a set of important initiatives.

It is aimed, he specified, to meet the will of people without resorting to the legislative procedures in force, particularly those related to general amnesty, youth employment and measures designed to prepare the political platform allowing to advance on the way of materialising the people's ambitions.

Mr. Foued Mebazaa underlined that this empowerment is a major responsibility which "he will strive to preserve," saying that each decree-law will be adopted after consultation and in accordance with the people's will.

The interim government will endeavour to honour its commitments.

He reasserted the pledge to achieve the objectives of the Revolution, and particularly the hopes of youth who have "always been on the lead," as reflected in history, from the movement of the Tunisian youth at the beginning of the last century.

Curfew lifted and state of emergency maintained

TUNIS, Feb. 15, 2011 (TAP) - Night-time curfew banning the movement of persons and vehicles between midnight and 04:00 a.m. was lifted, said a communiqué from the Interior Ministry released on Tuesday.

However, as part of vigilance against anything that may threaten the country's and citizens' security and undermine public order and so as to protect public and private property, it was decided to maintain the state of emergency until further notice, the communiqué added.

It should be noted that the state of emergency decreed last January 14, implies that:

- All gathering of more than three persons is prohibited on public roads and squares.
- Security forces and the national army may use their weapons against any suspicious person who fails to comply with orders to stop or tries to escape and when it is no longer possible to stop him.

Setting up of three National Commissions in charge of Political Reform, Fact-Finding on abuses committed and Fact-Finding on cases of embezzlement and corruption

TUNIS, Jan. 22, 2011 (TAP) - Heads of the three National Commissions in charge of Political Reform, Fact-Finding on abuses and Fact-Finding on cases of embezzlement and corruption, held a news conference, Saturday in Tunis, to present the objectives and the prerogatives of the three National Commissions.

These commissions gather experts, lawyers and representatives of the political scene and civil society. Each of the three Commissions is made up of 10 to 15 members. Their reports are to be issued public at the end of their mission.

The Heads of the three Commissions asserted independence and neutrality of these structures whether on the level of their composition, their mission, their working methods or concerning the results to which they will end up with.

Mr. Iyadh Ben Achour, President of the Higher National Commission for Political Reform asserted that the commission will examine the different aspects of political life, institutions and laws including the constitution.

He explained that the former regime used law to exclude any person having a different opinion and prevent him from taking part in political life. He affirmed that the Commission for Political Reform will make contacts with the political scene actors and the civil society representatives so as to be able to contribute to the works of the commission.

He explained that the Commission will choose individuals known for their integrity and loyalty, not having been associated to the elaboration of the former texts of law and decrees and who did not participate in campaigns calling for the election of the former President in 2014.

The President of the Commission added that he started his preliminary contacts with the parties and the national personalities to invite them to take part in the works of the Commission which will gather some one hundred men of politics, representatives of the civil society and lawyers.

He specified that priority will be granted to the elaboration of texts organising the elections and the amendment of the electoral code to help the candidate bid, without obstacles, to the Presidential election and guarantee the organisation of free and credible election, in accordance with the objectives of the people's revolution including freedom, equality, democracy and the rule of law.

Besides, Mr. Iyad Ben Achour asserted that the personalities appointed to chair these commissions are known for their independence and their neutrality. He affirmed that the public opinion will be informed of any pressure or attempts of interference in the works of the commission.

Answering a question pertaining to the new bill, the President of the Commission said that the elaboration of these draft laws is under way but their adoption could not be made as part of the present Parliament, an authority which has neither credibility nor legitimacy.

He said that the new President of the Republic will be called to organise the political scene in line with the bill elaborated by this commission.

Mr. Iyad Ben Achour also evoked the amendment of the Press Law, underlining that it will be the focus of a comprehensive and fundamental reform to help the journalists and officials of the information sector practice their profession in freedom and independence.

For his part, Mr. Abdelfattah Amor, President of the Fact-Finding Commission on cases of embezzlement and corruption said that it is a Technical Commission made up notably of experts in the fields of finance, accountancy as well as in tax and administrative law in addition to specialists in company law, in stock market and in banking operations.

As regards the prerogatives of the commission, Mr. Abdelfattah Amor asserted the imperative to investigate on all the acts of corruption and embezzlement. He said that the Commission will audition any person who can bring a justified and precise testimony.

The President of the Commission called to protect public documents and preserve them, underlining that the fact of hiding, destroying and falsifying these documents is a crime of penal character.

He specified that the work of the commission will be on the same level of the historical event experienced by the country and is part of a new political ethic, asserting that the Commission will respect the secret of investigation and the right of any person for an equitable proceeding.

Mr. Abdelfattah Amor explained that the Commission is neither a court nor a political commission, even if it has a political dimension.

Concerning the possibility of coming to Tunisia of a team stemming from the High Human Right Commissariat, he asserts that it is a positive initiative and that contacts will be made with the United Nations team.

For his part, Mr. Taoufik Bouderbala President of the Fact-Finding Commission on Abuses committed in the last period explained that the Commission is tasked with gathering documents and giving them to the concerned parties.

He said that light will be shed on violation of rights, including in first place, the right to life, the right to physical integrity, and the right to security.

Mr. Bouderbala said that the Commission is made up of lawyers, magistrates, practitioners, journalists and experts. It will address, first, to the Interior Ministry and some of its

staff responsible of the damage and the death of disarmed citizens.

More than 800 files submitted to Fact-Finding Commission on Cases of Embezzlement and Corruption

TUNIS, Feb. 4, 2011 (TAP) - The Fact-Finding Commission on Cases of Embezzlement and Corruption reminded that its prerogatives comprise looking at corruption and embezzlement cases in which are involved the authorities, groups or individuals

In a press communiqué received on Friday by Tunis Afrique Presse (TAP) news agency, the Commission specifies that it has neither a judicial vocation nor a political one and that its attributions do not entitle it either to compensations or reparations, pointing out that its key mission consists in studying, rationally and thoroughly, the documents and files submitted to it and lend a listening ear to the testimonies that help unveil acts of corruption or embezzlement, away from any form of self-satisfaction or commitment.

So far, the Commission received more than 800 files touching notably on financial, taxation, customs, landed and administrative issues.

In the same communiqué, the Commission calls on all physical and moral persons having benefited, illegally, of financial assets, real estate properties, or other gains and all those who served to cover the real identity of other persons, to show their good intentions by getting in touch with the Commission.

Tunisia's diplomacy takes measures against ousted President, his wife and their relatives

TUNIS, Jan. 30, 2011 (TAP) - Authorized sources at the Foreign Ministry report that since they received last January 21 letters of request against the ousted President, his wife and several of their relatives , the relevant services of the Ministry have taken the following measures:

1- Informing on January 22, all the diplomatic representations of Tunisia abroad of the launching of an investigation about the former Tunisian President , his wife and their relatives .

These representations have been entrusted with intervening with the relevant authorities in the countries where they are accredited to take the necessary protective measures with respect to the property the afore-mentioned people could own , including bank accounts, financial assets, stocks, shares in companies and personal and real estate , as well as to freeze them .

2 - Since last January 22 and up to today , 16 letters of request have been issued to brotherly and friendly states.

3- In view of the list of names included in the letters of request, the Foreign Ministry has started, since last January,26, to revoke the diplomatic passports of the

former President and his wife as well as all those named in the afore-mentioned lists.

According to the same source, several diplomatic passports issued to the ousted President's relatives and to former officials have also been revoked. The total number of diplomatic passports cancelled stands so far at 48 .

Diplomatic passports are considered immediately and definitively non-valid as soon as a diplomatic memorandum is sent to foreign countries to this end.

4 - In accordance with the Government decision to reshuffle the diplomatic corps , an end has been put , as of January , 29,2011, to the mission of several Tunisian Ambassadors and consuls abroad.

Interpol issues global alert to arrest Ben Ali and six of his relatives

TUNIS, Jan. 26, 2011 (TAP) - At the request of the Tunisian authorities, Interpol issued, on Wednesday, an alert to all 187 member countries to seek the location and arrest of former president Zine el Abidine Ben Ali and six of his relatives.

"Mr. Ben Ali and some of his family members are wanted in Tunisia on charges of alleged property theft and the illegal transfer of foreign currency," said Interpol in a statement issued in Lyons, France.

Interpol had not unveiled the names of other wanted persons. The investigation regarding illegal acquisition of property targets dozens of other individuals, including the wife of the dictator, Leila Trabelsi, his son-in-law Sakher El Materi as well as the brother-in-law of Ben Ali, Belhassen Trabelsi.

Minister of Justice Lazhar Karoui Chebbi said, on Wednesday morning, that all fugitives in this affair were subjected to a warrant for arrest in Tunisia.

Ben Ali and his wife are in Saudi Arabia after having fled the country.

As to Belhassen Trabelsi media reports said he had arrived last Thursday in Montreal along with his wife.

Swiss Federal Council freezes possible assets of former president Ben Ali in Switzerland

Tunis, Jan. 19, 2011 (TAP) - The Swiss Federal Council decided with the order approved in a session held on Wednesday to freeze immediately possible assets in Switzerland of Tunisia's deposed president and his entourage's.

All needed measures should be taken to avoid any misappropriation of Tunisian public funds. In addition, the sale and transfer of real estates belonging to those persons has been banned.

In a communiqué made public on Wednesday, following recent events that occurred in Tunisia, the Federal Council said the Tunisian authorities have the possibility to request legal assistance in penal matters from Switzerland. The order has come in force as of today.

The Federal Council wishes to avoid that possible assets be transferred from Switzerland to other countries and escape measures decided. The order is valid for three years.

EU freezes assets of 46 relatives of deposed President

TUNIS, Feb. 4, 2011 (TAP) - The European Union (EU) decided, on Friday, to freeze the assets of 46 relatives of ousted President Ben Ali and his wife Leila Trabelsi, French AFP news agency reported, quoting a diplomatic source.

The European governments « adopted a decision that adds 46 names to the European assets-freezing list of people, » which has so far included the deposed president and his wife, a European diplomat said, specifying that « they are mainly members of the two families, » the Ben Alis and Trabelsis.

The decision was adopted on the sidelines of a meeting of European heads of state and government. The European foreign ministers had decided, last Monday, to freeze the assets of former Tunisian president and his wife as they are subjected to an investigation by Tunisian authorities for « the embezzlement, opening of banking accounts and holding of financial assets in several countries as part of money laundering. » The list in question was established on the Tunisian government's request.

Foreign Minister resigns

TUNIS, Feb. 13, 2011 (TAP) - Foreign Affairs Minister Ahmed Ounais, on Sunday, submitted his resignation to the Interim Government, a communiqué from the Foreign Affairs Ministry announced.

DIPLOMACY

Visiting US Assistant Secretary of State for Near East proposes US assistance to "build up a free country and prepare transparent elections"

TUNIS, Jan. 26, 2011 (TAP) - "Tunisia's people should decide fate on their own to build up a free country and prepare transparent elections ", said Jeffrey D. Feltman, US Assistant Secretary of State for the Near East , proposing the US "assistance" in this process.

He added that the United States stands with the Tunisian people at this unique and exciting moment, pointing out in this regard that the US did not interfere either to oust the former President or in the choice of the Tunisian Government which depends only on the people, and that its legitimacy should come from the people and from free elections.

The US official said the United States had always advocated, in public as in private, the promotion of liberties in Tunisia and in the world.

He reminded that President Barack Obama had referred to Tunisia in his state of the union speech on Tuesday evening and that Tunisia "has now a place on the map of the US conscience".

The US President had indeed said yesterday that "the will of the people has proved more powerful than the writ of a dictator and let us make it clear this evening: The US stands with Tunisians".

The US official also said that he had a series of talks with the interim government members, delegates of opposition parties and elements of the civil society.

"The national unity government, he said, has made important decisions and taken major steps on the way of political openness and democracy ".

Answering a question on Tunisia's army, he said "the army is showing respect for the constitution and is respected for keeping peace ", adding that the expectations of Tunisia's people consist in a civilian government.

At financial level, he said the US central bank had ordered to all the US banks to report any "doubtful transactions" by relatives of the ousted President.

As regards economic cooperation, the US diplomat said the United States had always incited US firms to invest in Tunisia and that a businessmen's visit is already scheduled.

In conclusion, he said the United States had kept good relations with Tunisia and that there was even greater potential to strengthen bilateral ties.

Prime Minister receives European Parliament Delegation

CARTHAGE, Feb. 4, 2011 (TAP) - Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi received, Friday morning at Carthage palace, a delegation of the European Parliament visiting Tunisia on February 3-6.

The Delegation, made up of twelve European deputies, is led by Messrs. José Ignacio Salafranca of (European People's Party/Spain) and Pier Antonio Panzeri (Socialists and Democrats/Italy).

At the end of the talk with the Prime Minister, Mr. Salafranca said to Tunis Afrique Presse (TAP) news agency that the Delegation "came to demonstrate to the Tunisian people solidarity of the European Parliament and the European Union, and to back up the democratic transition process in the country."

"We are to meet the personalities from civil society, Trade Unions, political parties and Government members, to listen to their possible needs, and if the Tunisian people wish it, we are ready to assist them in this democratic process in Tunisia," he added.

For his part, Mr. Panzeri said he had "very positive impressions from this visit." "We are," he added, "gathering all necessary information to support the democratic transfer in Tunisia and to understand the role to be played by the European Union in this sense."

"Each talk constitutes for us a positive element insofar as it brings new elements of information," he underlined, asserting that the talk with the Prime Minister was of great importance.

European Parliament calls for energising co-operation with Tunisia

BRUSSELS, Feb. 3, 2011 (TAP) - The European Parliament voted, on Thursday, a resolution calling for boosting co-operation between the European Union (EU) and Tunisia to accompany the country's democratic transition.

The resolution, adopted with the support of the main political forces, provides for "re-directing the funds and, if need be, increase the different financial instruments of EU-Tunisia co-operation," French AFP news agency reported.

The EU also favoured launching by the European Investment Bank (EIB) of "low-interest loans" in Tunis to help the Tunisian economy's diversification and offer Tunisian youths skilled employment prospects.

The EU presently grants Tunisia between 80 and 90 million euros a year, as non-repayable aid.

For its part, EIB granted Tunisia in 2010 a loan worth 500 million euros to finance infrastructure projects, notably in transports and roads.

The head of the European diplomacy Catherine Ashton had announced, on Wednesday, to the European Parliament her planned visit to Tunisia in two weeks' time to discuss EU's assistance to the country, after the fall of the old regime.

She confirmed the EU's readiness to enhance the level of its relations with Tunisia by granting the country an "advanced status," which would help it make the most of the preferential customs duties on the European market.

Europe, Mrs. Ashton said on Wednesday, will "re-orient" its assistance programme to the country so that this aid be "more directly" beneficial to the people, be dedicated to the urgent social needs, to reform of the judiciary system and fight against corruption, as well as to support civil society and NGOs.

Catherine Ashton says "The EU is willing to help Tunisia in its democratic transition"

BRUSSELS, Feb. 3, 2011 (TAP) - "The European Union is willing to help Tunisia in the short and long term to back the process of democratic transition", declared the Head of European Diplomacy at the end of a meeting with Foreign Minister Ahmed Ounais on Wednesday in Brussels.

In a joint statement after the meeting, Mrs Ashton announced that concrete propositions had been discussed and considered with the Union Member states' officials "to provide assistance and support to Tunisia in its democratic transition and economic and social development", Foreign Ministry sources reported on Wednesday to TAP news agency.

Stressing the importance of relations between the European Union and Tunisia, Mrs Ashton said that the EU which will also provide support to non-governmental organizations, "is ready to work closely with Tunisia so that change might happen".

She also said that her talks with the FM had turned on the programmes and development plans of the Tunisian Government.

She went on saying she had been "impressed by the huge work rapidly started by the Interim Government", pointing out "the importance of re-establishing the rule of law and reinforcing institutions in these so crucial circumstances".

The FM declared in turn: "the talks with Mrs Ashton have been dense, frank, substantial, and promising".

He expressed thanks to the EU and to Tunisia's partners all over the world for their support and solidarity, reckoning that it is a constructive response that has just been proved by the head of the EU diplomacy.

"Since its independence, Tunisia has made the country's economic, social and industrial modernization its fundamental choices", the FM said, adding that the revolution carried out in Tunisia for less than one month "is that of democracy, good governance and freedom".

Foreign Minister visits France on his way back from Brussels

PARIS, Feb. 4, 2011 (TAP) - At the invitation of Mrs. Michelle Alliot-Marie, France's State Minister and Foreign and European Affairs Minister, Foreign Minister Ahmed Ounais paid, on Friday, February 4, on his way back from Brussels a working visit to Paris.

During his talk with his French counterpart, Mr. Ounais gave an account on the measures taken by the interim government in matters of public liberties, as well as the social emergency plan and the economic revival programme.

On this occasion, he expressed thanks to Mrs. Alliot-Marie for France's support to the interim government's actions, as well as its backing of Tunisia among its European partners. The minister paid tribute to France for having hosted and protected members of the Tunisian opposition and democrats, and having helped them express themselves at a time when their own country « was gagging them. » Mr. Ounais stressed the need to renew the April 2008 accord on concerted management of migratory flows and joint development, and the need to endow it with mechanisms likely to grant it greater efficiency.

For her part, Mrs. Alliot-Marie pledged to lift the precautionary measures on the Tunisia destination in a message to the French nationals traveling to Tunisia. She voiced France's solidarity and its readiness to back up the interim government's social emergency plan and economic revival programme. Commending Tunisia's exceptional democratic transfer, accomplished in a record time, she expressed her country's willingness to accompany the Tunisian government's efforts.

During a meeting with the press, the two ministers reasserted determination to boost the Tunisian-French relations in all fields.

Foreign Secretary William Hague: "Great Britain will be strong friend of the Tunisian people, at this new stage of its history"

TUNIS, Feb. 8, 2011 (TAP) - "I came here to show the United Kingdom's support to the people of Tunisia, at this decisive stage of its history, as it is striving to determine its own future and freely exercise democratic rights," British Foreign Secretary William Hague said, in a meeting with the press, on Tuesday in Tunis.

"This change has long been wished for and it has been brought about by the Tunisian people who called on their leaders to respond to their economic and political aspirations.

We commend the interim government for having lent a listening ear to the people's concerns and launched an important reform process," he underlined.

The British Foreign Secretary, who had met on Tuesday morning Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi and Planning and International Co-operation Minister Nouri Jouini, said that talks had turned on the key reforms started by Tunisia in this transition period.

The meeting with the Prime Minister had helped discuss "the vital elections to be held this year," he stressed, asserting that it is clearly important, in the eyes of the world, that these elections be "free, transparent and democratic."

Besides, Mr. Hague said that the meetings had provided the opportunity to raise the issue of human rights "which represents a crucial component of the reform process."

"We commended the Tunisian government's decision to ratify important international conventions, in this sense, notably the optional protocol against torture," he pointed out.

He added that the meetings had also centred on the prospects for promoting Tunisia's relations with Great Britain and the European Union, "relations which, we hope, will be further developed in the years to come," he stressed.

"Great opportunities have come into being here, in Tunisia; such opportunities that should be seized, rather than feared," the British Foreign Secretary argued, asserting his country's "readiness to work with the government and civil society, to support economic development and promote broader political openness." "Great Britain will be a strong friend of the Tunisian people who has started a new stage in its history," he asserted, adding that "the eyes of the whole world are on you, sharing with you your ambitions."

In this connection, he announced that Great Britain has created an Arab Partnership Fund, a body that provides assistance to civil society, state institutions and individuals in Tunisia and other countries striving to establish greater openness and political participation, to consecrate the citizens' rights and develop independent institutions, "all

these are key factors for building up a stable, prosperous and democratic society."

Furthermore, he pointed out that "it is by no means Great Britain's responsibility, or any other country's, to dictate or determine the approach or the nature of the change for the region," asserting, on the contrary, that his country supports liberties and the universal democratic values which are essential to the edification of a democratic society, "an aim which the Tunisian people is pursuing with great passion." Answering the journalists' questions, Mr. Hague asserted he had found among the Tunisian government "an earnest determination" to move forward during this period of transition.

He underscored the importance to take appropriate decisions and carry out the necessary reforms to "increase the foreign investors' confidence and develop new partnership opportunities."

In conclusion, Mr. Hague reiterated Great Britain's readiness to offer its friendly assistance to Tunisia and deal with it on the bases that are dictated by the new situation.

He said "this point is to develop new co-operation opportunities," notably in the security and higher-education areas, "a co-operation that rests on shared values."

Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle: "Germany is ready to support Tunisia through concrete gestures"

CARTHAGE, Feb. 12, 2011 (TAP) - "Germany is very impressed by the democratic changes in Tunisia. We are ready to support this new beginning, not only through words but also by means of concrete gestures," said German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle, after a working session with Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi, held on Saturday in Carthage Palace.

Speaking to journalists from national and international media, the German FM, who was accompanied by an important delegation, reiterated Germany's supportive stand to the Tunisian Revolution, saying: "Tunisia has launched a freedom and liberation drive and this move needs to be not only an irreversible one but also successfully shaped."

The German FM's statement came in response to Mr. Mohamed Ghannouchi's in which he emphasised "Tunisia's commitment to guarantee success to the challenge of establishing democracy." The first test the Interim Government is facing, he said, "is that of organising free and transparent elections monitored by the United Nations." These elections require, he pointed out, "to set up a social, economic and political environment allowing to end up with the country having in common with Europe the same universal values."

In this respect, the Prime minister also pointed to the organisation by Tunisia, with the support of its partners, of an international conference next March in Carthage. This conference, he said, will have political and economic objectives and will also seek to attract more investments as part of a win-win approach, so that European and

international firms invest in Tunisia and also in democracy, Mr. Ghannouchi argued.

"Tunisia has been a competitive country. It will be even more so, as part of the rule of Law," Mr. Ghannouchi stressed.

Mr. Guido Westerwelle, who said that Germany would take part in the Carthage conference, announced, during his visit, two concrete co-operation projects, particularly in the energy sector, as well as several other initiatives, particularly in the areas of civil society and youth.

Germany, which is Tunisia's second economic partner, was among the first countries to show support for the Tunisian Revolution. Over 3,000 Germans live and work on a permanent basis in Tunisia, and almost no one has left Tunisia to this day.

Prime Minister receives Japanese Ambassador in Tunis

TUNIS, Feb. 12, 2011 (TAP) - Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi received here this morning Japanese Ambassador in Tunis Toshiyuki Taga.

The talks turned on the development of bilateral relations and means to boost co-operation in the various fields.

The PM stressed on the occasion that Tunisia had entered a new stage in its history, driven by a strong will to provide the best chances of success to the democratic transition, establish the foundations of the rule of law and institutions and consolidate Human Rights.

He also said that Tunisia will hold shortly an international conference on political and social reforms.

The Japanese official expressed in turn his country's will to support Tunisia in this important transition stage to enable it to fulfill its people's ambitions and aspirations.

He also expressed Japan's readiness to take part in the international conference on political and social reforms.

Tunisia voices confidence in Egypt's ability to pass, with assuredness and aptitude, this important milestone of its history

TUNIS, Feb. 11, 2011 (TAP) - Following Friday's developments in Egypt, notably the announcement of President Mohamed Hosni Mubarak's handing of power, the interim government voiced on behalf of the Tunisian people, heroes of the Freedom and Dignity Revolution, consideration to the brotherly Egyptian people for their militancy, as well as the sacrifices of their martyrs among youths.

It also paid a particularly ringing tribute to the Egyptian Army for its high patriotic sense and the pivotal part it played in protecting Egypt and its children, at this critical period the country went through.

In a statement made public on Friday evening, a copy of which was received by Tunis Afrique Presse (TAP) news agency, the Foreign Ministry expressed "total satisfaction at the announcement of Mohamed Hosni Mubarak's stepping down from the presidency of the Egyptian

Republic and of the power transfer to the Higher Council of the Egyptian Armed Forces."

In this statement, the interim government voiced confidence "in Egypt's ability, thanks to its children's competence and patriotism, to pass with assuredness and aptitude this important milestone of its history, regain its strengths and restore its prestige on the regional and international scenes."

The Tunisian government also voiced "confidence that this great accomplishment is to strengthen the Tunisian-Egyptian relations, bolster the longstanding co-operation binding the Tunisian and Egyptian peoples, and undoubtedly contribute to the triumph and support of the Arab causes."

Prime Minister receives High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

CARTHAGE, Feb. 14, 2011 (TAP) - Mrs. Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy expressed "great privilege to be in Tunisia in this historical moment," adding that "on behalf of the EU's 27 countries and the international community, we offer our support to help you succeed in this stage," particularly in developing the economy, supporting the civil society and helping the government create new opportunities.

After a meeting held on Monday with Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi, Mrs. Ashton also said she came to Tunisia to express to the Prime Minister and to the Caretaker Government, the European Union's support and provide support to the Tunisian people for the coming period.

"We wish every success to Tunisia in this stage and hope to continue and strengthen our co-operation with the Tunisian people in the coming years," concluded the Head of European Diplomacy.

For his part, the PM voiced satisfaction at the EU's support and the proposals made by Mrs. Ashton "to help Tunisia succeed at this stage which will end up with building a rule of law and a free and democratic country."

Mr. Ghannouchi said discussions were "frank" and turned on the challenges posed and conditions required to ensure success to this stage which would lead to presidential elections and the establishment of a government team whose mission would be to take up the challenge of democracy.

Mrs. Ashton also had talks with Planning and International Co-operation Minister Nouri Jouini and Regional Development Minister Ahmed Néjib Chebbi.

She will meet, during the day, representatives of political parties, Human rights activists and several civil society players.

Head of European diplomacy meets the press

TUNIS, Feb. 14, 2011 (TAP) - Mrs. Catherine Margaret Ashton, first deputy-chairperson of the European

Commission and High Representative of the European Union (EU), held, on Monday afternoon in Tunis, a news conference before her departure.

Mrs. Ashton said that the EU "supports forcefully" Tunisia's process of democratic transition, adding that all Tunisian political players, as well as members of civil society, ought to carry on working together in order to "make the organisation of free and democratic elections easier."

"Our support to Tunisia will materialise on the ground with an aid package of 258 million euros, to be mobilised from now on to 2013. Resources of about 17 million euros will be released shortly," she specified.

The EU High Representative said she had had "frank and open discussions" with the European Investment Bank (EIB) officials, which produced the mobilisation of one billion euros, an amount that would serve to boost the small and medium enterprises and infrastructure projects in Tunisia.

She pointed out that the EU is planning to assist the interim government in organising a conference on Tunisia next March.

Regarding Tunisia's access to the "advanced status," Mrs. Ashton said that discussions will start with the interim government and will be carried on with "the new government" that would emerge from the next elections, the one which will have "to ratify the document."

On illegal migration, the EU's High Representative pointed out that the EU is in permanent contact with officials in Tunisia and Italy, and what is most important in this situation "is the fact that things are being done in accordance with the best practices, in order to guarantee security of persons, as well as Italy's."

Mrs. Ashton conferred, during her one-day visit in Tunisia, with Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi, Planning and International Co-operation Minister Nouri Jouini and Regional Development Minister Ahmed Néjib Chebbi, as well as with representatives of political parties, human rights activists and several civil society's players.

"Tunisia categorically rejects any interference in its internal affairs" says Foreign Ministry

TUNIS, Feb. 14, 2011 (TAP) - After the statement of Italian Interior Minister Roberto Maroni speaking of deploying Italian police force in Tunisia to fight against illegal immigration, authorized sources at the Foreign Ministry affirmed : "Tunisia is as strongly committed to preserving the excellent friendly relations of cooperation with Italy and further promoting them as surprised at this stance and affirms that it categorically rejects any interference in its internal affairs or offence against its sovereignty."

"Tunisia, the communiqué said, reiterates its readiness to cooperate with brotherly states to identify adequate solutions to the issue of illegal immigration founded on respect of human rights and dignity and on the principle of solidarity-based development."

The same sources also said: "Tunisia will discuss this issue in total transparency with Italian officials in coming days."

Foreign Minister Frattini: Italy suggests operational co-operation in compliance with Tunisia's sovereignty

TUNIS, Feb.15, 2011 (TAP) - Italian Foreign Minister Franco Frattini announced on Monday evening in Tunis the establishment of an operational co-operation between Tunisia and Italy to stop the flow of illegal immigration.

Speaking at the end of a working session with Caretaker Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi , he said, in a statement to the press, that he had suggested to Tunisia "an operational co-operation in compliance with the sovereignty of the Tunisian state " to stop illegal immigration at the start. This co-operation, he declared, consists in " a package of pragmatic operational assistance " providing the Tunisian army with advanced technology equipment , a radar network for monitoring and patrol boats to be operated by the Tunisians.

The FM announced as well the setting up of a technical committee to work out an operational programme , stressing the importance of implementing the bilateral agreement concluded between the two countries in the field of immigration which implies "duties and obligations for both sides " with the possibility of revising the quotas for regular migrants.

Besides, the Italian FM affirmed that he came to Tunisia to reiterate his country's total support "to the peaceful political revolution " and to the access of Tunisia to the status of advanced partner of the European Union , expressing Italy's will to "finalise this agreement with the government of Mr. Ghannouchi".

He also announced in this context the lifting of restrictions for travelling to Tunisia , voicing his country's will to revive and provide new credit lines worth 100 million euros to finance plans that will be announced at the international conference scheduled for next March in Carthage.

A meeting will be held in this regard next Thursday in Italy by Tunisian officials and delegates of Italian small and medium firms, investment institutions and provinces.

Prime Minister announces International Conference on Political and Economic Reforms to be held in Carthage

TUNIS, Feb. 10, 2011 (TAP) - Prime Minister Mohammed Ghannouchi announced, on Thursday, that an International Conference on Political and Economic Reforms is to be held shortly in Carthage.

In a telephone conversation, on Thursday, the Prime Minister discussed with German Chancellor Angela Merkel the organisation of this International Conference.

A well-informed source pointed out that the Prime Minister also reviewed with the German Official the relations binding the two countries, as well as Tunisia's efforts to guarantee conditions of success to the democratic transition and establishment of the foundations of the rule of law and fundamental liberties.

For her part, Mrs. Merkel reasserted her country's will to assist Tunisia and its people during the present stage, the same source added.

Prime Minister Ghannouchi and French Prime Minister Fillon converse on phone

TUNIS, Feb. 11, 2011 (TAP) - Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi had, on Friday morning, a telephone conversation with his French opposite number François Fillon.

The talk turned on means to reinforce relations between the two countries during the coming period.

The two sides discussed the promising prospects opened by the Tunisian People's Revolution and efforts exerted to achieve aspirations in the various economic, political and social fields, in order to definitely break off with the old dictatorial regime and social injustice, and to establish the attributes of democracy and public and individual freedoms.

Mr. Fillon reiterated, on the occasion, France's support to Tunisia and its people, and its will to boost bilateral co-operation in all fields.

He also pointed out will to speed up the process of Tunisia's accession to the status of advanced partner of the European Union.

He also voiced France's readiness to effectively take part in the international conference on political and economic reforms to be organised in Tunisia.

BUSINESS & ECONOMY

Foreign companies resume activities gradually

TUNIS, Jan. 22, 2011 (TAP) - Foreign companies based in different regions of the Republic started resuming their activities while project developers are determined to move forward, said Mr. Noureddine Zekri, Director- General of Foreign Investment at the Ministry of Planning and International Co-operation.

The three thousand foreign companies operating in Tunisia, he said to TAP news agency, had not suffered material damage thanks to the vigilance of the staff and civil defence committees. Although surveys conducted by the Tunisian-German and Tunisian-French Chambers of Commerce and industry show a resumption of activities in different foreign companies, order delays were reported due to security measures implemented in ports and airports, causing congestion and impeding consequently imports and exports.

In this connection, he said that surveyed companies were optimistic about Tunisia's future and the return to a healthy climate of investment.

Tunisia to repay its debts on time

TUNIS, Jan 21 2011(TAP) - Tunisia will discharge its debts estimated, for 2011, at 1,120 million dinars (MTD), on time. About 820 MTD(450 million euros) will be reimbursed in April and 300 MTD(15 billion yen) in September 2011.

Mr. Mustapha Kamel Nabli, Governor of the Central Bank of Tunisia (BCT) said in a news conference held on Friday in Tunis that this reimbursement will be made through the use of the State budget resources.

He added that Tunisia's reserves of Tunisia's foreign currencies are valued at 12.6 billion dinars, the equivalent of 143 days of imports to guarantee the proper progress of foreign payments, while speeding up the pace of the economy.

He said Tunisia will issue bonds on the international market in 2011, as the reduction of sovereign rating of Tunisia could result in an increase in the cost of borrowing.

Mr. Nabli emphasised that this reduction, even if it is a preventive measure, nevertheless remains "illegitimate" as these rating agencies have not taken into consideration conditions under which the revolution took place in Tunisia and that the latter does not pose a long-term threat to the country's stability.

Rating agency "Moody's Investors Service" downgraded from "BAA2" to "BAA3" Tunisia's sovereign rating with a negative outlook.

The two other rating agencies "Standards and Poor's" and "Fitch" have kept the Issuer Default Ratings (IDR) in foreign currency assigned to Tunisia to BBB, while subjecting the country to a negative control over a period of 3 to 6 months.

The Japanese rating agency R&I, for its part, downgraded Tunisia's rating from AAA- to BBB, while placing it under negative watch.

UNIMED and PROMOCHIMICA to set up production unit of main components for medicine in Beja

TUNIS, Feb. 9, 2011 (TAP) - PROMOCHIMICA company is to set up a production unit of main components for pharmaceuticals in the Beja region, Northwestern Tunisia, as part of a North-South partnership between Tunisian UNIMED pharmaceutical laboratory and PROMOCHIMICA Italia company.

The project, of a cost of about 20 million euros (40 million dinars), will constitute an exceptional opportunity for technology transfer and will be co-funded by Tunisian and Italian promoters with the contribution of a consortium of Tunisian and Libyan financial institutions.

International Maghreb Merchant Bank (IMBank) and Bank of the Promoters' Council announced in a communiqué, a copy of which was sent to Tunis Afrique Presse (TAP) news agency, that it will organise on Friday, in Tunis, a press conference on the meeting of the PROMOCHIMICA Tunisia company's occasion of board of directors.

Industry Minister meets with foreign investors in aeronautics

TUNIS, Feb. 10, 2011 (TAP) - Tunisian Aeronautic and Space Industries Group (GITAS) recommended ensuring the safety of its production sites and providing appropriate logistics for the good progress of activities likely to combine optimum conditions for the return to normal.

Mr. Philippe Cussonet, Chairman of the Group, said at a meeting that brought together on Thursday representatives of the aeronautic sector in Tunisia and Industry and Technology Minister Afif Chelbi, that the production sites suffered no damage after the recent events in Tunisia, calling for further ensuring the safety of these sites.

He also emphasised the need to ensure road safety to reassure workers.

Mr. Cussonet called to secure continuity of activity of Rades port, for both imports and exports.

He said the economic situation in Tunisia arouses concern of the raw materials suppliers of the aeronautic sector in Tunisia, as they demand today advances from different production units before any supply operation.

Mr. Chelbi said his Department is permanently in touch with the Defence and Interior Ministries to ensure the safety of aeronautic production sites, calling upon investors to get in touch, in case of emergency, the "crisis unit" created within the Industry Ministry.

He said, however, that the security situation in the country is temporary and will be improved in the coming period.

He also pointed out that efforts will focus on guaranteeing continuity of activities of the Rades port and speeding up works at the Enfidha port to enhance logistic services provided to investors.

He said that, despite the delicate situation the country is living through, the Tunisian economy still enjoys confidence of investors, adding that the number of investment intents declared at the Industry and Innovation Promotion Agency in 2011 is almost the same as the one recorded in January 2010.

The Minister said revenues generated by exports of Tunisian manufactured industries in January 2011 reached 1.4 billion Dinars, i.e. a decrease of 2.3% compared to the same period of 2010.

He said the slogan "Invest in Democracy" will be the next period's roadmap.

The minister also announced the organisation by the end of the first quarter of 2011 (March or April) of an International Conference which will provide the opportunity for Tunisia's partners, particularly the European Union, to provide support to the Tunisian economy.

ADB ready to support Tunisia, says KABERUKA

Tunis, Feb. 14, 2011 (TAP) - African Development Bank group President Donald Kaberuka renewed on Monday the commitment of the bank to back up Tunisia by all means, in this critical stage, saying: «These are hard times but providing opportunities for Tunisia.» "We are getting down to work with the Government in this regard,

out of awareness that any change of this kind is always complex» he told TAP News Agency after meeting on Monday Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi.

Kaberuka also said that the meeting had allowed to review Tunisia's political and economic situation as well as the current action carried out by the transition Government. The meeting was attended by Planning and International Cooperation Minister Mohamed Nouri Jouini.

SOCIETY

Five hundred million dinars allocated as emergency funds to support citizens of interior governorates

TUNIS, Jan. 25, 2011 (TAP) - Regional and Local Development Minister in National Union Government (NUG) Ahmed Néjib Chebbi announced that 500 million dinars have been allocated to come to the rescue of citizens in several priority governorates and regions, including notably those of Sidi Bouzid, Kasserine and Gafsa, which had suffered from social injustice and imbalance in regional development.

He pointed out, in a talk-show on "Hannibal" TV, that one of the modalities of handing these credits is to indemnify victims of the Tunisian Revolution among martyrs' families and the injured, asserting that this assistance is a stop-gap, as the true extent of the damage and scope of compensation are yet to be fixed.

He argued that appropriation of these funds, which has been decided during Monday's Cabinet meeting held under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister, is to benefit small craftsmen and traders who had suffered losses and damage as a result of the last events, which is to help them reinvigorate their activities, as well as they are meant to back up farmers victimised by bad weather conditions.

Mr. Ahmed Néjib Chebbi specified that the allocated funds are also to serve to launch public works that will offer jobs for the unemployed, indicating that these are only emergency measures, while it remains to identify other needed investment resources for the creation of development projects.

Regarding the university graduates' unemployment, Mr. Ahmed Néjib Chebbi pointed out that part-time voluntary work opportunities, paid 150-dinar monthly wages, are to be created, pending access to steady jobs.

The Minister said that these decisions are not mere promises; they rather are immediate assistance measures whose distribution and management modalities are to be left to the citizens themselves to decide about, through civil organisations and structures, all the more so that decision has been taken to dissolve the existing regional development councils and to reshape them in such a way that they include, in addition to the administration, the different components of civil society, at the forefront of which those commissions set up by the Revolution, like the Sidi Bouzid families' support commission.

He also announced that a movement in the Governors' body is to be put into effect, on Tuesday, the key characteristic of which will be to single out competences in the regional development field with a view to leading the interior regions, insofar as this issue tops the priorities of the next stage.

Caravan of thanks heads to Sidi Bouzid

TUNIS, Feb. 6, 2011 (TAP) - The Caravan of Thanks, organised by nearly 10 thousand citizens from all classes and age categories left Tunis on Sunday morning to the Governorate of Sidi Bouzid.

The four-kilometre-long caravan comprises a hundred cars and six major buses.

This caravan, whose idea was born through the social network "Facebook," aims to pay homage to martyrs of Sidi Bouzid and more particularly Mohamed Bouazizi who has become a symbol of the popular Revolution in Tunisia.

It is, according to organisers, the first of a set of initiatives that will involve soon other underprivileged areas such as Tala and Kasserine.

As soon as they arrive in Sidi Bouzid, participants will meditate to the memory of young martyr Bouazizi to pay homage to him.

Organisers of the Caravan also plan visits to most underprivileged districts of the region where donations will be given to residents.

Return to the capital is expected at 4 p.m.

Compensation for families of victims of People's Revolution

Compensations to the families of the victims and the injured, as a result of the People's Revolution for freedom and dignity, started on Thursday, in all regions of the country. The competent authorities in the Kebili Governorate handed the first part of these reparations to the families of the victims and the wounded during the clashes.

A 3,000-dinar amount per person is granted to 3 wounded, and 20,000 dinars are served to each of the two families who lost two of their members. The family of martyr Hatem Bettaher, academic, refused to receive the indemnity. Four people were killed, two in the city of Douz, one in Kebili and another in Souk Lahad, in addition to 13 other wounded people.

The Sidi Bouzid regional council has just completed payment procedures of the first part of compensations, under the shape of banking cheques to the injured and families of the victims of the Tunisian Revolution. In a statement to Tunis Afrique Presse (TAP) news agency, the Sidi Bouzid tax collector said that an amount of 225,000 dinars has been mobilised for the payment of the first part of the compensation. Victims in Sidi Bouzid number 9 martyrs (two in Sidi Bouzid, 5 in Regueb and 2 in Menzel Bouzayane) and 15 were wounded. Families of the victims stressed the emergency to bring to justice the

person having caused the death of Tunisian youths and shot dead demonstrators.

Families of the two victims in Tozeur received a compensation. Six other persons were injured in the Tozeur region. These families criticised the way in which events were covered by the media which, according to them, omitted to shed light on the victims of the Tunisian Revolution, in the Governorate of Tozeur.

Mother of martyr Hassan Arfaoui from Moulares, Gafsa, specified that her son, the family's sole tutor, went to Tozeur to look for a permanent job to help him support his own family. For Abdelmoneem, one of the wounded, sacrifices made by Tunisian youths in the name of freedom and dignity have no price. In the Gabes governorate, the Tunisian Red Crescent started, since Wednesday, distribution of the first part of the indemnity for the benefit of four families of martyrs and 34 wounded people.

Religious affairs ministry: no attack on the Jewish community

TUNIS, Feb. 2, 2011 (TAP) - The religious affairs ministry asserts, in a communiqué made public on Wednesday, that no attack against the Jewish community has been reported since the start of the Revolution.

The ministry reacts to news reported by some foreign media, and which has proved to be groundless, on the rumoured fire set at the synagogue of El Hamma, southern Tunisia, an information which was denied by Mr. Roger Bismuth, chief of the Jewish community in Tunisia. Besides, the communiqué retakes the latter's statement to French AFP news agency, confirming that "no anti-Semitic attack has been carried out in Tunisia since the start of the People's Revolution..."

At no time have Tunisia's Jews been targeted by attacks or even by awkward remarks." "Tunisia, which houses various religious communities that live in a climate of peace, equality, understanding and tolerance, is determined to respect and protect these communities and their institutions and their right to practice their rites in total freedom and without exclusion," the religious affairs ministry affirms. The Tunisian authorities will not allow any act that violates the rights of religious communities whoever they are, the communiqué makes it clear.

France releases emergency social assistance of 350,000 Euros for Tunisia

TUNIS, Feb.14, 2011 (TAP) - France has released an emergency social assistance for Tunisia, the French Embassy in Tunisia reported on its website. A budget of 250,000 euros was released by France to bring assistance to persons from disadvantaged areas, in addition to a budget of 100,000 euros raised by the Department For Cultural Co-operation and Action (SCAC), making it a total of 350,000 euros. The fund will finance projects implemented by local associations from the civil society as well as Tunisian social and medical and hospital services, in collaboration with the French embassy.

It aims to bring assistance to most vulnerable groups of society, namely children, elderly, victims of the demonstrations and sick persons.

To date, 14 projects proposed by Tunisian associations have been retained at a cost of about 200,000 Euros.

The assistance prioritises central and southern regions of Tunisia.

These associative projects aim to support victims' families in the regions of Kasserine, Thala and Sidi Bouzid and target more generally early childhood, the disabled and those most vulnerable.

Projects were selected in accordance with their speed, their operational efficiency and target beneficiaries.

TOURISM & CULTURE

British tour operators ready to return to Tunisia

TUNIS, Feb. 9, 2011 (TAP) - British three major tour operators—Thomas Cook, Thomson and First Choice - decided to resume travel to Tunisia by the end of this month, "Air-journal.fr," reported on Wednesday

The measure follows the British Foreign Office's decision to relax its advice against "all but essential travel" to Tunisia.

The British operators cancelled all services to the country after the announcement of the state of emergency last January 14.

Sousse to host, as of Friday, several European tourists

TUNIS, Feb. 10, 2011 (TAP) - A large number of British, Belgian and French tourists confirmed bookings and will arrive in Sousse on February 11, 12 and 13, 2011, announced on Thursday Mr. Hamouda Belhouane, Chairman of the Regional Federation of Travel Agencies for the midlands and Sahel regions.

In a statement to Tunis Afrique Presse (TAP) news agency, the Official said that contacts with activists of Civil Society Associations were established in several countries to attract tourists, who will show solidarity with the Tunisian people in their revolt against dictatorship.

Besides, he spoke of contribution of Tunisian elites abroad in the promotion of Tunisia destination.

Asked by the TAP agency regional correspondent in Sousse, the sector's professionals were unanimous in underscoring the positive impact of the Revolution on the tourist sector.

Mr. Hichem Edris, Secretary-General of the Sousse-based regional hotel federation, underlined that the January 14 Revolution generated huge sympathy in all world countries, adding that this capital of esteem vowed to the country will surely have a positive impact on the Tunisian destination.

It is to be reminded that 400 foreign tourists chose to stay in El Kantaoui resort area and were able to follow the various developments of the Tunisian People's Revolution.

« I Love Tunisia », a large campaign on the Internet

TUNIS, Feb. 14, 2011 (TAP) - A large charm campaign entitled « I Love Tunisia » has been launched on Monday by the Ministry of Trade and Tourism.

This campaign, held one month after the Tunisian revolution, aims to incite tourists to visit a free and democratic Tunisia and back the revival of tourist trade.

The aim of the new campaigning logo « I Love Tunisia » is to create a mass buzz on the Internet through the use of social networks like Facebook and Twitter.

After France and Great Britain, Germany decides to ease restrictions on travel to Tunisia

TUNIS, Feb. 13, 2011 (TAP) - Germany has decided to ease travel restrictions for Germans wishing to visit Tunisia, said Saturday in Tunis German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle.

The German FM also said the German Government decided on Friday to change the information and advice to travellers to Tunisia "towards more stabilisation."

These information and advice, he added, involve the cities of Tunis and coastal tourist areas, including Djerba."

It should be recalled that France had announced, on Saturday, lifting of restrictions on travel to Tunisian coastal cities and Djerba island. Great Britain had taken the same decision last week.

Switzerland lifts restrictions on some Tunisian destinations

GENEVA, Feb. 15, 2011 (TAP) - Switzerland lifted travel restrictions on some destinations in Tunisia, including capital city Tunis, as well as seaside resorts, the Swiss Foreign Ministry's website reported on Tuesday.

For its part, Swiss tour-operator Kuoni also announced,

on Tuesday, that it resumes travel to Tunisia as a result of the Swiss government's change of advice to travelling nationals.

The Swiss tour-operator suggests the date of February 26, 2011, as the return to normal flights to the island of Djerba, Tunis and the region of Hammamet.

"Travel to Djerba and seaside resorts, as well as to Tunis, are not inadvisable any longer against," the group underlines in a communiqué.

Call to safeguard archeological heritage

TUNIS, Jan. 19, 2011 (TAP) - The Tunisian Association for the Protection of Museums and Archeological Sites, "Tourath ," has issued a call to all citizens to protect

monuments, museums and archeological sites against looting and destruction.

"Tourath" points out that the heritage constitutes one of the country's main wealths and contributes to the development of cultural tourism and income-sources creation.

The Association calls for joining efforts to boost the country's economic and cultural development and restore Tunisia's vocation as a privileged tourist destination.

Culture Minister: "More than 130 stolen archaeological pieces retrieved"

TUNIS, Feb. 15, 2011 (TAP) - "More than 130 stolen archaeological pieces have been retrieved," Culture Minister Ezzeddine Bach Chaouch said, in an interview with Tunis Afrique Presse (TAP) News Agency.

Some of these pieces, the minister specified, had served to decorate capitals, columns and edges of swimming pool in luxurious residences in Soukra, Sidi Bou Said and Hammamet.

These items are for the time being under the protection of the national Army and the interior security forces, pending their transfer under appropriate conditions, for the sake of preserving them from any damage, he added.

In this connection, he reminded that safeguarding archaeological sites and retrieving their looted treasures are among the Interim Government's priorities.

"The required emergency measures have been taken to this effect," he said, to protect the archaeological sites which were illegally occupied by some people related to the former regime.

The Culture Ministry is closely co-ordinating its actions with the interior ministry and the national Army. It also called on the citizens to let the competent authorities know of any confiscation or looting of the national archaeological sites, as was recently the case in the Zama archaeological site, in the Siliana region, where thieves were arrested thanks to the local people's assistance.

Tunisian Publishers Union supports people's Revolution

TUNIS, Jan. 22, 2011 (TAP) - The Tunisian Publishers Union expressed its support for the people's Revolution reminding that Union had refused the hideous practices of the former regime and preserved its independence despite the pressure exerted on some of its members.

The union commends in a statement released on Saturday the gains of the people's Revolution consisting of the consecration of freedoms, release of prisoners of opinion and the will to prosecute anyone involved in corruption and embezzlement.

It reiterates its condemnation of practices of seizure of publications, terror and censorship suffered by several publishers.

The union expresses its commitment to the principles of the Republic and the constants of the civil society.

It demands the annulment of all laws and provisions restricting freedom of opinion and creation, particularly the Press Code.

It also recommends co-ordination between associations, organisations and Unions operating in the cultural field to develop a cultural programme that meets the legitimate aspirations of the people.

The Union also welcomes the support brought by the Maghreb Union of Publishers, the Arab Publishers Union, the International Publishers Union and the International League of Independent Publishers.