



TUNISIA NEWSLETTER

June 2011

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TUNISIA & JAPAN

Foreign Minister receives delegation of Japanese NEC Corporation

June 17, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - Foreign Affairs Minister Mohamed Mouldi Kéfi received, on Thursday in Tunis, a Japanese delegation led by Mr. Yukihiro Araki, Director General of NEC Corporation's "Tunis Project" office and including representatives of Japanese economic companies and institutions on their visit to Tunisia to take part in the "Tunisia Investment Forum," on June 16-17.

During the meeting, the Minister reiterated, on behalf of the Government and people of Tunisia, compassion and solidarity with the Japanese people after the earthquake and tsunami that hit Japan.

Mr. Kéfi also praised the outcome of his recent visit in May to Tokyo, reminding of his talks with the Japanese officials on ways to strengthen the relations of friendship and fruitful co-operation in different fields between the two countries.

The Minister highlighted, in this context, Tunisia's will to consolidate partnership with Japan, inviting the Japanese companies to come to Tunisia "because investing in Tunisia now means investing in democracy," he said.

Mr. Araki expressed his country's will to bring support to the Tunisian Revolution, saying that Japan is ready to make new investments in Tunisia, particularly in infrastructure.

JICA sends elections expert to Tunisia

June 21, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - "Political Funding in the Framework of Elections" was the topic of a lecture given Tuesday in Tunis by Director of the Japanese Centre for Political Studies Prof. Rei Shiratori.

The lecture was given at a meeting organised by the High Independent Authority for Elections, jointly with the Japanese International Co-operation Agency (JICA).

The lecturer laid emphasis on the need to encourage financial assistance, mainly donations granted by citizens to political parties, reckoning that political money is not always the cause of corruption.

He also reviewed the monitoring mechanisms which are essentially laws on funding, the audit system and the information provided by parties in their official reports and documents about their financial transactions.

He said that auditing of money collected by political parties does not always lead to the expected results.

He also emphasised the role of the media in investigating political money and seeking the truth on corruption files.

It should be noted that the draft decree-law governing political parties in Tunisia, which is under examination by the High Independent Authority for Elections, provides for publishing in newspapers the reports on the audit of political parties' accounts.

This decree-law also sets a ceiling for donations and assistance granted by parties and places emphasis on

accountability and the audit conducted by chartered accountants.

AfDB commits 137 million Euros loan for Tunisia-Libya motorway project, also financed by JICA

June 24, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - The African Development Bank (AfDB) approved, during a meeting of its Board of Directors held on June 21, a loan of 137.34 million Euros for Tunisia to finance a motorway project linking Gabes to Ras Jedir.

The loan was granted to the "société Tunisie Autoroutes" (Tunisia Highways Company).

The overall project involves the construction of 195 km road 2x2 between Gabes and Ras Jedir (Tunisian-Libyan border), said a statement of AfDB.

The project is also financed by the Japan International Co-operation Agency (JICA) with a loan amounting to 136.47 million Euros and the "Tunisie Autoroutes" to 180.97 million Euros.

The aim of the project is to reduce regional disparities and ensure better accessibility between the North, South and East of the country.

It will also allow to construct on the Tunisian territory an essential link of the Trans-Maghreb motorway, thus contributing to the regional economic integration of Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) countries.

Regarding employment, the construction of this motorway would help create nearly 2,160 direct jobs (2,000 in the phase of construction and 160 during the operation), in addition to indirect jobs.

The construction of the motorway link will allow in the short term to create 30,000 jobs only in the tourist sector, the statement added.

POLITICS

Decree on distribution of constituencies and setting up of commission to rule on ineligibility adopted

June 1, 2011 BARDO (TAP) - The High Authority for the Achievement of the Revolution Objectives, Political Reform and Transition to Democracy held a meeting on Tuesday and adopted the decree on distribution of constituencies and seats for the next constituent assembly's election.

The assembly will have 218 seats, including 19 for expatriates, and the constituencies number 33, including 6 abroad. Besides two commissions were set up: the first will be tasked with drafting a new republican pact and the second will be in charge of listing ineligibile candidates.

Some members of the Authority Council called for the participation of the Tunisian community abroad, including the expatriates in North and South America, Australia and Japan, whose number do not exceed 29 000. They urged, in this regard, not to adopt the rule of one seat for 60 000 people provided for in the Government decree on elections and suggested to include Tunisian expatriates in these regions of the world in constituencies in Europe.

Some other members stressed the need to inquire into the situation of expatriates in Libya who have not yet returned home. The latter are estimated, according to statistics, at 80 000.

Assignment, line-up and structure of Regional Independent Authorities for Elections

June 2, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - The High Independent Authority for the Elections announced, in a communiqué released on Wednesday, fixing of line-up, structure and assignment of the Regional Authorities for Elections.

This decision was taken in accordance with the provisions of Article 5 (last Paragraph) of the Decree-Law 27 of April 18, 2011.

The line-up and structure of these Regional Authorities will be as follows :

- I - *Regional Independent Authority for Elections in Electoral Constituency:*

1- The Regional Authority is called "Regional Independent Authority for Elections in the Electoral Constituency."

It is tasked with organising the elections of the National Constituent Assembly as part of the relevant constituency, under the umbrella of the central authority.

2- The Regional Independent Authority for Elections in the Electoral Constituency works, under the umbrella of the Central Authority, to guarantee democratic, pluralist and transparent elections.

3- The requirements to become member of the Regional Authority are:

- Be a voter
- Have qualification, neutrality, independence and probity
- full-time availability for the task within the Regional Independent Authority for Elections
- Having not held a position of responsibility within the RCD in the last ten years and having not called the ousted president to bid for the 2014 Presidential election.

4- The Regional Independent Authority for Elections has 14 members to be selected by the Central Authority, in accordance with the afore-mentioned provisions. They include: a lawyer, a judge, a notary, a bailiff, informatics expert and eight members of civil society organisations.

5- A Chairman and a Secretary-General appointed by the Central Authority co-ordinate works of the Regional Authority.

6- If the conditions provided for by articles 6 and 10 of the decree-law n°27 are not met for the above-mentioned candidates in their professional capacities, the High Authority will undertake to check the impediment and propose candidates in apparent specialities by taking into account the principle of parity.

7 - Regional Authorities accomplish tasks assigned to them by the Central Authority to supervise, monitor and control different operations of the electoral process with the limit of the Electoral Constituency. The Regional Authorities accomplish the legal tasks assigned to them and which are provided for by the decree-law n°35 of the year 2011.

In the exercise of their powers, Regional Authorities use administrative and technical means as well as leaflets exclusively made available to them by Central Authority.

Regional Authorities supervise, under the umbrella of Central Authority, the administrative and technical mechanism made available to them by the latter.

8- The Regional Independent Authority for Election proposes Local Authorities at the levels of delegations to be appointed by Central Authority.

9- The Regional Independent Authority for Elections meets when convened by its Chairman or one third of its members.

II- Structure of Regional and Local Independent Authorities for Elections:

- Unit for establishment of material means
- Unit for monitoring the process of registration and drawing up the voter rolls.
- Legal unit
- Training unit
- Information unit
- Unit for monitoring election campaign
- Unit for establishment of regional and local vote counting offices.

III- Assignments of Regional Independent Authorities for Elections:

- 1- Co-ordination and supervision of registration offices
- 2- Submission, display and access of voter rolls.
- 3- Removing names from voter rolls
- 4- Receiving applications for registration after the call for elections in accordance with legal deadlines
- 5- Receiving and examining requests on disputes related to voter rolls
- 6- Receiving lists of running candidates and delivery of the provisional receipt
- 7- Delivering the final receipt of lists of candidates.
- 8- Accepting and notifying withdrawal of candidatures
- 9- receiving and co-ordinating information on electoral meetings
- 10- Ensuring that electoral posting conditions are respected
- 11- Ensuring compliance between ballot papers and number of voters
- 12 -The Regional Authorities will fulfill different tasks and prerogatives assigned to them by Central Authority.

Registration of application for accreditation of national and international controllers and observers starts

TUNIS (TAP) - The upcoming election of the Constituent Assembly will take place "under exclusive control of Tunisians and in the presence of Tunisian and international observers," said on Thursday, Mr. Ghazi Ghrairi, official Spokesman for the High Authority for Achievement of Revolution Objectives.

The electoral process, governed by the decree-law, will break with previous modes of organisation and will be beyond the executive branch," said Mr. Ghrairi at an

international symposium on "Role of International Observers for Transparent Elections," organised by the Center for Mediterranean and International Studies (CEMI), in association with the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Foundation.

A call for application for accreditation of national and international controllers and observers was launched by the High Independent Authority for Elections which will supervise all the electoral process.

Observers will be recruited by the Authority among the proposed candidates, notably associations interested in citizenship and elections. Candidates must have the required expertise or belong to organisations that have already undergone this experience, specified Mr. Ghrairi, citing the electoral provisions stated by the decree-law.

There is no question of an "an untimely recruitment or an international clientelism," he said, adding that a large number of Tunisian and foreign candidates meeting well-defined criteria have asked to participate in the election monitoring process.

Observation, which will involve both large cities where political stakes are more important and small constituencies, will be made according to a fair distribution of observers on the entire national territory.

The six electoral constituencies abroad which will help elect the 19 representatives of one million Tunisian expatriates will have a role to play in the process of monitoring and observation.

Observation of election is in no case "interference" or violation of the sovereignty of the country, Mr. Chafik Saied Honorary Dean of the Faculty of Law and Political Sciences of Tunis believes.

According to experts, Tunisians are able to conduct elections that comply with international standards, saying that the presence of international observers will testify to the success of the elections, the political climate and respect for procedures of the electoral process, in line with a pre-determined code of conduct.

The participation of the international community will also help bolster the credibility of an important stage in the process of democratic transition in which election is a key component.

This view is shared by international expert José Antonio De Gabriel who had taken part in over thirty observation missions across the world.

He said that Tunisia has the right to "require a quality observation."

Constituent Assembly's election set for October 23 (Interim PM)

June 8 , 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - The date of the National Constituent Assembly (NCA)'s election was set for next October 23, Interim Prime Minister Béji Caïd Essebsi announced.

He pledged to work to ensure success of democratic transition and organise free and transparent elections, on the basis of a consensus between all political parties, the Government and the civil society.

Speaking at a meeting held on Wednesday in Tunis, Mr. Caïd Essebsi recalled that the Interim Government had

initially chosen July 24 as the date of these election, a date that is according to the High Independent Authority for Elections, can not be complied with, given the time constraints and material, technical and logistic conditions needed to hold free and transparent elections, proposing next October 16 instead.

The election date is not sacred, he said, adding that the most important thing is to reach a consensus around this event, provide conditions for their success and establish a climate of security and stability in the country.

In this regard, Mr. Béji Caïd Essebsi called on political parties and the national media to support the Interim Government's efforts in this difficult phase in the history of Tunisia. He also called on them to contribute to deepen collective awareness and guidance of the public opinion, particularly facing the continuation of strikes and protests and their negative impact on the national economy.

He also spoke about the difficult security conditions the country is living through, due to the situation in border regions and the events in the town of Metlaoui because of tribal conflicts.

Mr. Caïd Essebsi paid tribute to the interior security forces and the National Army for their efforts to restore security, defend the homeland and protect the citizens.

Regarding the situation on the Tunisian-Libyan border, the Interim Prime Minister recalled that Tunisia has so far hosted 471,000 refugees of all nationalities coming from Libya, praising the hospitality of citizens from the border regions.

Mr. Essebsi voiced satisfaction at Tunisia's success in laying the foundations of a democratic system, thanks to the maturity of its people and the role of women in public life.

He stressed the Government's keenness to establish the principle of parity in the National Constituent Assembly which, he described, as a first in the world.

Mr. Caïd Essebsi asserted that the Caretaker Government has endeavoured to comply with the previous government's decisions and commitments, notably regarding the creation of three independent commissions.

He pointed out, in this connection, that the Fact-Finding Commission on Corruption and Embezzlement has so far looked into 7,700 files, and the Fact-Finding Commission on Abuses has already received 1,500 complaints.

He went on reminding that the Political Reform Commission, renamed the High Authority for the Achievement of Revolution Objectives, Political Reform and Democratic Transition, has made important decisions, notably those pertaining to the Electoral Code and devising a roadmap for the next political stage which the Government is seeing to implement in totally consensual legitimacy.

The events which have followed the Revolution, the Prime Minister recalled, have seriously impacted the national economy, tourism and foreign investment, more particularly and weighed heavily on the budget of the State which is striving to carry on subsidising basic consumer goods and fuel.

He highlighted that the Government is compelled, in the meantime, take up a number of other key challenges, such as: wage increases, compensations to be offered to

281 enterprises affected by the crisis and hiring of 700,000 jobless people".

These objectives could not be achieved overnight. They require time, patience and joining of efforts," he explained.

In another connection, Mr. Caïd Essebsi pointed out that his recent participation in the Deauville G8 Summit had provided the opportunity to reassert the Caretaker Government's determination to ensure success of the democratic process and to establish a civil state, especially as the Tunisian Revolution was the spark for the whole region and such a fresh breath that the world has coined the phrase of "Arab Spring."

The Caretaker Prime Minister concluded by urging the attending representatives of political parties and civil society, the media and national figures, to support the Government's efforts, to trust it, not to doubt its intentions and go beyond limited personal considerations, to contribute to the achievement of hoped-for objectives, with the respect of the opposite view and in the service of the nation's higher interest.

Political parties overwhelmingly endorse date of Constituent Assembly's election

TUNIS (TAP) - Political parties have overwhelmingly approved of the date of October 23, 2011 for the election of the National Constituent Assembly.

They told TAP, by telephone, that the issue had been submitted to consultations among all the involved sides, namely the Government, political parties and national authorities and organisations.

Secretary General of the Democratic Patriots Movement Chokri Belaid said the new date complied with what had been decided by the Independent High Authority for the Elections which had not taken into consideration, when setting the previous date, the parties' political calendars but only the technical and logistic aspects of holding transparent and credible elections.

He underlined that the new date would provide all Tunisians with the opportunity to become acquainted with the platforms of the different parties.

Mr. Mouldi Sahem, executive committee member of the Progressive Democratic Party (PDP), expressed his party's satisfaction at the date of October 23, "a date which it (PDP) suggested previously."

Mr. Othman Belhaj, Secretary General of the Tunisian Baath Party, views the date as the most appropriate, reminding that "the Independent High Authority for the Elections has advocated that it is not possible to hold elections that meet standards before October 16."

Ennahdha Movement agrees with the date, as voiced by its official spokesman Noureddine B'hiri who said that "this choice which consecrates the consensual orientation of different trends is a political decision par excellence."

He added that the Independent High Authority for the Elections is not entitled to take the decision on its own, reminding that Ennahdha was originally opposed to any postponement of the elections, but then joined the national consensus and is now committed to an irrevocable date.

"Al Majd" party chairman Abdelwaheb el Hani describes as "positive" the Caretaker Prime Minister's commitment on a final date, before the High Independent Authority for the Elections, the political parties and public opinion. The important thing, he said, is to organise transparent and credible elections.

He pointed out the importance of consensus in this transitional stage, calling for the creation of a mechanism to prepare the 2012 draft State budget and the start of academic year.

Besides, Spokesman for the Tunisian Workers' Communist Party (POCT) Hamma Hammami asserted that his party adheres to the date of October 23, explaining that what matters to POCT is not the elections' organisation but building the country's democracy on solid foundations.

He pointed out that what is now required from the caretaker government is to guarantee all the appropriate conditions for the High Independent Authority for the Elections to be able to comply with its calendar regarding this political event and carry out the urgent political reforms, notably regarding freedom of press as the guarantor for free and credible elections.

For his part, Congress Party for the Republic chairman Moncef Marzouki expressed disappointment as to the postponement of the elections, adding that the caretaker premier had not respected the principle of consultation and that "there are no guarantees for compliance with this new date."

Importance of national media's contribution to success of historic transition in Tunisia

June 9, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - Interim President Foued Mebazaa received, on Thursday in Carthage, Chairman of the National Authority for Information and Communication Reform (NAICR) Kamel Laabidi who briefed him on progress of the sector's reform since the creation of this authority, last March.

Mr. Mebazaa emphasised the importance of national media's contribution to the success of the historic transition in Tunisia, saying that no democratic experience can succeed without a free, honest and objective media.

He reasserted the will to support the reform process of the information and communication sector and readiness to take the required steps to encourage freedom of the press and practice of the profession, in accordance with relevant international standards.

Chairman of High Authority for Achievement of Revolution Objectives lectures on election problems

June 13, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - The upcoming missions of the High Authority for Achievement of Revolution Objectives, Political Reform and Political Transition consist in drafting a law on political parties and their fund raising, preparing a press code and a piece of legislation on associations, said Mr. Iyadh Ben Achour, the Authority's Chairman.

Mr. Ben Achour, who was lecturing on Sunday in Marsa on "Election Problems in the Democratisation Process,"

reviewed the major stages preceding the adoption of the Election Act.

Among the problems faced, he mentioned the controversy over Article 15. Indeed, he said, banning candidacy for the Constituent Assembly's elections does not apply to former members of the dissolved RCD, as originally understood, but to people who had held decision-making positions within that party.

The other major stumbling block was the postponement of the Constituent Assembly's elections, initially scheduled for July 24, 2011 and then deferred to October 23 for material and logistic reasons.

Actually, he specified, this process requires training of 400,000 agents to be assigned to the 8,000 polling stations. Mr. Ben Achour voiced confidence in the intelligence of the Tunisian people who managed to emancipate the country from exclusion and corruption, to show the needed maturity and patience in order to achieve the country's well-being after the holding of free elections, "the first to be experienced by the country," he concluded.

Tunisia should count on retrieving its money from abroad rather than get indebted (Mr. Ziegler)

TUNIS (TAP) - "Tunisia, which has carried out an unprecedented Revolution against dictatorship, should count on retrieving its money which was transferred to foreign countries, rather than getting indebted to ensure its democratic transition," member of the UN Human Rights Council's Advisory Committee Jean Ziegler said.

Taking the floor at the 14th Summer University organised in Tunis under the theme: "Which Social Policy for a Country in a Democratic Transition?: Tunisia's Case," Mr. Ziegler pointed out that "the Tunisian Revolution has inspired the Arab peoples," adding that "we owe this Arab Spring to the Tunisian martyrs' sacrifice."

Speaking about the social policy that ought to be adopted by the country, he argued that the transition plan prepared by the Tunisian economists is "interesting" but seems confronted with the challenge of funding.

To Mr. Ziegler, indebtedness could complicate the task of the government which is endeavouring to redress an economy already in difficulty, hence the need to audit the foreign debt in order to identify "the odious debt" which did not serve the country and was transferred to the foreign bank accounts of the deposed president and his clique.

That money will suffice, according to Mr. Ziegler, to relaunch the Tunisian economy and ensure the required democratic transition in all security, without the need of resorting to the world market whose interest rates are very high.

He explained that the Caretaker Government should keep pressurising the countries which house these personal accounts of the former regime members, to return the stolen money to the Tunisian people.

"Hope resides in the moral strength of the Tunisian Revolution which succeeded to dislodge dictatorship," Mr. Jean Ziegler concluded.

UN Women Executive Director express solidarity with the Tunisian people and pay tribute to Tunisian women

Friday June 17 TUNIS (TAP) – "I am here to express solidarity with the Tunisian people, but also to support Tunisian women both in cities and inland, at the political, economic and social levels and help them fully enjoy their rights," said on Friday, UN Women Executive Director Mrs. Michelle Bachelet.

Addressing a group of journalists, Mrs. Bachelet paid tribute to Tunisian women for their precious contribution to the January 14 Revolution, saying it is essential to "reward them for their remarkable efforts and enhance their status in the Constitution."

She stressed, in the context, the urgent need to promote women's participation in political life, particularly during the upcoming elections, through strengthening their leadership and their initiation to decision-making.

Mrs. Bachelet also emphasised the UN Women's readiness to bring technical and financial assistance to Tunisian women to offer them the opportunity to create projects and meet their family needs, stressing the UN's will to work alongside Tunisia's civil society to achieve this objective.

Mrs. Michelle Bachelet will take part, on Friday afternoon, in the symposium held by the Tunisian Association of Women Democrats (ATFD) under the topic: "Women and Democratic Transition."

File under preparation to request extradition of deposed President

Friday June 18, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - The Military Court is examining charges lodged against deposed President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali and former Interior Minister Rafik Belhaj Kacem on the murder of innocent people during the Freedom and Dignity Revolution.

It is also looking into the events that took place in the country during the period spanning December 17 and January 14, and the killing and injury of many people.

This was pointed out by Colonel-Major Marouane Bouguerra, Military Justice Director-General and representative of the National Defence Ministry, at the regular meeting of the Prime Ministry's communication cell, on Friday, with the media representatives.

He added that the military investigating judge issued an arrest warrant against the ousted President and was preparing the file to require from Saudi Arabia to extradite him. This request will be made in compliance with the Arab Judiciary Co-operation Convention, signed in 1983 in Riyadh.

Besides, Colonel-Major Bouguerra explained that 182 cases recorded during the Revolution were referred to three permanent military courts in Tunis, Sfax and Kef; these cases had been already looked into by the courts of first instance. One hundred and thirty of these cases were recorded in the Greater Tunis, the North and Sahel, 51 others in the Centre, South and South-East governorates and only one in the mid-west, the latter being known as the "Tala and Kasserine case."

Regarding the issue of snipers during the Revolution, the National Defence Ministry's representative specified that

the military justice structures have been carrying out the inquest for a month now, asserting that "the military justice system will inform Tunisians about findings of the inquiry, whether to confirm or infirm the existence of these people and to reveal the murder circumstances and determine the responsibilities.

For his part, Colonel-Major Mokhtar Ben Nasr, National Defence Ministry's representative, rejected the recently spread rumours about France's intention to establish a military base in the Gafsa region. He explained, in this regard, that the issue has to do with the signing by the National Defence Ministry, last May 17, of a partnership agreement with the French Interior Ministry to create a military vocational training centre in that region, and by virtue of which the French side would grant Tunisia 2 billion dinars to equip the centre.

This same accord provides that Tunisia would invest 4 million dinars in construction and road fitting out.

He added that the centre, which is the 13th in Tunisia, would generate 250 new vocational training posts and will be operational as of September 2013. These centres provide 2,500 training opportunities.

The National Defence Ministry's representative said that the experience of Tunisian-French partnership in matters of military vocational training is not the first of the kind, reminding that similar agreements had been signed in the past between Tunisia and Italy, with Germany and France.

These agreements, he added, helped create several such training centres in Béja, Foudouk Jedid, Oued Ellil, Kharrouba, Bizerte and Gabès.

Regarding the outcome of the visit paid to Tunisia by United Nations Higher Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres, Colonel Major Mokhtar Ben Nasr said the UN official pledged to speed up repatriation of the refugees whose period of stay in the southern camps lasted for too long, and to ensure that Tunisia be only a transit point.

He said that reinforcement of the Army forces' presence in the South of the country is part of a military strategy bent on strengthening control of the Tunisian southern borders. He reiterated, in this regard, the National Army's total capacity to protect the country against any external danger, further elaborating: "our forces do not need assistance from anybody; they are able to face up to any danger that threatens the country. There is no room for NATO forces in Tunisia."

On the action taken by the national committee tasked with seizing property of family of the ousted President and his wife, and the movable and real estate property of persons that are on the two lists of 114 and 112, announced by the Interim Government last March, Chairman of the committee Mohamed Adel Ben Ismail said that so far 600 land titles were listed, in addition to companies, securities, financial assets and vehicles, worth a total of 3,000 million dinars.

He also said that these companies which provide a large number of jobs are now a national gain that should be preserved, given the volume of their economic activities and their direct impact on the existence of other firms, all the more so that some of them are part of "holdings."

Mr. Ben Ismail said that some of these companies are facing financial difficulties as a result of the bad reputation they have earned because of their former owners.

He stressed, in this context, the committee's keenness to join optimum conditions for the good operation of these enterprises and bring assistance to them to iron out the hardships they are facing, in order to preserve the jobs they offer and safeguard the financial resources of the national economy, mentioning that the smallest capital of one of these companies stands at 17 million dinars.

The Chairman of the committee said that in view of the important size of the files submitted to it and the volume of property owned by companies subject to complaints, "we can say that the committee is examining one quarter of the volume of the national economy."

He added that some 300 firms belonging to the family of the ousted President and his wife have already been seized by the State.

He said, in conclusion, that several other names might be added to the two pre-mentioned lists and seizure operations might include property belonging to them, underlining that "seizure will be made only on the solid grounds of legal records and evidence."

Registration on electoral rolls starts next July 11

June 20, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - The High Independent Authority for the Elections (HIAE)'s Central Council set the dates for the election of the National Constituent Assembly (NCA). Registration on electoral lists is due to start next July 11 and be closed on October 23, by the vote casting and the announcement of results.

In a communiqué made public on Saturday by HIAE, following its Friday's meeting with attendance of all its members, the Authority points out that the authorities and the public will later be informed of the details.

HIAE got acquainted with the furtherance of works of the commission tasked with selecting candidacies to local authorities and whose results will be announced in the course of next week.

Regarding the participation of the Tunisian community abroad in the October 23 elections, HIAE looked into the work achieved by the concerned commission and the outcome of the working sessions held with the Foreign Ministry's cadres.

The Authority also decided about the make-up of local authorities abroad and criteria for selecting their members and their number in the six electoral constituencies scheduled at this level.

Besides, the Authority was briefed about preparations for the sensitisation campaign and the necessary conditions to guarantee security and transparency of the elections.

Ousted President Ben Ali sentenced in absentia to 35 years in prison

June 21, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - Ousted President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali and his wife Leila Trabelsi were sentenced in absentia to 35 years in prison by the Court of First Instance of Tunis.

They were each found guilty of theft and unlawful possession of cash and jewellery.

The judge also ruled Ben Ali and his wife would have to pay fines totalling 91 million Tunisian dinars in the case n° 23004 related to the Palace of Sidi Dhrif.

He said the verdict on the second case n°23005 related to illegal possession of drugs and weapons found at Carthage Palace was postponed for June 30 at the request of the defence.

Number of cases against ousted president rises to 113

June 22,2011 KASBAH (TAP)- The number of lawsuits against the ousted president and his wife rose till Wednesday to 113 and investigations into three of these cases were initiated during the period ranging between June 15 and 17, said Mr. Kadhem Zine El Abidine, representative of the Justice Ministry.

During a regular meeting with the Prime Ministry's Communication Cell, held late on Wednesday morning in Tunis, between the representatives of several Ministries and the media, Mr. Kadhem Zine El Abidine said that the first of these three last lawsuits against the ousted president and his wife related to illegal appropriation of public funds of the 26/26 National Solidarity Fund.

The second case against the ousted president, his wife and his brother-in-law Moncef Trabelsi and a number of ministers and former officials relates to illegal granting to the maritime transport company "Transmed" belonging to Moncef Trabelsi, of contracts for the transportation of oil products of the "STIR" company, a privilege that helped the owner of the "Transmed" company win huge sums of money thanks to these unfair practices.

The third case against Leila Ben Ali, her brother Belhassen Trabelsi and all those who will be named in the investigations conducted to this end relates to breach of trust, fraud and theft committed against a Tunisian businessman residing abroad who represents the interest of an Arab investment group specialised in tourism.

The facts are that the businessman was victim of fraudulent tactics and fraud, as Leila Ben Ali and her brother promised to help him achieve a tourist resort in Hergla, an unfulfilled promise that cost 5 million euros (nearly 10 million dinars).

The representative of the Justice Ministry said the State has used all legal means to retrieve the property robbed by the ousted President and his family, saying that examining judges have issued letters rogatory to their counterparts in 25 countries which might host property belonging to Ben Ali and his wife, including France, Spain, Argentina, Greece, Cyprus and Democratic Republic of Congo.

Mr. Kadhem Zine el Abidine also stressed the complementarity between these efforts and those made by the national committee for recovery of funds placed abroad coming under the Central Bank of Tunisia, the committee of financial analyses and the Tunisian Association of Financial Transparency.

Mr. Zine El Abidine said that the sentence by absentia against deposed President and his wife requires his extradition to Tunisia by Saudi Arabia.

He denied in this regard that the verdict issued by the court which looked into the case of the Sidi Dhrif Palace was swift.

He added that the sentence in absentia against the defendant in the Criminal Code requires the pronouncement of the verdict during the same day of the trial.

He also stressed that the ousted President's summons to the trial was made in an unquestionable and lawful manner by "the Tunisian judiciary through the a Saudi judge and diplomatic channels, 30 days before the start of the trial, in accordance with the law put into effect in this field."

"Ennahdha" boycotts HAARO's session

June 23, 2011 BARDO (TAP) - Representatives of "Ennahdha" Movement boycotted the session of the High Authority for the Achievement of the Revolution Objectives, Political Reform and Democratic Transition (HAARO) held on Wednesday in Tunis.

The session was devoted to reviewing the draft decree-law on the organisation of political parties.

"Boycotting the session works was the result of the flagrant irregularities that characterised, at all levels, actions of the Authority which did not cling to its objectives and mission," members of "Ennahdha" Movement argued.

"Ennahdha" representative Sahbi Atig told Tunis Afrique Presse (TAP) news agency that "the Movement will rethink its stand vis-à-vis the Authority and submit this to the party's main structures to have a final say on whether to carry on working with the Authority or suspend this participation."

Alluding to the parties supporting the discussion of the draft decree-law on political parties' formation, "Ennahdha" spokesperson Nouredine Bhiri pointed out that "there is a minority within the Authority, lacking popular grassroots, which is trying to dictate its views on the Authority's agenda."

As regards the Republican Pact, Mr. Bhiri accused some political sides, represented within the Authority, to plead the cause of normalising relations with Israel, reasserting that "Ennahdha" rejects this move and considers that this refusal of normalisation is a fundamental matter that could be neither a subject of controversy or discussion.

For his part, Mr. Samir Bettaieb, for the "Ettajdid" Movement, told TAP that "Ennahdha" has adopted an anti-democratic attitude, pointing out that "Ennahdha" members' boycott of the meeting had been announced by the movement's chief Rached Ghannouchi two weeks ago in the media.

He added that discussing the decree-law pertaining to the creation of political parties is a fundamental issue that will undoubtedly organise future political life, stressing that "Ettajdid" is firmly opposed to any form of normalisation with the Zionist state.

Parties' financing sources was one of the main issues discussed by the Authority during Wednesday's meeting, and it was a heated debate.

In this regard, Mr. Imed Hidouri, representing the Sidi Bouzid governorate, accused the Progressive Democratic Party (PDP) and "Ennahdha" Movement of exploiting

political funds in the service of mobilising the largest number of members in the regions.

The two parties vigorously protested at this accusation, which compelled High Authority Chairman Yadh Ben Achour to demand that the representative of the Sidi Bouzid governorate apologise for these allegations.

"Our action in the regions is part of our attempt to introduce our party's programme and basic objectives" to the people, PDP representative Mongi Ellouze told TAP, adding that "our stand on this issue political money has been made clear on several occasions in the past."

As to the decree-act pertaining to the organisation of political parties, several attendees called for the review of the aforementioned decree-law which provides that all those who wish to form a political party address an application letter to the Prime Minister, reminding in this context, that, under normal circumstances, such a prerogative is granted to the Judicial rather than to the Executive.

Some of the participants claimed that the membership dues, presently set at 240 dinars, be raised.

It is to be reminded that the High Authority for the Achievement of the Revolution Objectives is to hold, on Thursday (June 23, 2011), a session to be devoted to the Republican Pact.

On this occasion, the Authority is also to report on the persons who had assumed responsibilities within the disbanded Constitutional Democratic Rally (RCD) or advocated that the deposed president run for the 2014 presidential election.

Tunisia: Eighty six new parties, 122 new publications and 158 new associations since January 14

June 24, 2011 TUNIS (TAP)- Eighty six new parties have been created in Tunisia since January 14, raising to 94 the total number of parties, regardless of the disbanded Constitutional Democratic Rally.

During the regular meeting of the Communication Cell of the Prime Ministry with the media held on Friday in Tunis, the representative of the Interior Ministry Néji Zaïri also said that 31 new applications for party creation are under examination by the Ministry and that 118 applications have been rejected.

Reasons behind this refusal, he specified, are in particular non-conformity to the provisions of Article 3 of the law on parties which prohibits that parties be based, at the level of principles and objectives, on religion, language, sex or region.

He also pointed to non-compliance with provisions of Article 6 which reject the similarity of parties, at the level of principles, choices and programmes and non-conformity to provisions of Article 11 related to errors in content and form be it in statement or statutes.

The representative of the Interior Ministry also said that 158 new associations were licensed after the Revolution, raising their number to 9,724 now.

He also said that 122 receipts were delivered for the creation of periodic publications. He added, in this regard, that 104 applications were rejected for non-compliance with legal conditions while 98 other applications were

declined. He also said that out of the 122 weekly publications, 8 belong to 7 parties.

The representative of the National Defence Ministry, Colonel Major Mokhtar Ben Nasr, said that the security situation on the Tunisian-Libyan border is stable after mortars fell on May 19, 2011, adding that the food, health and social situation is good on the borders in general.

He reminded of the visit paid by the United Nations Higher Commissioner of Refugees last week to the south of Tunisia where he inspected the evolution of the situation.

Colonel Major Mokhtar Ben Nasr also announced that the issue of indemnification of Tunisian families is under examination by the Ministry of Social Affairs, particularly for those hosting Libyan families or those having provided homes to Libyans, particularly to pay their electricity and water bills.

He added that as a result of the important current stage, the National Defence Ministry is considering the possibility to reinforce the National Army units by reservists and extend the second conscription session. He said that a regulatory decree was promulgated to this effect.

Withdrawal of Ennahdha will have no impact on works of High Authority, says Mr. Ben Achour

June 25, 2011 TUNIS (TAP)- Chairman of the High Authority for Achievement of Revolution Objectives, Political Reform and Democratic Transition Yadh Ben Achour said the withdrawal of Ennahdha from this authority has no impact on its works.

He said that the leadership of the Movement has decided to "withdraw permanently," even though the authority has not received any formal written document to this effect.

In a statement to the press on the sidelines of his participation in a forum held in Tunis by the association "Political Commitment," Mr. Ben Achour said Ennahdha had previously suspended its activities in the authority and had not expressed openly to the press its intention to withdraw.

Regarding the press statements of Mr. Rached Ghannouchi, President of Ennahdha, Mr. Yadh Ben Achour said: "we respect his opinion but we will continue our mission to achieve the objectives of the revolution, political reform and democratic transition.

Representatives of Ennahdha Movement had withdrawn from the meeting of the High Authority on Wednesday following tough debates and altercations over a set of issues, particularly parties funding, the republican pact and the issue of normalisation with Israel.

Between 14,000 and 18,000 persons to be excluded from National Constituent Assembly's elections

TUNIS (TAP) - Between 14,000 and 18,000 persons of the dissolved Constitutional Democratic Rally (RCD) and persons having called the ousted President to bid for a new presidential term in 2014 and government members of the former regime are to be excluded, as voters or candidates, from the National Constituent Assembly's elections due next October 23, Tunis Afrique Presse (TAP) news agency has learned from an official source of the commission in charge of implementing article 15 of the

decree-law on the election of the National Constituent Assembly.

In a statement to TAP news agency, Mr. Mustapha Tlili, Chairman of the Commission said that the commission strives to identify the responsibilities and establish in consequence the list of the dissolved RCD members concerned by the measure of exclusion.

The commission's objective is not "to extirpate all those who adhered in the RCD and take revenge on those who harmed the people" he asserted, underlining that the judgement is exclusively stemming from the judiciary system, which explains "the secrecy of the commission's work".

He said that the commission is also establishing the list of the persons who had called the ousted president to bid for the new 2014-2019 presidential term.

In this connection, the President of the High Authority for the Achievement of the Revolution Objectives, Political Reform and Democratic Transition will ask, in the coming days, official bodies for the complete list of these persons to put it at the disposal of the High Independent Authority for the Elections.

He asserted that the exclusion of the fallen system's henchmen from the National Constituent Assembly's elections is considered as "a victory for the Tunisian people and their glorious Revolution."

The measure of exclusion regarding the dissolved RCD would concern members of the politburo, the central committee, co-ordination committees and federations, Chairmen of territorial cells, professional federations and cells and RCD civil servants who had played a key role in the mobilisation for the party's benefit, member of the commission Mohamed Ali el Hani pointed out.

The number of RCD officials concerned by the exclusion reached between 7,000 and 9,000, the same number as that of persons who had called the unseated president for a new presidential term in 2014, that is a total ranging between 14,000 and 18,000 persons, he specified.

Recent troubles perpetrated in Tunis and Republican Pact under focus

June 29, 2011 BARDO (TAP) – Wednesday morning's session of the High Authority for Achievement of Revolution Objectives, Political Reform and Democratic Transition was marked by a lengthy debate on the recent events and the acts of violence of last week-end and Tuesday that targeted creators and lawyers.

During the session, which also looked at the draft Republican Pact, participants called on the High Authority to take a clear and firm stand on those events.

In this regard, High Authority member Seghaïer Ouled Ahmed blamed "extremists" for "provocation" and condemned the role of some Arab media and satellite channels in fueling tension.

Mr. Samir Bettaieb from Ettajdid Party said "what happened in Tunisia in recent days is a conspiracy against the country's security that threatens the democratic transition process."

For his part, Mr. Moncef Yaakoubi, representative of the Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT), said that the

danger does not threaten Tunisia's Muslim identity which is "indisputable" and "does not tolerate any overbidding."

He said that the country is confronted to more serious threats that relate to democracy and its effective materialisation, as well as to the country's economic future.

Other Authority members stressed the need to face up to all those who are seeking to undermine Tunisia's religious symbols. In this regard, Mr. Mustapha Ben Abd el Kebir, the Médenine Front representative, denounced all attempts to "attack the sacred symbols" under the pretext of freedom of expression, while Mrs. Awatef Zarrouk, from the Development and Justice Party, pointed out that "freedom of speech and individual liberties are legitimate so long as they are practised responsibly."

The attendees voiced satisfaction at the comprehensive nature of the Republican Pact, a document which deals with almost all principles claimed by most of the country's active strengths.

They also pointed out that the Republican Pact should specify clearly that Tunisia is "a civilian state with positive laws," a country where individual freedoms are protected, which guarantees such fundamental public rights as the right to work, education and health, and where the principles of tolerance and dialogue are consecrated.

Besides, the debaters enquired about the restricting character of the text, stressing the need to reassert more clearly the Republican principles and separation of powers and the guarantee of balance among them.

Additionally, they focused on the issue of refusal of normalisation with the "Zionist entity," calling to discredit any form of contact with that entity.

They called for Tunisia's non-membership to any military alliance or "the presentation of any facility to any military force that plans to make use of its territory."

Lacking consensus and deviating from essential mission of HAARO, reasons behind Ennahdha's pullout

June 27, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - Chairman of "Ennahdha" Movement Rached Ghannouchi said the deviation from the mission assigned to the High Authority for Achievement of Revolution Objectives, Political Reform and Democratic Transition (HAARO), usurpation of the power of elected parliamentary authority and focusing on issues that do not fall under its competence are the reasons that compelled the Movement to pull out definitely from the Authority.

Speaking at a news conference, held on Monday in Tunis with attendance of national, Arab and international media, Mr. Ghannouchi said HAARO's priority for the time being is to prepare for the National Constituent Assembly's election and overcome the legitimacy crisis which has shaken the State institutions, rather than approving laws that stem from the powers of the Constituent Assembly to be elected shortly.

Mr. Samir Dilou, member of the Movement's Executive Board and HAARO member, denied some media reports that the reason behind the Movement's withdrawal from the High Authority had to do with the decree-law on the election and its aspect related to political funding and the

issue of "normalisation" discussed as part of the draft Republican Pact.

He said that the "Ennahdha" is ready to answer questions on its funding resources, just like all the other parties.

He added that the Movement agrees on the fact that the Republican Pact contains general principles, including the issue of normalising relations with Israel, provided that this be done as part of a consensus and without affecting the Arab-Muslim identity.

Answering journalists' questions, Mr. Rached Ghannouchi said the Movement's return to the High Authority is possible "if the latter adopts the principle of consensual rule in its work," underlining that the Movement is not seeking mobilisation of the public opinion for the sake of the party's goals.

Different stages of National Constituent Assembly's election

June 30, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - The Independent High Authority for the Elections established a schedule for the National Constituent Assembly's election which sets the different stage of the electoral process from the voters' registration to polling day, on October 23, 2011.

It is to be reminded that the High Authority is entrusted with the mission of preparing the elections, supervise them and control voting operation, in accordance with provisions of Article 4 of the April 18, 2011 decree-act which provides for the creation of the Authority.

The central bureau of the Independent High Authority for the Elections fixed, by virtue of the provisions of Articles 3 and 6 of the decree-law n°35 of the year 2011, issued on May 10, 2011 pertaining to the election of the Constituent Assembly's members, the date of the start and closing of the registration operation of the Tunisian voters in Tunisia and abroad as follows:

1 -Start of the registration operation:

The voters' registration operation in the registration office starts on July 11, 2011 at 8 am, till August 2, 2011 at 6 pm, with the possibility to decide to extend the registration date and to change of opening time of the stations.

The High Authority is entrusted with determining the places of the registration stations of voters in Tunisia and informing the public, while the Tunisian voters abroad will be registered in the Tunisian embassies and consulates.

2 -Announce the date of posting the lists:

Posting updated voters' lists will start in the territorial constituency they stem from it (municipality, delegation or "Imada" or premises of diplomatic and consular missions) on August 20-26, 2011. Voters' lists will be made public on the same date on the Authority's website.

3 -Announce dates of recourse brought against the lists:

The dates of the opening and closing of applications of opposition on the updated voters' lists are the same as those of the opening and closing dates of posting of electors' lists.

4 -Publishing of the decree of voters' convocation:

The decree for voters' convocation is issued before August 23, 2011.

5 -Period of submission of statements related to candidate lists:

Opening in the regional elections premises of the registers for the reception of candidacy applications to the lists as of September 1, 2011 at 8 am till September 7, 2011 at 6 pm, every day and with no stop.

6- Date of the process of exceptional registration:

Process of exceptional registration starts at each regional office from the end of ordinary registration till October 12, 2011 at 6 pm.

7- Announcement of the list and seats of polling stations:

The High Authority posts at the seats the regional offices, delegations and offices of "Imadas" and municipalities the list and seats of the polling station at a date not exceeding October 15, 2011.

8- Dates of start and end of electoral campaign:

The electoral campaign starts on October 1, 2011 and ends on October 21, 2011.

9- Date of accreditation of observers and representatives of candidates:

The High Authority receives applications for accreditation of observers from July 11, 2011 at 8 am to October 19, 2011 at 6 pm.

Regional offices, each according to the territorial competence to which it belongs, will receive applications for accreditation of representatives of candidates from September 19, 2011 at 8 am to October 19, 2011 at 6 pm.

10- Date of pulling out candidacies:

Each candidate has the right to withdraw his candidacy provided that he deposits it at the regional office to which he belongs at a date not exceeding October 20, 2011 at 6 pm.

11- Running of the election:

The election date for Tunisian voters in Tunisia is scheduled for October 23, 2011.

The Tunisian expatriates are called for voting one day or more before the aforementioned day.

Caretaker PM confers with Ennahdha chairman

June 30, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - Ennahdha Movement's decision to pull out from the High Authority for the Achievement of the Revolution Objectives, Political Reform and Democratic Transition and ways to ensure its return to the Authority were at the centre of the talk that Caretaker Prime Minister Béji Caid Essebsi had, on Thursday in Tunis, with Mr. Rached Ghannouchi, the Movement's chairman.

After the meeting, Mr. Rached Ghannouchi told TAP that he had explained to the Interim PM how the Movement had exhausted all attempts of reform within the High Authority for the Achievement of Revolution Objectives.

He argued that the Authority had deviated from its principal path of serving the election set for next October 23.

This Authority, he added, is concerned with other issues, such as releasing statements on cultural issues or drafting pacts or pieces of legislation which fall under the Constituent Assembly.

The talk focused on general amnesty and ways to promote it by ensuring that justice be done and restoring the rights of all.

Draft republican pact adopted by majority

LE BARDO (TAP) - The draft republican pact was adopted on Thursday by a majority of members of the High Authority for the Achievement of Revolution Objectives, Political Reform and Democratic Transition.

DIPLOMACY

Caretaker PM receives Romania's former PM

June 1, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - Caretaker Prime Minister Béji Caïd Essebsi received Tuesday Romania's former Prime Minister Petre Roman, who is on a visit to Tunisia in his capacity as member of the Club of Madrid.

In a statement to Tunis Afrique Press (TAP) news agency, Mr. Roman said that his meeting with the Prime Minister had been an opportunity to exchange views about experiences of democratic transition periods.

Mr. Petre Roman, who was Prime Minister in the Romanian Interim Government in 1989, just after the fall of the communist regime of Dictator Nicolae Ceaucescu, laid emphasis on the similarities between the two transition periods in Tunisia and Romania.

He said his tenure as Caretaker Prime Minister for six months was marked by many popular protests, social claims and demands to recover rights by Romanian citizens.

A situation, he specified, that is identical to what Tunisia is living through, wishing success to the Tunisian Interim Government in holding the upcoming election of the National Constituent Assembly.

Mr. Petre Roman said that the Club of Madrid, which is an independent organisation bringing together 81 former presidents and prime ministers from 57 different countries, supports Tunisia in its democratic transition, stressing the experience and know-how of this organisation in the management of democratic and political transition processes.

Qatar decides to freeze Ben Ali assets

TUNIS (TAP) - Qatar has issued an order to freeze the funds and assets of the ousted President, his wife and relatives in response to Tunisia's letters rogatory, Justice Ministry delegate Kadhem Zine El Abidine told Tuesday the regular news conference.

He added that Tunisia was expecting a similar decision to be made by Saudi Arabia which has been sheltering ousted President Ben Ali and his family since last January 14, expressing confidence that this brotherly state would respond positively to its request for the freezing of Ben Ali's assets there and his extradition.

As regards the situation on the Tunisian-Libyan borders, Colonel Major Mokhtar Ben Naceur, delegate of the Defence Ministry, said that three shells had fallen last May 28 in a depopulated area south of Dhiba after clashes

between rebels and forces loyal to Gaddafi but denied the news conveyed by some media about the incursion of armed Libyans into Tunisia.

He also said that calm had been restored in the Shucha camp after the recent unrest there, stressing that the Minister had pointed out, at a meeting on Tuesday with Director of UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) Bureau in North Africa, that Tunisia is a provisional camp for the refugees who must be evacuated as soon as possible.

Captain Mongi Kadhi, civil defence delegate, reminded, in turn, of the interventions of civil defence forces on Tunisian-Libyan borders that numbered 8700, an average of 102 interventions daily.

As to Tunisia's attendance of the G8 Summit, Finance Ministry delegate Jamel Belhaj explained that Tunisia had submitted an economic plan requiring 25 billion dollars for the next five years to boost national economy and democratic transition.

Speaking of the strike of customs staff, he affirmed that it is illegal since the Finance Ministry is examining their claims.

Transport and Equipment Ministry representative Moufdi Mseddi spoke, for his part, of the appointment of a chairman and managing director and a deputy director general for carrier Tunisair, saying that their mission consists notably in reducing the economic effects of the crisis the national carrier is living through and endeavouring to increase its competitiveness.

Social Affairs Ministry delegate Kamel Omrane spoke, in turn, of the rising number of strikes that caused the loss of too many working days and stressed the efforts made by the Ministry to find solutions to workers' claims, in collaboration with the Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT).

Italy seizes yacht of ousted President's family

ROME (TAP) - Anchored in the port of the tiny Lampedusa island in Italy, a one-million-Euro yacht belonging to a nephew of ousted President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali has been seized Wednesday by the Italian Financial Police, French AFP news agency reports.

According to a communiqué of the Italian police, the sequestration of the 14-meter-long yacht took place in response to a request by Tunisian judicial authorities "to Italian judges to find and sequester the assets of the ousted President and his relatives, considered as property of the Tunisian people."

"Tunisia asked Italy to freeze the assets of 47 relatives of Ben Ali. Their assets belong to the Tunisian people," Colonel Gavino Putzu of the financial police told AFP news agency.

The yacht, which arrived in Lampedusa after the January 14 riots that ousted President Ben Ali from power, will be returned to the Tunisian people, added the officer. The Atlantic 43 yacht was registered in the name of Kais Ben Ali, nephew of the former President "but was used by the whole family," Colonel Putzu declared.

Italian PM: "Italy fully supports financial requests submitted by Tunisia at G8 Summit"

June 3, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi reiterated Italy's full support for the financial requests submitted by Tunisia during the G8 Summit held last May 27 in Deauville.

During his talk with Foreign Minister Mohamed Mouldi Kefi, on the sidelines of festivities marking the celebration of Italy's National Day and the 150th Anniversary of the Unification of Italy, Mr. Berlusconi also expressed Italy's determination to ensure the implementation of commitments made by the G8, to provide substantial political, economic and financial support to Tunisia in the next period.

Moreover, he reasserted the Italian's Government's will to help Tunisia make a successful democratic transition and promote its economic and social construction.

Mr. Berlusconi also emphasised his country's commitment to support Tunisia, by strengthening Italian investments in the country and launching new projects.

During a meeting held on the sidelines of the ceremony organised at the presidential palace, on Italy's National Day, Italian President Giorgio Napolitano paid tribute to the January 14 Revolution, reasserting his esteem and respect for the Tunisian people and his support to the democratic transition process in Tunisia.

Mr. Napolitano entrusted the Foreign Minister with extending to Interim President Foued Mebazaa his regards and wishes for further progress and prosperity to the Tunisian people.

For his part, Mr. Kefi conveyed to the Italian President the greetings of Mr. Mebazaa and the best wishes of the Government and people of Tunisia, on Italy's National Day. Mr. Kefi had a set of meetings with several heads of delegations of sisterly and friendly countries, including particularly Palestinian National Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, Egyptian Prime Minister Essam Sharaf and many other FMs.

The talks provided the opportunity to review the development of the situation in Tunisia after the Revolution and efforts made to ensure the success of the democratic transition process.

Talks also reviewed ways to further boost co-operation relations between Tunisia and these countries.

UNDP Director:" Eyes of the whole world upon Revolution in Tunisia and its transition process"

June 4, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) – "The eyes of the whole world are upon the Revolution in Tunisia, its process of transition and the elections of the Constituent Assembly, " said UN Assistant Secretary General and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Director of the Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean Heraldo Munoz.

At the end of his meeting Saturday in Tunis with Foreign Minister Mohamed Mouldi Kéfi, Mr. Heraldo Munoz expressed the UNDP's readiness, through its regional bureau for Latin America, to support Tunisia and provide it with the necessary assistance in its process of transition.

Currently on a two-day visit to Tunisia at the head of a high-level delegation of UNDP experts, Mr. Munoz highlighted that this programme provides for technical assistance to Tunisia and for presenting the experiences

of several countries of the region (Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Mexico) in matters of transition to democracy.

The point is, he declared, to allow civil society activists and political parties to draw inspiration from the experiences of these countries in matters of fight against poverty, reduction of disparities and democracy.

The FM expressed, for his part, high consideration for the UNDP commitment to support Tunisia's efforts aimed to establish democracy and boost the development process, pointing out that the holding of free and transparent elections is an important step on the way of establishing democracy in Tunisia.

He also reaffirmed Tunisia's readiness to make the most of democratic transition experiences in Latin American countries, especially Chile, which, he underlined, had scored positive results in this field.

UAE: freeze request of assets of Ben Ali and 120 other Tunisians

June 8, 2011 TUNIS (TAP)- The UAE Central Bank requested banks to freeze the assets of deposed president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and 120 other Tunisians, "Alroya al-Iqtissadia" economic daily reported Wednesday.

The newspaper, citing a Central Bank circular, specifies that local and international banks in the country as well as investment firms had been ordered to check the existence of and freeze properties belonging to Ben Ali, his wife Leila Trabelsi and 120 other Tunisians.

Tunisian authorities asked several countries to freeze the assets of the ousted president suspected of having amassed a fortune during his 23 years in power and made several investments abroad along with members of his family and his in-laws.

Signing of various co-operation conventions and programmes between Tunisia and Ethiopia

June 11, 2011 ADDIS ABABA (TAP) - Works of the 5th Tunisian-Ethiopian Joint Committee ended on Friday, in Addis Ababa. Several conventions and co-operation programmes were signed, on that occasion, in the health, education, vocational training, culture and information fields.

The two sides also agreed on canceling visas for diplomatic and special passport holders.

The session started on June 9, under the chairmanship of Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Radhouane Nouicer and Ethiopian State Minister for Finance and Economic Development Abraham Tekeste.

On the fringes of the session, Mr. Nouicer met with Ethiopian Foreign Minister and that of energy and waters. They reviewed, during those meetings, the bilateral co-operation fields, stressing the need to strengthen and diversify trade exchanges between the two countries and make the most of the partnership and investment opportunities in the two countries.

The Secretary of State asserted readiness of post-January 14 Tunisia to open up a new page in its bilateral co-operation with the African countries and notably with Ethiopia.

In this respect, he stressed the importance of the visit of a Tunisian businessmen delegation to Addis Ababa, as part of their participation in the International Agriculture and Food Exhibition, "Agrifex-Ethiopia." They had fruitful meetings with their Ethiopian counterparts.

Besides, Mr. Nouicer discussed with the Ethiopian officials progress of the situation in Tunisia and the country's challenges, notably the issues of higher-education graduates' employment and fight against development imbalance between regions.

In turn, the Ethiopian officials voiced satisfaction at the peaceful evolution of the Tunisian Revolution and the transition process. They expressed admiration for the Tunisian people's level of maturity, which has helped restore normal activity and stability in the country so swiftly.

Ninth Tunisian-Maltese Joint Committee's session

June 14, 2011 VALETTA (TAP) - The 9th session of the Tunisian-Maltese Joint Committee was held on June 12-13 in Valetta, under the chairmanship of Foreign Affairs Minister Mohamed Mouldi Kefi and Malta's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Tonio Borg. Placed under the motto of mutual understanding and consultation, the meeting confirmed similarity of views between Tunisia and Malta on the international and regional issues of mutual interest, said a statement from the Foreign Ministry issued on Monday.

The two sides reasserted willingness to seek to strengthen the political relations established between the two countries since 1967, reinforce gains and find ways to bolster and enrich the different aspects of bilateral co-operation, the statement added.

During the joint committee's works, emphasis was laid on the geopolitical context and issues involving the Mediterranean region, as well as the challenges posed in Tunisia, particularly building of a democratic and free society after the January 14 Revolution.

The Maltese side renewed the interest it takes in joining conditions for the success of democratic transition.

Tunisia and Malta signed a co-operation agreement in the area of youth and a memorandum of understanding between the Exports Promotion Centre and Malta Enterprise, its Maltese counterpart, the statement said.

The Maltese FM had paid a visit to Tunisia, last February 18-19, during which he underlined his country's will to bring all support to Tunisia at this crucial phase of democratic transition.

Italian Economic Development Minister: "Italian Government committed to strengthening partnership with Tunisia"

TUNIS (TAP) - Interim Prime Minister Béji Caid Essebsi conferred, on Wednesday in Tunis, with Italian Economic Development Minister Paolo Romani.

The two sides reviewed the economic situation in Tunisia, the progress of Tunisian-Italian partnership programmes and the investment climate in Tunisia after the Revolution of January 14, 2011.

The Italian Minister told TAP news agency that he had come to Tunisia, accompanied by an important delegation of investors and economic operators.

He placed emphasis on the strong economic relations between the two countries as reflected in the setting up of 700 Italian companies in Tunisia.

Mr. Romani also expressed hope that the economic relations between the two countries will further strengthen and the pace of bilateral co-operation accelerate in different fields.

He said that "the Italian Government is committed to strengthening partnership with Tunisia."

The Italian Minister added that economic co-operation was the focus of talks he had during his visit with members of the Interim Government, saying that these talks showed "the strong will to boost Tunisian-Italian partnership."

Mr. Paolo Romani also had a talk with Minister Delegate to the Prime Minister Rfaa Ben Achour.

The talk focused, in particular, on efforts made to ensure the sustainability of operations of Italian economic companies settled in Tunisia and attract other companies that could benefit from the continuous improvement of the investment climate in the country.

African peoples place high hopes in Tunisian Revolution

TUNIS (TAP) - Members of the Pan-African Parliament delegation, on an official visit to Tunisia, stressed the importance of the stage Tunisia is living through, which, according to them, "will be crucial in determining the country's future, in addition to the promising prospects it opens to all African countries."

They stressed, during their meeting Wednesday with Foreign Minister Mohamed Mouldi Kéfi, "the need to ensure all appropriate conditions to guarantee the success of the Tunisian Revolution in which all peoples of the Continent place high hopes to achieve a real democratic transition."

The two sides also discussed the development of the situation in Tunisia after the Revolution and the important measures and steps taken by the Interim Government to ensure democratic transition.

The Foreign Minister commended the African Union (AU)'s interest in Tunisia and its stands in support of the revolution for freedom and dignity.

The visit of the African parliamentary delegation is the third paid by AU's officials to Tunisia since the January 14 Revolution, after those of the AU President and a delegation of the Wise Men Committee stemming from the African Council for Peace and Security.

Interim PM receives Romanian FM

TUNIS (TAP) - Interim Prime Minister Béji Caid Essebsi received, on Thursday in Tunis, Mr. Theodor Baconchi, Romanian Foreign Affairs Minister who expressed his country's readiness to support Tunisia in the reconstruction of its economy and its repositioning on the regional and Euro-Mediterranean region."

I appreciate the courage of the Tunisian people who managed to topple a dictatorship without blood shed," said Mr. Baconschi after his meeting with Mr. Caid Essebsi, stressing Romania's commitment to support Tunisia to ensure the success of democratic transition.

The aim of his visit, he specified, is to strengthen the economic relations between the two countries. He said that he is accompanied by delegation of 15 businessmen who have already met Tunisian businessmen.

"Romania can boost investment in both countries and strengthen co-operation in the fields of new technologies, agriculture, tourism and infrastructure," he also said.

The Romanian FM also met during his visit in Tunisia with members of the Interim Government, including Foreign Minister Mouldi Kéfi and representatives of Tunisian NGOs.

During his meeting on Wednesday in Tunis with Foreign Minister Mohamed Mouldi Kéfi, Mr. Baconschi expressed admiration for the Tunisian Revolution, stressing Romania's solidarity with the Government and people of Tunisia in this phase of democratic transition.

In a statement to TAP news agency, the Romanian Minister said the meeting made it possible to review prospects for bilateral co-operation, particularly in establishing democratic institutions in Tunisia, and "learn lessons from errors committed in Romania after the fall of communism."

The talk also focused on the development of the situation in the Arab world and relations with the European Union, he added.

For his part, Mr. Mohamed Mouldi Kéfi said the economic mission of Romanian businessmen visiting Tunisia on June 13-16 will contribute to bolster trade exchanges in the two countries' mutual interest, a statement from the Foreign Ministry said.

The two ministers laid emphasis on the excellent bilateral relations in the academic field, calling for increasing the number of Tunisian students in Romania, the statement added.

Polish FM : "We'll support Tunisia during EU's Polish presidency"

June 17, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski asserted on Thursday in Tunis that Poland, which will ensure as of next July the European Union (EU)'s rotating presidency, will support Tunisia and help it make a success of its democratic transition process.

During his meeting with Caretaker Prime Minister Béji Caid Essebsi, the Polish FM said that he was convinced of the success of the Tunisian experience which has "inspired the region's peoples, in the same way Poland had inspired peoples of Eastern Europe."

In a statement to the press, the Polish Minister asserted his country's would step up investments and trade exchanges with Tunisia, specifying that he urged the European citizens, and Polish people in particular, to visit Tunisia and get acquainted with its tourist products.

Mr. Radoslaw Sikorski paid tribute to Tunisians for the hospitality they are reserving to refugees fleeing Libya, asserting Poland's readiness to host a number of refugees in order to alleviate pressure weighing on the country.

The Polish FM is paying a visit to Tunisia to present the new European neighbourhood policy and the role of the Polish Presidency of the European Union from July 1, 2011, in its implementation.

"The Polish Government supports Tunisia in its efforts to build a stable democracy whose success is a high priority for the whole of Europe," he said in a statement to TAP news agency after his meeting with Foreign Affairs Minister Mohamed Mouldi Kéfi.

"I believe, we need to forge an even closer relationship between Tunisia and Europe, strengthen the principles of neighbourhood policy and partnership and provide assistance in the electoral process," he also said.

Mr. Sikorski expressed hope that the Tunisian people would be "more confident" in this historical period of democratic transition.

A call was launched to Polish tourists and all European tourists to return to Tunisia to enjoy the attractions of the country, especially because "it is now safe," he said.

"This can give a boost to the Tunisian economy," reckoned the Polish Foreign Minister.

Speaking at a news briefing held on Thursday in the Foreign Ministry, the Polish Foreign Minister emphasised his country's will to support the people and government of Tunisia, all the more so that Poland had lived through a similar democratic transition in the '90s."

The government of Poland is ready to help Tunisia guarantee success to its democratic transitional process and lend it assistance in holding the Constituent Assembly's election," Mr. Sikorski explained.

The Polish Minister also said that Tunisia possessed all necessary assets to ensure success of its democratic transition, namely its excellent educational system, solid economic base and large participation of women in active life.

The success of this democratic transition, he concluded, hinged on consecrating the international solidarity, promoting democracy and laying down the foundations of sustainable development.

Russia stresses Tunisia's fundamental role in search for solution to Libyan crisis

TUNIS (TAP) - Developments of the situation in Libya and means to help reach a solution to the crisis opposing the two conflicting sides were the focal points of the meeting, on Friday, between Caretaker Prime Minister Béji Caid Essebsi and Russian President's envoy for African Affairs Mikhaïl Marguelov.

At the end of the meeting, the Russian emissary said that "he agreed with the Prime Minister on acting together and starting political talks between the two conflicting sides in the Libyan crisis." "This is why I decided to postpone my departure from Tunis," he specified.

He added in substance: "We are convinced that Tunisia has a key role in international mediation," reminding that the country has "an important experience in matters of Palestinian-Israeli negotiations dating back to the 1990s." "Consequently Tunisia could play a crucial role in reconciling the two conflicting sides in Libya and in searching for settlements acceptable to all," he explained.

Mr. Mikhaïl Marguelov pointed out that he had looked into co-operation possibilities between Russian institutions and the African Union in order to find a political solution to the conflict between the two sides and establish political stability in African countries. Russia believes in the opportunity to achieve this objective, he asserted.

He said he was convinced that achievement of political stability in Libya seems difficult at this point, in view of complexity of the recent developments on the field, mentioning demands made by the rebels in the city of Benghazi who call for political and democratic reforms.

Speaking about bilateral relations, the Russian envoy specified that his visit to Tunisia is the first of the kind paid by a Russian official to Tunisia after the Revolution, pointing out that his country hopes to develop the long-standing relations between the two countries and widen its prospects.

He concluded by voicing wish that more Russian tourists would visit Tunisia.

TUNIS (TAP) - At the end of his meeting, on Friday, with Foreign Minister Mohamed Mouldi Kéfi, Mr. Marguelov told the press that Tunisia and Russia share the same views and approaches to the preservation of relations with the two sides in Tripoli and Benghazi, in addition to their efforts for the Libyan national reconciliation.

Mr. Marguelov said that Russia "is endeavouring to gather the two Libyan conflicting sides around the table of negotiations, as a political crisis cannot be solved with military means."

He added that Libya's Prime Minister Baghdadi Mahmoudi had said, on Thursday, that Tripoli had started dialogue with the Libyan National Transition Council representatives who are living in various European capitals, notably France, Norway and Germany.

Mr. Marguelov is visiting Tunisia as part of a tour in countries of the region to look for a political solution to the Libyan crisis. He said that he was confident that the information he collected during his meetings with the conflicting sides, would be the data-base of consultations the Russian President would engage with the world leaders, for an efficient international initiative.

Libyan National Transition Council Chairman: Tunisians will have largest role in reconstruction of Libya

June 18, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - "The humanitarian aid provided by the people and Government of Tunisia to Libya and the fraternal positions it has adopted, represent more than a recognition of the Libyan National Transition Council," said Mustapha Abdeljalil, the Council Chairman.

At the end of the talk he had on Saturday with Caretaker Prime Minister Béji Caid Essebsi, Mr. Abdeljalil expressed "gratitude to the Tunisian families for the warm welcome and generous hospitality they have offered to the Libyan refugees."

He also said that he was optimistic about the future of the Tunisian-Libyan relations, adding that Tunisia would have the largest role in the reconstruction of Libya. "Libya will start a development dynamics in which the Tunisian workforce will play the largest role," he underlined.

Mr. Abdeljalil concluded by praising the Tunisian Revolution which he described as "pioneer of Arab revolutions and initiator of the Arab Spring."

UNHCR Antonio Guterres voices international community's gratitude towards Tunisia

June 18, TUNIS (TAP) - United Nations High Commissioner For the Refugees (UNHCR) Antonio Guterres reiterated the international community's gratitude to Tunisia for the huge efforts it has deployed in providing assistance to the flows of refugees, in spite of the particularly difficult situation it has been facing itself.

In a meeting with the press on Saturday, Mr. Guterres said that Tunisia its government and people has demonstrated a remarkable and exemplary generosity by opening its borders to the refugees.

He announced that this year's World Refugee Day will be celebrated, for the first time, from Tunisia "as a token of acknowledgement to Tunisia's efforts to assist the refugees from different nationalities in their escaping crisis in Libya."

He reminded that Tunisia had hosted more than 450,000 refugees, including thousands of Libyan refugees housed by Tunisian families themselves.

Besides, Mr. Guterres underscored the important agreement signed with the Tunisian authorities on the opening of an UNHCR office in Tunisia.

The UN High Commissioner also said that he had invited the interim president to be the main speaker at the UNHCR executive committee's meeting which will gather, next October, all member countries.

Besides, Mr. Guterres pointed out that several events will mark the celebration, on June 17-20, 2011 in Tunisia, of the World Refugee Day.

Tunisia takes part in 87th session of European Commission for Democracy through Law

TUNIS (TAP) - Delegate Minister to the Prime Minister Rfaa Ben Achour took part, in his capacity as alternate member of the European Commission for Democracy through Law, the Venice Commission, that comes under the Council of Europe, in this Commission's 87th session, held on June 16-17.

During this session, an item related to recent constitutional developments in Tunisia was on the agenda.

While reminding in his exposé of the events that Tunisia experienced since December 2010, Mr. Ben Achour highlighted the legal framework of the country's democratic transition, i.e., the decree-law on interim organisation of public powers, decree-law on election of the National Constituent Assembly and the status of the High Independent Authority for Elections.

During the debate, participants expressed admiration at what Tunisia has been achieved since January 14, 2011.

They also stressed the unique and exemplary nature of the Tunisian experience in the Maghreb and Middle East.

Libyan emissary praises 'Tunisian Government and people's support to Libyan citizens who fled to Tunisia'

June 20, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - Interim Prime Minister Béji Caïd Essebsi received, on Monday, a Libyan emissary.

Mr. Omrane Boukraa, Libyan Secretary of Arab Affairs in the General People's Foreign Communication and International Co-operation Committee, praised, in a statement to TAP news agency, "the Tunisian Government and people's support to the Libyan citizens who fled to Tunisia, whatever side they belong to."

The Libyan official underscored "Tunisia's constant stand in the Libyan crisis" and the Tunisian Interim Government's keenness to "look, together with the Libyan brothers and the international community, for a political solution to this crisis."

Tunisia, Spain review ways to boost co-operation in security and public outreach

June 21, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - Ways to boost Tunisian-Spanish co-operation and make the most of the Spanish experience in matters of communication between the Interior Ministry and citizens were the focal points of the talk held by Interior Minister Habib Essid and Spanish officials, during his recent working visit to Spain.

The Minister conferred with First Deputy Prime Minister and Spokesman for the Spanish Government Alfredo Perez Rubalcaba and Secretary of State for Security Antonio Camacho Vizcaino, with attendance of Director General of the Spanish National Police and Civil Guard Francisco Javier Velazquez Lopez.

Mr. Essid also had a working session in the Police Academy of Avila and conferred with the Director of the Office in charge of Interior Security Studies and trade union expert in various security bodies in Spain.

The visit is part of strengthening Tunisian-Spanish relations in the security field and learning about the Spanish experience in developing a new communication and outreach approach between the various interior ministry's departments and the public.

The First Deputy Prime Minister and Spokesman for the Spanish Government expressed, during his meeting with the Interior Minister, Spain's solidarity with the Tunisian people and full readiness of its government to support the Tunisian initiative regarding co-operation actions in such fields as short- and mid-term training and the organisation of seminars in Tunisia focusing on "Trade Unionism and Democratic Transition," with assistance from various civil society components.

In another connection, it was agreed to devise a legal framework to help bolster co-operation between the two countries' interior ministries.

Moreover, Mr. Habib Essid had a meeting with the Tunisian community members living in Spain.

The meeting focused on the progress of the democratic transition process in Tunisia and the gradual improvement of the security situation in the country.

Interim President briefed on outcome of 15th session of Tunisian-Algerian Follow-up Committee

June 22, 2011 CARTHAGE (TAP)- Interim President Foued Mebazaa was briefed on the outcome of the 15th session of the Tunisian-Algerian Follow-up Committee,

held June 20-22, as he met on Wednesday with Algerian Delegate Minister in charge of Maghreb and African Affairs Abdelkader Messahel.

During this meeting, the two sides praised the development of the close relations of fraternity between the Tunisian and Algerian peoples, reasserting the will to boost bilateral co-operation, diversify its fields and examine its mechanisms in both countries' interests.

The Interim President emphasised the need to promote consultation and co-ordination between officials in both countries to promote relations to highest levels and identify new opportunities of co-operation in different fields.

Mr. Mebazaa paid tribute to Algeria's stands in support for Tunisia in this transitory stage, which stances, he said, are not surprising from President Abdelaziz Bouteflika and the Algerian people.

He reminded of the close bonds of brotherhood between the two peoples, the values and principles they share and the history and destiny uniting them.

The Interim President entrusted the Algerian official with extending to President Abdelaziz Bouteflika his respect and consideration and wishes for progress and development to the Algerian brotherly people.

He expressed hope that the Tunisian-Algerian relations will fully contribute to building a unified Arab Maghreb and establishing a climate of stability, progress and prosperity to serve peoples of the region.

After the meeting, the Algerian minister said he was carrying a written message from President Abdelaziz Bouteflika to his brother President Foued Mebazaa.

He also said he had briefed President Mebazaa on the outcome of the 15th session of the Tunisian-Algerian Follow-up Committee, reasserting both countries' commitment to give a stronger impetus to bilateral co-operation.

Mr. Abdelkader Messahel informed the Interim President of the initiative of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika on political reform in Algeria and the strategy of his country in the economic and social fields.

The Algerian minister also said the meeting had given way to an exchange of views on several issues of mutual interest in the region.

He aired hope that Libya would reach a settlement to its crisis by opting for national dialogue that prioritises a political solution.

"We need to restore stability in Libya and preserve the unity of its territory which will certainly have a positive impact on neighbour countries," he said.

Foreign Minister meets heads of diplomatic missions accredited in Tunis

June 25, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - Foreign Affairs Minister Mohamed Mouldi Kefi held, on Friday in Tunis, an information meeting with heads of the diplomatic missions and representatives of regional and international organisations and authorities accredited in Tunis.

The Minister briefed his guests on the progress of the process of democratic transition in Tunisia and current preparations to ensure success to the election of the National Constituent Assembly to be held next October 23.

After the meeting, the Minister told TAP that this meeting decided by the Interim President and the Caretaker PM is in response to the invitation made to countries that promised to support Tunisia in its democratic transition process and keep their promises by "standing with it in this delicate period and ensuring success of the next electoral campaign."

He added that the heads of diplomatic missions and representatives of international organisations accredited in Tunis were informed of "the country's need of their expertise in matters of democratic transition," either by sending experts in the organisation of elections or training Tunisian experts in this field and their respective institutions or financial support of Tunisia.

Mr. Mouldi Kéfi said he had found real will with the ambassadors to support Tunisia "in this delicate period, similarly to Indonesia and countries of the former Eastern block and other countries that had gone through experiences similar to Tunisia's."

Tunisia deposits instruments of accession to ICC Rome Statute

NEW YORK (TAP) - Permanent representative of Tunisia to the United Nations Ghazi Jomaa handed, during an official ceremony held on Friday at the UN premises, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon Tunisia's accession document to the Rome Statute, i.e., the founding document of the International Criminal Court.

The Treaty of Rome aims to put an end to impunity for the perpetrators of the most serious crimes of international concern, including genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and aggression.

The UN Secretary-General praised Tunisia and its people, commending the country's initiative to present the official document of its accession to the Rome Statute, commenting that "Tunisia has shown by this application the avant-garde role it plays in the region in the field of implementation of international justice and its commitment to preserve the principles of human rights and demand of non-impunity."

He also expressed consideration at Tunisia's being "the first country in the region to have sparked off the brave fight for freedom and dignity."

W. Burns: U.S. determined to back Tunisia's economic development and democratic transition

June 27, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - United States Under-Secretary of State for Political Affairs William Burns reasserted, on Monday, his country's will "to do its utmost" to support economic boosting in Tunisia.

"We are fully aware of the hardships the country is facing," Mr. Burns explained, at the end of his meeting on Monday with caretaker Premier Béji Caïd Essebsi.

An important delegation of American businessmen is presently in Tunisia to discuss means to develop the economy, he reminded, pointing out that "the American Government will carry on work with its Tunisian partners to bolster the transition."

This visit comes to reassert "the United States' forceful commitment" to support Tunisia's democratic transition and "to contribute to success of the Revolution."

The talk of the Prime Minister and the U.S. Under-Secretary of State also turned on regional issues of mutual interest to the two countries.

Mr. William Burns, on his second visit to Tunisia since the January 14 Revolution, is to meet, today and on Tuesday, with other government officials and members of civil society.

It is to be reminded that several other U.S. officials had visited post-Revolution Tunisia, including in particular Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Senators John McCain and Joseph Lieberman.

June 28, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - "The United States has multiplied fifteen times its assistance budget to Tunisia, since the Revolution, to reach during the last six months the volume of 30 million dollars," said U.S. Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs William J. Burns.

"A democratic transition could not succeed without economic support to help re-establish growth" he argued, promising, in this connection, an increase in the American assistance to Tunisia and a long-term partnership, during a meeting he held with the press, on Monday afternoon at the U.S. Embassy, in Tunis.

Mr. Burns specified that his second visit to Tunisia, after last February's, aims to reassert the U.S. support to the democratic transition in Tunisia.

In this regard, he underscored the personal involvement of President Barack Obama, during the last G8 Summit in Deauville, France, to convince the most industrialised countries to back up democratic transition in Tunisia and the Tunisian economy in the coming period.

Seventy-seven American companies are operating in Tunisia, he said, reminding that two important delegations of American businessmen had visited Tunisia, the most recent one was led by General Electrics CEO.

Mr. Burns said that the USA is also planning to encourage American citizens' tourism in Tunisia following the implementation of the Open Sky Agreement, a project, he said, that has been discussed with the Tunisian interim Prime Minister, the Foreign and the Finance Ministers.

To a question on the likelihood of American President Barack Obama's visit to Tunisia before the end of 2011, Mr. Burns said that no such a visit has been planned, reasserting however the growing interest that the United States takes in Tunisia and the "Arab Spring."

As regards, the October 23rd elections, Mr. Burns reminded that his country supports Tunisia's democratic process, stressing the fact that the Tunisian people are sovereign in their choice and that the U.S.A. does not support any particular political party, pointing out that contacts are underway with the different political parties and representatives of the Tunisian civil society.

Mr. Burns reasserted, in conclusion, the U.S. total confidence in the success of the democratic transition process in Tunisia.

'U.S. committed to support Tunisian people in fight for democracy and freedom,' says Congressman Mike Thompson

June 29, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - U.S. Congressman Mike Thompson renewed the US commitment "to back up the

people of Tunisia in their fight for democracy and freedom."

Speaking at the end of the talk he had, on Wednesday morning, with Foreign Minister Mohamed Mouldi Kefi, the US official said he was "very proud of the accomplishment of this people who belongs to a fantastic country."

During the meeting, Mr. Mohamed Mouldi Kéfi was keen to pay tribute to the United States for the continuous support it brings to Post-Revolution Tunisia, expressing thanks to the American Congress for having backed up the initiative of creating the Enterprise Fund for Tunisia.

He reminded, in the context, of the extent of the challenges Tunisia is facing up in this transitory stage in the different political, economic, and social fields as well as in the employment sector.

Several other American officials have come to Tunisia after the Revolution, including American Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, American Under-Secretary of State for Political Affairs William Burns and Senators John McCain and Joseph Lieberman.

'Switzerland to grant Tunisia 60 million dinar assistance over 5 years'

June 30, 2011 TUNIS (TAP)- "Switzerland will grant Tunisia donations worth 60 million dinars (MTD) over a five-year period," said Mr. Pierre Combernous, Switzerland's Ambassador in Tunis, at a news conference held Thursday in Tunis.

The Ambassador said this donation programme of 12 MTD per year will benefit essentially midland regions of Tunisia, more particularly the Feriana and Thala areas.

These funds will help finance several projects related to water management, especially through establishment of purification and waste-water processing stations in the Kasserine and Siliana governorates.

Processed water, he said, will be used in irrigation of large agriculture perimeters and will help preserve the local ground water.

He added that this kind of projects will settle definitely some of the region's health problems by eradicating cases of hepatitis recorded in the region after contamination of ground water by non-processed waste water.

Emphasis was also placed on other regional development projects initiated by Swiss NGOs, such as the "Fondation Hirondelle," specialised in media assistance which plans to invest 1.5 million dollars to strengthen local radio stations, particularly those in the interior regions.

Preliminary contacts were established last March and a first project is underway in co-operation with Gafsa Radio, he said.

Switzerland, Mr. Combernous said, also plans to enhance its presence in Tunisia with the opening of an honorary consulate in Djerba island and the appointment of Mr. Rachid Abdelkebir, as Honorary Consul.

This move will help stimulate the flow of Swiss tourists to the island by means of 60,00 tourists a year, out of a total of 120,000 who visit Tunisia annually, he said.

At the humanitarian level, the Swiss ambassador said his country was very active in providing assistance to

refugees with donations worth 5 MTD, reminding that the Swiss government also provided technical and financial assistance to several humanitarian organisations operating in the region.

Swiss assistance also involved border or transit regions such as the locality of Ben Guerdane, located at the Tunisian-Libyan border, he pointed out.

At the economic level, Mr. Combernous reminded that Swiss investments in Tunisia are around 160 MTD, shared out between many Swiss large companies and SMEs active in different sectors, such as electrical and mechanical industries for a total of 14,000 direct jobs generated.

He said that several Swiss firms expressed wish to invest in the next period in such sectors as consulting, research in electronics and especially in renewable energy.

Answering a question on assets of the deposed president and his family, frozen in Switzerland, the Swiss ambassador said the amount of 60 million Swiss Francs which had been announced was made on the basis of the bank accounts opened on behalf of Ben Ali and his family, and that these assets may be increased if other accounts are communicated by the Tunisian authorities.

He also praised the co-operation established in this area between the Central Bank of Tunisia and its Swiss counterpart, reminding that there are 600 million Swiss Francs of Tunisian assets deposited in Switzerland, most of which belong to companies or individuals who have no relationship with the ousted regime.

Mr. Combernous said the frozen assets will be restituted to the Tunisian people even though procedures may take a few years, saying that Switzerland is one of the very few countries in the world to have declared the value of the frozen assets of the deposed president and members of his family.

BUSINESS & ECONOMY

"Mediterranean Sea Basin CBC Programme": 10 strategic projects to be financed in Tunisia

June 1, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - Ten strategic projects will be funded in Tunisia out of a total of 31 projects submitted by Mediterranean countries, as part of the "Mediterranean Sea Basin Cross-border Co-operation Programme," Mrs. Kerima Ghribi, Director-General of the Cross-border Co-operation Unit at the European Union said.

During a technical seminar held on Wednesday in Tunis, at the initiative of the International Co-operation Ministry, in association with the joint management unit, she said that 350 million dinars have been allocated to fund this scheme.

The latter seeks to contribute to the development of the sustainable and harmonious co-operation process at the level of the Mediterranean basin, by addressing joint issues and developing its endogenous potentials.

This programme refers to two types of projects .They are, she said, strategic projects including actions focusing on topics of strategic interest for the co-operation zone.

These actions are chosen by the joint monitoring follow-up committee, on the basis of measures contained in the programme and later specified in calls for proposals.

Budgets allocated to such projects should not exceed 5 million Euros.

The second type of projects coming under this programme consists in standard projects. They are initiated by local actors organised in cross border Mediterranean partnerships, in accordance with proposals launched as part of this programme.

They are projects that need at least three partners and whose budget should not exceed 2 million Euros.

The "Mediterranean Sea Basin Cross-border Co-operation Programme" is part of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and its financing instrument 2007-2013.

Tunisian economy remains strong despite impacts of Revolution and crisis in Libya

TUNIS (TAP) - "The Tunisian economy remains strong despite the impacts of the Revolution and the crisis in Libya," said African Development Bank (AfDB) President Donald Kaberuka.

During a meeting with the press held, on Wednesday in Tunis Mr.Kaberuka reiterated his institution's readiness to support the economic growth process in Tunisia and attract foreign investments.

In this connection, he reminded that the 500-million-dollar loan extended to Tunisia, aims to guarantee an immediate response to the requirements of the Tunisians, notably in matters of reducing regional disparities by improving access to social services in underserved regions, creating and preserving jobs and strengthening the citizen's voice and accountability.

This emergency support programme, which is to be granted rapidly, is part of an overall 1.4-billion-dollar programme financed by the World Bank (500 million dollars), the European Union (92 million Euros) and the French Development Agency (185 million Euros), reminded Mr.Kaberuka.

He went on saying that by late June 2011, the AfDB will grant Tunisia another 210-mln-dollar loan meant for the achievement of the Gabés/Ras Jedir motorway.

Tunisia raises 2,850 million dinars of foreign funding

June 2, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - Tunisia has managed to raise 2,850 million dinars for 2011, as part of bilateral and multilateral co-operation, said Planning and International Co-operation Minister Abdelhamid Triki.

Additional needs of Tunisia's foreign financing are estimated at 4,200 million dinars for 2011 to meet challenges related to the impact of this critical period which the Tunisian economy has been living through since January 14, 2011, said the Minister.

These additional needs are explained, in particular, by the rise of the current external deficit of expenditure which reached 1,525 million dinars due to lower exports and fall in tourism revenues.

In a statement to Tunis Afrique Press (TAP) news agency, Mr. Triki said Tunisia has received support from its key international partners.

The African Development Bank (AfDB) has provided funds of more than one billion dollars, 500 million dollars for short term reforms.

The World Bank will provide a 500-mln-dollar loan.

As regards loans for micro-projects, 75 million dinars will be granted by the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (AFESD), in addition to 150 million dinars to finance exceptional projects in internal regions, as well as technical assistance to be provided for the compensation of damage (15 million dinars).

For its part, the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) will provide funding of 50 million dinars for the Tunisian Solidarity Bank (BTS).

At the bilateral level, the Minister said that Tunisia had received pledges of exceptional support from several countries. France will grant loans estimated at 350 million Euros (700 million dinars), 185 million Euros of which will be disbursed quickly to strengthen the short-term reform programme.

Italy will provide nearly 135 million Euros, i.e 270 million Euros, Algeria will grant 100 million dollars and the European Union will give a 90-mln-Euro donation.

The Minister reminded that several other funding (nearly 1,500 million dinars), under review, will be dedicated to the construction of many motorways, in addition to agricultural and integrated development projects.

"The additional funding takes into account the imperatives of the current economic and social situation," he said.

The Minister expressed hope that these funds will be disbursed swiftly, i.e. in the course of 2011, and with easy repayment terms.

These funds will be used to support the Government programme aimed at boosting economic activity, through consolidation of regional development and employment, in addition to the support for social sectors and investment in regions.

The Interim Government has also set up a reform programme aimed at supporting the economy in the short term. This programme has four points relating to good governance, financial sector, employment and regional development and social sectors.

Mr. Triki said several measures and decrees on strengthening good governance, transparency and access to information have been published as part of this programme, in addition to identifying needs of needy families.

The Minister said the new commitments will be divided into three categories. The first will involve funding to support the middle term reform programme which is "the largest programme" to be carried out and help provide funding of 1,950 million dinars.

These funds come from the World Bank (700 million dinars), the African Development Bank (700 million dinars), the French Development Agency (370 million dinars) and the European Commission (180 million dinars).

The Minister said negotiations have been initiated around the programme decided by the Interim Government with the African Development Bank whose Board of Directors had approved on May 30, 2011 the loan agreement to be signed next week, the World Bank (WB) which will approve the loan next June 21 and the French

Development Agency (AFD), with which a convention was signed to fund this programme.

Negotiations will begin next week with the European Commission regarding the grant it will present to support the economic and social reform programme.

On the withdrawal operations, the Minister said they will be made at the beginning of July 2011 (1,570 MTD) and by late 2011 (380 MTD).

The second category of commitments includes credit lines to finance micro-projects estimated at 150 MTD and on which negotiations with the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) and the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (AFESD) have ended.

The Minister said, in this regard, that the Tunisian Solidarity Bank (BTS) may benefit from these funds in the second half of this year.

He also added that the third category of liabilities relate to appropriations for the benefit of exceptional programmes to strengthen regional development whose identification is in progress.

Mr. Triki said the support of donors and the G8 to Tunisia is a sign of confidence enjoyed by the country and a factor likely to encourage foreign promoters to invest in New Tunisia.

He noted that these funds were granted to Tunisia on easy terms and their repayment will be made over a period ranging between 17 to 20 years, including 5 years of grace, underlining that the mobilisation of these resources will not impact on indebtedness.

Indeed, he said, these resources will not impact on indebtedness, knowing that the resort to these loans will bring about an increase in the rate of debt of 3% of the GDP, thus bringing the debt rate to 38% by late 2011, a level which is "very positive and able to boost development action after 2011," according to the Minister.

He said, in the same context, that foreign currency reserves fell from 13 billion dinars to 10 billion dinars now, adding that they will reach an acceptable level late this year and that it will be possible consequently to remedy the current problems and maintain the levels of economic growth.

Tunisia's share of funds granted by G8 yet to be fixed

June 7, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - Tunisia's share and modes of allocation of funds granted by G8 leaders, who had met May 26-27 in Deauville, France, "have not yet been set," said Mr. Mustapha Kamel Nabli, Governor of the Central Bank of Tunisia (BCT).

During a news conference held Wednesday, BCT Governor said that talks on the funding to be raised, its sharing between Tunisia and Egypt and conditions for its appropriation will start in the coming weeks.

He added that the meeting of Finance Ministers and Foreign Affairs Ministers of the G8 countries, to be held next July in Brussels, will help set modes of distributing this sum according to the projects and programme submitted by each of Tunisia and Egypt.

It will also identify the final sum and conditions for its allocation, he said.

The G8's commitment is a forceful signal to the different foreign economic players who are called upon to invest in Tunisia, said Mr. Nabli, specifying that materialisation of these objectives "depends on the success of the democratic transition process."

The G8 Summit pledged to grant Tunisia and Egypt a financial support of 20 billion dollars throughout the 2011-2013 period.

This commitment, funded by international financial institutions (World Bank, European Investment Bank), will be bolstered by bilateral financing of 20 billion dollars from the Western and Gulf countries. The total sum of the raised funds will stand at 40 billion dollars.

Mr. Nabli said that a significant share of foreign funds to be granted to Tunisia would be under the shape of loans.

"Tunisia is compelled to incur debts to cover the deficit of its payment balance—which is presently estimated at 3.5 billion dollars—and preserve the country's economic activities," he said.

In the Deauville G8 Summit, Tunisia had submitted a five-year economic plan that requires investments of 125 billion dollars, 25 billion dollars of which are foreign investments.

The basic programme rests essentially on own resources, particularly national savings which are estimated now at 20%.

Tunisia is planning to increase the rate of national savings to 45%, a rate closer to those recorded by emerging countries, and this thanks to the climate of confidence, transparency and democracy that will prevail in the country, BCT Governor said.

The Government is also planning to initiate a consultation on this programme which will focus on five essential elements relating to good governance, consolidation of basic infrastructure in regions and development of human resources, in addition to ensuring integration in the global markets and modernising the financial sector.

WB: 1.5% growth in Tunisia in 2011

June 8, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - The World Bank (WB) foresees a GDP growth rate of 1.5% for Tunisia in 2011, following repercussions of the January 14 Revolution.

The 2011 report on the World Economic Prospects, released on Tuesday by WB, specifies that the industrial production in Tunisia "dropped" by over 15% during the first months of the current year, as foreign tourist arrivals recorded a 45% fall in the first quarter of the same year.

However, the report asserts that "the economic activity's pace would speed up in Tunisia" in 2012, without giving a precise rate, and growth would be close to 5% in 2013 "even if growth prospects remain uncertain."

The WB points out that "events which took place in Japan and political trouble in the Middle East and North Africa have strongly weakened the countries' growth."

The economic growth rate in this region would reach 1.9% in 2011 "and nearly 4% in 2013, as a consequence of recovery of the capital flows and restoration of confidence among investors."

The WB report urges all developing countries to "carry out successful balanced growth policies by implementing

structural reforms," "keeping inflationary pressures under control" and "fighting against the rise in basic products."

World GDP growth is expected to reach 3.2% in 2011 and 3.6% in 2012.

Caretaker PM reassures businessmen on investment in Tunisia

June 9, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - "Tunisia's future will meet expectations," Caretaker Prime Minister Béji Caïd Essebsi reassured businessmen on the country's democratic action.

He pointed out, during a forum organised on Thursday in Tunis at the Tunisian-American Chamber of Commerce (TACC)'s initiative, that the conciliation arrived at by the various political sensitivities and civil society during Wednesday's meeting in Tunis to set the date of the forthcoming elections, is an obvious proof that understanding and solidarity among the various stakeholders are the only way to success.

The different political parties, components of civil society and citizens are called, he said, to raise awareness about the difficult economic juncture the country is living through and, in such a situation, protest actions, sit-ins and strikes could only further the harm, in view of the impediments caused to the inflow of investments.

In response to apprehensions expressed by TACC members, businessmen and investors, about fall-out of the various protest trends on attracting investors, Mr. Béji Caïd Essebsi specified that the quality of Tunisia's human resources and Tunisian women's status in the political and economic spheres are the main factors reinforcing the country's chances to ensure the success of its democratic process.

Actually, businessmen and investors asserted that success of the democratic transition in Tunisia is the only guarantor for economic revitalisation, achievement of the best growth rates and bringing down unemployment.

Tunisia is today faced with a historic opportunity to show to the whole world that "Arab identity and Islam are not conflicting with democracy," said Mr. Essebsi.

He went on saying that Tunisia tried to clarify this point during its participation in the G8 Summit in Deauville, France, on May 26-27, 2011.

Besides, the interim PM underlined that the American administration, whose foreign policy has radically changed in light of the peoples' revolutions in the region, expressed its readiness to support Tunisia financially and authorise access of its products to the American market.

In turn, Mrs. Amel Bouchmaoui Hammami, TACC chairwoman, specified that the sought-after objective is to create a climate which guarantees strengthening of American investment in Tunisia.

This investment, she added, remains modest with 77 American enterprises in Tunisia employing 14,000 workers.

Speaking TAAC's action, the official pointed out that the strategy adopted lays essentially on visits paid by the two sides to implement concrete investment programmes and mobilise high added-value investments, notably in the services sector which could be exported by Tunisia.

Mr. Gordon Gray, U.S. ambassador in Tunisia, stressed his country's readiness to back up Tunisia's democratic process.

An American delegation, led by U.S. Senator John McCain, will shortly visit Tunisia to enquire about the investment opportunities offered, he specified.

Businessmen attending the meeting stressed the need to establish partnership likely to guarantee the two sides' interests.

They also called for creating partnership projects aimed to boost Tunisian skills in matters of marketing and establishing labels which will help the Tunisian products' access to American market.

Preparations for Tunisia's participation in G8 Finance and Foreign ministers' meeting examined

June 14, 2011 CARTHAGE (TAP) - Caretaker President Foued Mebazaa took interest, when receiving on Tuesday Finance Minister Jalloul Ayed, in the preparations for Tunisia's participation in the G8 Finance and Foreign Ministers' meeting, next July in Brussels.

On the occasion, Mr. Jalloul Ayed said that these preparations were making sure progress and that efforts were focused on identifying Tunisia's financial needs, pointing out that these efforts could but reassert the importance of the economic and social programme presented during the Deauville G8 Summit and would help get the necessary funds from the G8 countries, the financial and international institutions and several sisterly and friendly countries.

He added that the meeting had turned on the structural reforms that needed to be carried out to make of this social and economic programme a success, notably in the financial and banking sectors, civil service and the administration.

Besides, the Minister said that the talk had been an opportunity to discuss the furtherance state of several draft complementary reforms, regarding notably the legal framework for venture capital firms and micro-credits that are of a central importance in the economic and social programmes.

Mr. Jalloul Ayed also emphasised preparations for the creation of the Deposit and Consignment Office and the establishment of a sovereign fund called the "Generations Fund."

Textile-clothing exports: 10.15 % rise in first 5 months of 2011

June 9, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - The textile-clothing sector's exports rose by 10.15% in the first five months of 2011 compared with 2010, generating revenues estimated at 2 282 million Dinars.

The last economic bulletin of the Textile Technical Centre "CETTEX" (June 2011) shows a 9.9% increase in clothing exports and a 11.8% rise for textile exports. Tunisia imported in the same period 138 676 tons worth 1612 million dinars, that is to say a significant 10.21% rise.

Tunisia managed to keep its traditional customers during this period, namely the UK (+27.3%), The Netherlands

(+21.1), Spain (+ 18%), Belgium (+11.1%), Germany (+25.9%), Italy (+7.3%) and France (+5.5%).

Portugal, Spain, China, Belgium, Germany, Turkey, France and Italy are the 8 main countries that supply Tunisia with raw materials.

With its 2 036 plants (34.9% of the total number of Tunisian enterprises) and the 199 500 jobs generated by the sector (39.2% of manufacturing industries jobs), the textile-clothing sector represents a chief support of manufacturing industries in Tunisia.

At the international level, the sector keeps its 5th rank as EU clothing supplier with 2 309 million euros (4400 MTD), that is 3.8% of the total EU clothing imports in 2010.

The EU remains a privileged partner of Tunisia since it accounts for 96% of the sector's exports. The major countries importing Tunisia's textile-clothing products are France (33.2%), Italy (29.1%), Germany (11.5%) and Belgium (6.7%).

AfDB HQs to stay in Tunisia for three more years

June 11, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - The African Development Bank (AfDB) will stay in Tunisia for three more years, starting from June 2011, announced, on Friday in Lisbon, governors of the African central banks at the closing works of the 47th session of the Bank's general assemblies, held on June 9-10 in the Portuguese capital.

This decision had been advocated by the AfDB Group of Governors' Consultative Committee, held last April in Washington, which had proposed keeping as long as possible AfDB's relocation in Tunis, said a spokesman for this institution.

During the closing meeting, AfDB officials reminded of the main mission of the African money lender, particularly improving the impact of its interventions and funding on the life of population in its partner countries.

They pointed to the visit of AfDB officials in those Tunisian regions which had been neglected under the ousted regime, to become acquainted with the needs of their populations.

Fourth Global Forum: Two Tunisian enterprises selected among Top 50 and Top 20

June 13, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - Two Tunisian enterprises, Chahtech SA and Acies international, were selected by the World Bank Programme: "Innovation and Technology Entrepreneurship," among the most innovative 50 small- and medium-sized enterprises (SME) in the fields of climate change, agribusiness and information technologies.

This programme is implemented by InfoDev to which took part, some 750 enterprises from 65 countries, was organised on the occasion of the 4th Global Forum held in Helsinki, Finland on May 28-June 3, 2011.

During the forum, another competition was organised to select the 20 SMEs among the Top 50 to receive the Access to Market and Finance Award.

The Chahtech SA enterprise, selected among the TOP 20 was awarded this prize.

This double distinction of TOP 50 and TOP 20 of this young enterprise, is an international acknowledgement for

the buried diffuser in underground irrigation. The firm holds exclusivity and national and international monopoly in making and marketing this technology.

This buried diffuser, invented by the enterprise manager Dr. Chahbani Bellachheb is a real revolution in the field of irrigation and conservation of water resources for a sustainable agriculture for the humid, semi-arid, arid and desert regions. During the Helsinki forum, a Finnish enterprise voiced readiness to import this Tunisian technology for the Scandinavian countries. Besides, thanks to the Top 20 prize, the World Bank Programme will support Chahtech SA to have access to the international markets and funding. The buried diffuser will be available on the Tunisian market by late June 2011. It was awarded the UNESCO International Water Prize in 2009.

FIPA sees good prospects for FDI in Tunisia

June 14, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - The 33 new foreign companies that started production after the Revolution of January 14 and the expansion of 65 companies already in place are strong evidences that companies have not lost confidence in Tunisia," Director-General of the Foreign Investment Promotion Agency (FIPA) Nouredine Zekri told TAP news agency.

After the fall of Ben Ali's regime, 60 delegations of foreign investors from several countries (USA, Great Britain....) and 15 international companies operating in outsourcing had visited Tunisia to get to know about the business climate, he added.

"The new Tunisia will offer a healthy atmosphere to foreign investors and put an end to all obstacles they faced in the past," Mr. Zekri said, adding that all indicators augur of good prospects for foreign direct investments (FDI) in Tunisia.

Two days before the opening of the " 2011 Tunisia Investment Forum" to be held on June 16-17 in Gammarth (Tunis Northern Suburb), the official said that " this event will help enhance the post-revolutionary image of Tunisia and stress the importance of new opportunities for attracting FDIs."

"Investment in a 'democratic and pluralistic' environment will give more credibility to Tunisia and its business climate."

"The 2011 Tunisia Investment Forum" seeks to rectify the image conveyed by some foreign media on the security situation in the country (lack of security, strikes, sit-ins....) during that period, said Mr. Zekri.

"These media did not mention in parallel the resumption of activities of foreign companies in the country only two weeks following their interruption after January 14."

According to the FIPA official, 1 000 participants including 320 foreign investors from 26 countries will take part in this forum. "This reflects the confidence of foreign investors in Tunisia," he highlighted.

Asked about the impact of the wave of claims for wage increase on foreign companies, the FIPA Director-General said that they responded positively by improving the social situation of their employees without waiting for the next negotiations.

He called, to this end, to take into consideration the efforts made by these companies during the negotiations on wage increase to ensure their financial stability.

He stressed the need to put an end to strikes and sit-ins, which would push foreign companies to leave Tunisia to other investment sites.

After January 14, 2011, the wave of strikes and sit-ins led to the cessation of activities of 45 foreign companies or joint ventures out of 3 200 companies set up in Tunisia. These companies employed 3 000 workers. Yet, large companies did not leave the country.

Exports post 13.9 pct rise, imports up by 4.5 pct during first five months of 2011

TUNIS (TAP) - Tunisian exports went up, during the first five months of 2011, by 13.9%, standing at a value of 10,610.7 million dinars (MTD), compared with 9,315 MTD during the same period of 2010. Imports reached 13,574.8 MTD, against 12,984.6 MTD during the same period of 2010, i.e., a 4.5-per-cent rise.

The trade deficit recorded a 12.2-per-cent drop to reach 2,964.1 MTD, against 3,669.6 MTD, resulting in to the improvement of the cover rate by 6.5 percentage points to reach 78.2%, instead of 71.7% in the same period of 2010.

Analysing the results of Foreign Trade of the first five months of 2011, Mr. Lotfi Khdir, the Foreign Trade Observatory director at the Trade and Tourism Ministry, specified in an interview to Tunis Afrique Presse (TAP) news agency, that, for the first time since the beginning of the year, a positive increase is achieved in all exportation sectors.

The progress rate has ranged between 3.1 % (for the diverse industries) and 56% (for agriculture and agribusiness).

As to the sector-based analysis of exports, he highlighted the resumption of phosphates and by-products sales, in May. About 300,000 tonnes were exported, against 144,000 tonnes in April 2011.

Phosphates exports during the first five months were 1/3 lower than those of the same period in 2010.

In April and May, 30.9 thousand tons of dates were exported, compared with 28.4 thousand in the same period of last year.

Olive oil exports also increased, reaching 18.5 thousand tons, compared with 15.8 thousand tons in the same period of 2010.

Mr. Lotfi Khdir said that the textile and clothing sector posted a growth, moving upwards from -9.9% in January to 7.5% by end of May.

Exports of mechanical and electrical industries fell by 6% in May. This sector, it is to be reminded, accounts for 37% of the overall exports of goods.

The official of the Foreign Trade Observatory said the volume of imports of capital goods continued to fall for the 5th consecutive month (-10.9%), while food products imports prices increased from 12.5% in the first quarter to 21.1% by late May 2011.

Despite the drop in the imports of energy products (12.5 %) to late May, following the cessation of activities of crude oil importation and slowing down of national

consumption of fuel by 2%, the value of imports rose by 19.8% as a result of the 36.6-per-cent increase of imports prices.

Imports of raw materials have steadily risen, from the first quarter of the current year, to reach 6.8% late May.

Tunisia-Italy: enhancing confidence of Italian investors

June 16, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - "Opportunities and measures to support Italian-Tunisian Co-operation," is the topic of the forum held on Thursday in Tunis by the Italian Institute for Foreign Trade (ICE).

This forum aims according to officials of Italian institutions of support to foreign investment to enhance confidence in the business climate in Tunisia despite the downgrading of its rating by relevant international agencies.

It also seeks to learn about ways to bring needed support to the 700 Italian companies already settled in Tunisia.

"We are here to bring our support and expertise to the government and people of Tunisia" said Italian Economic Development Minister Paolo Romani who is paying a one-day visit to Tunisia.

Mr. Romani, who heads a delegation of 90 Italian operators, added during a news briefing held on the sidelines of the forum that the aim is to prompt the development of companies already settled in Tunisia and increase their number while identifying difficulties in matters of investment. The Tunisian officials demand, he said, high value added investments.

Minister of Trade and Tourism Mehdi Houas said Tunisia which is "living through a Revolution rather than a crisis," yearns to become a leading country in the Mediterranean, reviewing the support brought by Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi to Tunisia during the G8 Summit.

Mr. Houas called on Italian business to seize the great investment opportunities offered by Tunisia in several fields, particularly tourism, farming and industry.

The two countries can create a dynamics allowing them to conquer the African market, he said.

Italy is the second customer of Tunisia. It absorbs, according to the Exports Promotion Centre (CEPEX), nearly 1/5 of Tunisian exports with a value of 2,464 million Euros in 2010.

Italy is also second supplier of the country with 17.5% of Tunisian imports which rose last year to 2,928 million Euros.

Exports of Tunisian farm and processed-food products to Libya resume upward pace

TUNIS (TAP) - Hit by the crisis in Libya since mid-February, Tunisian exports to the neighbouring country, which Tunisia's first Arab trade partner, dropped by 32% up to the end of last April, according to the Foreign Trade Observatory (OCE).

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According to OCE, commodities exported are basically farming products and processed food, which are

sometimes ordered via telephone calls by Libyan tradesmen and delivered by means of unconventional channels to the Libyan borders.

Exportation of these products, mainly tomato pasta (27.3 MTD), vegetable oil (26.3 MTD), cheese (13.5 MTD) and dough (7.9 MTD), went up from 95.7 MTD beginning of last May to 200.1 MTD, by the end of that month.

By the end of last May, Libya has become the second exporting destination for Tunisian farming and processed food products (20.1%), second to Italy (20.5%).

Four months after the Libyan uprising, which has turned out into an armed conflict, Tunisian exports of various industries, such as mechanical industries, phosphates and by-products, textile-clothing, leather and footwear, recorded a significant drop, estimated by the OCE at 196.9 MTD.

Tunisia to open sales representation in Benghazi

June 17, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - A sales representation of Tunisia will open next Monday in Benghazi, East of Libya. The Exports Promotion Centre (CEPEX) said, in a communiqué released Thursday, that this representation will help promote Tunisian exports to the Libyan market.

Tunisia Investment Forum 2011: PM calls on Tunisia's partners to boost investments in the country

Friday June 17, 2011 TUNIS (TAP)- Interim Prime Minister Béji Caïd Essebsi called on Tunisia's economic partners to increase their investments in the country so as to contribute to the success of the Tunisian revolution at the economic level.

Addressing Thursday the opening works of "Tunisia Investment Forum 2011," the Caretaker PM said that investing in Tunisia after the Revolution is investing in democracy, stressing the close correlation between economic and democratic success in this crucial stage of the country's history.

He underlined that security had improved in the country in recent days, urging foreign investors to have more trust in Tunisia and increase their investments.

Tunisia, he stated, numbers today about 3 100 foreign firms, most of them operating in manufacturing industries. Additionally, it is the most prominent investment site in the South Mediterranean.

The Government is indeed making huge efforts so that Tunisia be the most attractive and competitive destination in the region.

US Assistant Secretary of State for Economic, Energy and Business Affairs Jose W. Fernandez said, for his part, that the United States "hopes to be a strong partner of Tunisia" and that "it will back up the country in fulfilling its development objectives."

He also stressed the need to develop Tunisian economic legislation and "endeavour to achieve transparency and fight against corruption in business," affirming that corruption had been among the factors that led to the fall of Ben Ali's regime.

Furthermore, he reckoned that improving the business climate in Tunisia requires the establishment of multilateral economic partnerships, notably with the

United States, recommending to call upon Tunisian expatriates in the US, especially those in California, to contribute to strengthening economic ties between the two countries.

A spokesman for the Development and International Co-operation Organisation announced, for his part, that establishing an economic climate where transparency and good governance prevail will contribute to attracting foreign investments to Tunisia.

The Organisation is ready to help Tunisia benefit from its expertise, revise the Investment Code and improve the skills of its human resources in matters of business creation, he said.

The "Tunisia Investment Forum" is held June 16-17 in the northern suburb of Gammarth by the Foreign Investment Promotion Agency (FIPA) on "New Tunisia, New Opportunities," with attendance of about 1500 investors and businessmen, including 500 from Europe, the United States and Asia.

Tunisia-USA: Towards more productive partnership

TUNIS (TAP)-" We stand with the Tunisian people, we try to support new forms of partnership and we are ready to promote the image of Tunisia as a site full of opportunities," said on Thursday US Assistant Secretary of State for Economic, Energy and Business Affairs Jose W. Fernandez.

Mr. Fernandez, who is on a visit in Tunisia leading a delegation of businessmen and economic operators to attend "Tunisia Investment Forum 2011" (June 16-17 in Gammarth), said he was "very happy to be in Tunisia in this crucial stage the country is living through."

He also said the talks he would have with Government officials and private sector representatives in Tunisia would focus on means to promote entrepreneurship, increase job creation for youths, "a major challenge throughout the world," and boost trade and economic co-operation with the United States.

Special care will be taken as well of implementing the US-North Africa Partnership for Economic Opportunity (NAPEO), notably as regards increasing trade exchanges not only between Maghreb states but also between economic operators of a same country, namely Tunisia.

Besides, open sky negotiations will be launched with Tunisian authorities with a view to increasing bilateral exchanges, knowing that the US has already 102 open sky agreements with other countries.

Talks will also turn on encouraging partnerships between Tunisian and US universities and developing co-operation in the field of technology. Furthermore, additional efforts will be exerted to increase the flow of American tourists to Tunisia, notably through attracting US hotel chains which would be "the best advertising for Tunisia."

Concerning sectors in which US firms would care to invest, Mr. Fernandez affirmed that the delegation of businessmen who will shortly escort US senator John McCain on his visit to Tunisia will include delegates of multinational companies operating in the fields of infrastructure, transport, telecommunications and tourism.

Speeding up negotiations between Tunisia and EU on agriculture and services

TUNIS (TAP) - European Commissioner for Trade Karel De Gucht recommended speeding up of negotiations between Tunisia and the European Union on agriculture and services.

He expressed keenness to carry on talks started at both technical and regulatory levels on the two areas, farming and services, expressing hope to finish negotiations with the new government after the Constituent Assembly's election.

Regarding Tunisia's access to the advanced status, Mr. Karel De Gucht said priority is given to fostering dialogue and finishing off as soon as possible talks on the agriculture and services files to move to the issue of the advanced status.

Tunisia is still a strategic partner of the EU, but this partnership should expand to other spheres.

The European Commissioner reiterated, during a news conference held on Friday in Tunis on the sidelines of the "Tunisia Investment Forum," the EU's interest in Tunisia's support at this stage of democratic transition.

The EU has brought support to Tunisia since the advent of the January 14, 2011 Revolution, he said, arguing that prospects for the relations between both sides are wide and promising.

The European Investment Bank (EIB) had granted Tunisia 500 million euros (nearly 1,000 million dinars) and 140 million euros (nearly 280 million dinars) for reconstruction and development over the period between 2011 and 2013.

The European Commission stressed that the business climate in Tunisia will further develop in the next period and that cessation of some companies' activities is only temporary.

He added that the Interim Government is making efforts to ensure political and security stability.

The Tunisian economy, he said, is now living through a transition and should take up such challenges as employment and regional disparities, pointing out that reforms decided are a new starting point towards establishing a healthy business climate and a modern system to control the national economy.

FDIs: 24.1% drop during first five months of 2011

June 20, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - Foreign direct investments (FDIs) reached, by the end of the first five months of 2011, a volume of 579.8 million dinars (MTD), against 763.9 MTD during the same period of last year, according to Foreign Investment Promotion Agency (FIPA), which represents a 24.1-per-cent drop.

These investments are shared out between 552.2 MTD in FDIs and 27.6 MTD in business, against 732.2 MTD and 31.7 MTD, respectively, during the first five months of 2010.

An analysis of the FDIs distribution in the manufacturing sector shows a strong attraction for the benefit of some activities. In this regard, the mechanical, electrical and electronic industries (MEEIs) are in leading positions, achieving 42 investment projects worth 40.8 MTD and creating 1,630 jobs, followed by the textile and clothing

industries (37 new projects and creating 2,055 jobs). Consequently, the MEEIs and textiles are the ahead-pulling areas of FDIs attraction and exports.

The chemicals and plastics industries recorded an increase in the FDIs flows by 76.7% and 40.2%, respectively, compared with the same period of 2010.

The first five months of 2011 were marked by 66 new companies of a foreign participation which started producing, the achievement of 86 extension operations by foreign firms set up in Tunisia and the creation of 5,990 new jobs, including 4,665 in the manufacturing industries.

EIB to sign on Friday with Tunisia first financing agreement of post-Deauville G8 Summit

June 23, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - Deputy-Chairman of the European Investment Bank (EIB) Philippe de Fontaine Vive is expected in Tunis, on Friday (June 24, 2011), to sign with Tunisia's Caretaker Government a financing agreement worth 163 million euros (= 326 million dinars), according a communiqué released by EIB.

Being the first of its kind with the EIB since the G8 Summit of Deauville, France, this convention is dedicated to co-financing the road upgrading programme.

The G8 Summit adopted, last May, the principle of an assistance of 20 billion dollars (about 27.6 billion dinars) over a two-year period for the benefit of Tunisia and Egypt.

This amount, to be allocated by the multilateral development banks (World Bank and EIB), would be bolstered by bilateral assistance accords worth 20 billion dollars shared out among the Western and Gulf countries, by means of 10 billion dollars (13.8 billion dollars) for each group of these countries.

According to EIB Deputy-Chairman, whose comments were quoted in the communiqué, "this first financing operation of the post-Deauville Summit is of high symbolism. It comes to give a concrete shape to our commitment vis-à-vis the Tunisian people," further adding, in this connection, "our mission consists in attempting to open up new future prospects before the young generation."

Mr. De Fontaine Vive is expected to meet, during his visit to Tunisia, Caretaker Prime Minister and other members of the Interim Government.

As a leading Mediterranean financial investor, EIB mobilised, since 2002, 12.6 billion euros (= 25.5 billion dinars) to shore up economic and social development programmes in nine Mediterranean country partners, 2.6 billion euros (5.2 billion dinars) of which in 2010.

AfDB commits 137 million Euros for Tunisia-Libya motorway

June 24, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - The African Development Bank (AfDB) approved, during a meeting of its Board of Directors held on June 21, a loan of 137.34 million Euros for Tunisia to finance a motorway project linking Gabes to Ras Jedir.

The loan was granted to the "société Tunisie Autoroutes" (Tunisia Highways Company).

The overall project involves the construction of 195 km road 2x2 between Gabes and Ras Jedir (Tunisian-Libyan border), said a statement of AfDB.

The project is also financed by the Japan International Co-operation Agency (JICA) with a loan amounting to 136.47 million Euros and the "Tunisie Autoroutes" to 180.97 million Euros.

The aim of the project is to reduce regional disparities and ensure better accessibility between the North, South and East of the country.

It will also allow to construct on the Tunisian territory an essential link of the Trans-Maghreb motorway, thus contributing to the regional economic integration of Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) countries.

Regarding employment, the construction of this motorway would help create nearly 2,160 direct jobs (2,000 in the phase of construction and 160 during the operation), in addition to indirect jobs.

The construction of the motorway link will allow in the short term to create 30,000 jobs only in the tourist sector, the statement added.

Tunisia submits official application to EBRD for shareholding member status

TUNIS (TAP) - Tunisia has officially applied to the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) for the double status of shareholding member and beneficiary of this financial institution's support and accompaniment.

In a communiqué released on Thursday, the Planning and International Co-operation Ministry specified that Tunisia's application has followed approval of the shareholders of EBRD, during its last annual assembly, of the principle of broadening the scope of the institution's intervention in countries of North Africa and the Middle East (MENA).

Set up in 1991 with a view to shoring up the economies of former communist countries, through their transitional process to democratisation and the establishment of market economy systems, EBRD means to make this experience available to the MENA region, especially to the Arab countries, to help them carry out successfully the democratic transition.

Tunisia, by means of this stakeholding status in this European institution, is planning to make the most of its expertise in matters of accompaniment throughout the economic and democratic transition, at this stage when the country has started effecting political, economic and social reforms.

FinMin calls on American businessmen to invest in Tunisia

TUNIS (TAP) - Finance Minister Jaloul Ayed called on American businessmen to seize the opportunities offered by Tunisia in different economic sectors, as a regional business hub allowing access to European, Arab and American markets.

During his participation in works of the New York Forum organised on June 20-21, with attendance of over 500 businessmen and decision-makers, the Finance Minister announced the launch of new investment mechanisms,

namely the Deposit and Consignment Facility and the Generations Fund.

Mr. Ayed took also part in a special session on "New Arab World: Investing in Change."

In Washington, he participated in a conference on "Democratic Transition in North Africa and Middle East." In his address, the Finance Minister briefed the meeting about the guidelines of the economic and social programme presented by Tunisia in the Deauville G8 Summit, which requires funding of 125 billion dollars over five years.

During his visit in Washington, he had talks with senior officials of the International Monetary Fund on the progress of democratic transition and the economic and social situation in Tunisia, particularly after the complementary Finance Law.

EIB approves 163-million-euro funding for road modernisation project in Tunisia

TUNIS (TAP)- A financing agreement on a 163-million-euro credit was signed on Friday in Tunis between Tunisia and the European Investment Bank (EIB), noted TAP reporter.

It is a contribution to finance a "road modernisation" project worth 595.5 million dinars.

The project, which should generate 7,000 jobs, aims, according to the Ministry of Planning and International Co-operation, to improve urban road infrastructure in Tunisia through the construction of 7 sub-projects in Greater Tunis (construction of interchanges and development of cross-roads), and 5 sub-projects of road extension as well as the construction of new ring roads in the governorates of Sfax, Kef, Mahdia and Monastir.

The project also provides for the development of some stretches or black spots recording a high number of road accidents and improvement and rehabilitation of regional classified roads.

EIB financing is repayable over 25 years, including 4 years of grace, with a fixed interest rate in each disbursement process.

The contract was signed by Messrs. Abdelhamid Triki, Minister of Planning and International Co-operation, and Philippe de Fontaine Vive, Vice-President of the European Investment Bank, who is on a visit to Tunisia.

Mr. Triki said that 4 other co-operation projects with the EIB are waiting, including conducting an analytical study on development of the business climate in Tunisia, inviting the bank to materialise the Mediterranean Bank project.

Mr. De Fontaine Vice said the project is part of guidelines set by the current government, particularly regarding creation of jobs in different regions of the country.

The official added that a set of projects worth 500 million dinars are waiting for disbursement, specifying that slowing of disbursement on two credit lines granted to small and medium enterprises (SMEs) is due to control measures taken to make sure that no one of the 110 persons close to the former president (appearing on the list of Tunisian authorities) or companies close to them could benefit from them.

He expressed EIB's readiness to further step up its funding, particularly in capital risk, and this to meet the demand of the Tunisian Finance Ministry.

EIB adopts projects in favour of Tunisia

TUNIS (TAP)- The European Investment Bank has adopted since the month of April in each Board of Directors meeting, a project in favour of Tunisia, said Vice-President of the EIB Philippe de Fontaine Vive.

After the meeting held on Friday in Kasbah with Caretaker Prime Minister Béji Caid Essebsi, Mr. De Fontaine Vive told TAP that the EIB will sign a convention on co-funding of a road modernisation project worth 595.5 million dinars to create over 7 thousand jobs to Tunisia.

The talk with the Prime Minister provided the opportunity, he said, to take stock of the economic and social situation in Tunisia and identify ways to contribute to creating jobs in the country and developing new investments.

He added that the EIB had several projects in Tunisia, particularly those related to financing small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

Regarding prospects for co-operation with Tunisia, the Vice-President of EIB said that last April, EIB had adopted the principle of a project for the Tunisian Chemical Group to construct a fertilisers plant in Mdhilla, Gafsa.

He said that ten days ago, the EIB had also adopted the principle of a loan to the "ENDIA Interarabe" organisation which the bank is ready to sign as soon as possible.

"It is a dynamics on which we will continue to work so that the funding could prompt the creation of jobs for Tunisians," said the Vice-President of the EIB.

The talk was attended by the Minister of Planning and International Co-operation.

Tunisia could become strategic platform for U.S. companies

June 25, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - Tunisia could become a strategic platform for American companies in their search of African and even European markets.

Leaders of seven American companies on a visit to Tunisia (June 24-25) said at a news conference held on Friday in Tunis that the main purpose of their visit is to identify opportunities offered by Tunisia to American companies in different sectors, particularly infrastructure, tourism, aeronautics.

"We are not carrying specific projects but the visiting companies are aware that Tunisia needs achievable projects in the short term, which could have a long term impact," said Mr. Jeffrey R. Immelt, CEO of General Electric.

"We should mobilise capacities available in the country," he said.

Officials of these multinational companies are very delighted to visit Tunisia in this transition period that could be very fruitful in terms of business.

He also underlined that the talks they will have with Tunisian businessmen will bring considerable contribution to identify investment opportunities in the country and more particularly in the infrastructure sector.

Reviewing the reasons behind this renewed interest shown by the American private sector for Tunisia, these business officials reminded that the presence of American companies in Tunisia and in North Africa is not new.

This region has experienced a remarkable economic development, said Mr. Curtis A. Ferguson, Coca Cola official in charge of the North Africa and the Middle East announcing that this company plans to double its investments in Tunisia.

M. Edwin D. Ed Fuller, President and Managing Director of International Lodging for Marriott International said this company will carry out two projects in Tunisia. He did not provide details on the amount of investment allocated.

Tunisian integrated system to improve trade processes rewarded by UN

June 29, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - The Tunisian project one-stop shop for transport run by the Office of Merchant Navy and Ports (OMMP) was awarded the second prize of the United Nations Public Service Award for the African Continent in the "Improving Public Services Delivery" category.

The awards ceremony was held in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, on June 23, 2011 on the celebration of the United Nations Public Service Day.

A Tunisia delegation made up of the transport and logistics team that overruns the project, led by OMMP, representatives from the Tunisian customs services, the computer centre connected to the Finance Ministry and the "Tunisie Net Trade" Company attended the ceremony.

This prize, one of the most prestigious international distinctions in the area of public services, rewards innovation and contribution of public institutions in the world to serve a more efficient and more reactive public service.

The project is a community system that allows stakeholders in ports to treat transport formalities electronically through the electronic one-stop shop of external trade and transport.

Since its coming into operation, this project helped shorten time of treating commodities exports and imports files, thanks to electronic procedures, thus contributing to reduce the period of stay of commodities in ports, enhancing efficiency of the operation of ports and cutting the cost of commodities.

IDB: 80 MTD to fund development projects in Tunisia

TUNIS (TAP) - On the sidelines of the meetings of the Islamic Development Bank (IDB), held on June 29-30, 2011 in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, Mr. Abdelhamid Triki, Planning and International Co-operation Minister, conferred with Mr. Ahmed Mohamed Ali al-Madani, this institution's chairman.

During the meeting, the minister invited the IDB official to visit Tunisia to sign two financing agreements.

The first agreement, worth 50 million dinars (MTD), will finance integrated agricultural development projects in the El Kef and Kasserine regions.

The second agreement, involving the support programme to micro-credits granted by the Tunisian Solidarity Bank, is worth 30 MTD.

During the annual meeting of IDB's Council of Governors, the minister made a presentation on the economic and social challenges facing Tunisia, such as those resulting from the country's slowed down economic activity, falling tourism earnings and rising public spending.

Tunisia was elected representing member of the North Africa Group within the Board of Directors of IDB for the 2011-2014 period.

"Current social and economic situation can no longer put up with strikes and protests," says Interim PM

June 8, 2011 TUNIS (TAP)- "It is urgently necessary to break for good with all forms of strikes and protests ahead of the holding of democratic, free and transparent elections next October 23," said Interim Prime Minister Béji Caïd Essebsi at a meeting held in Tunis on Wednesday morning.

He pointed out that " the current economic and social situation prevailing in the country can no longer put up with such disruptions, especially in view of the deterioration of the major economic sectors and the situation on the Tunisian-Libyan borders," stressing that 471 000 refugees had so far crossed into Tunisia.

SOCIETY

New partnership agreement for the benefit of women micro-project promoters

June 20, 2011 TUNIS (TAP)- A partnership agreement for the benefit of women micro-project promoters was signed on Monday in Tunis.

The aim of this partnership between the Ministry of Women Affairs and the Ministry of Industry and Technology is to support women wishing to launch micro-projects by providing them all guarantees for success.

Under this agreement, the business centres coming under the Ministry of Industry and Technology will host training programmes of the Ministry of women Affairs in regions. These training programmes will focus on encouraging women entrepreneurship.

Both sides are also committed to set up a joint regional training of trainers (ToT) programme and support women promoters by offering them needed guidance to launch their projects.

Employment indicators down in first five months of 2011

June 21, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - Employment indicators in Tunisia in the first five months of 2011 fell compared to the same period of last year. Employment services in different regions recorded during that period 18,074 job offers, i.e. a decrease of 65.8% compared to the same period of 2010.

These new offers include 15,960 direct jobs, 4,194 of which for university graduates.

The Tunisian Technical Co-operation Agency has overrun the employment of 1,339 Tunisians in foreign countries.

Moreover, 21,334 young people received professional initiation training.

The programme involving payment by the State of 50% of the wages as part of encouraging hiring of university graduates fell by 98%.

The programme to support small enterprises promoters benefitted to 5,248 promoters, including 2,364 university graduates.

The job market also suffered additional pressure with the deterioration of the situation in Libya. Between 30 and 35 thousand Tunisians returned from Libya and nearly 10 thousand workers were dismissed by ailing companies.

Yet, job indicators improved by 1.1% compared to April with 7,830 new offers.

"European Programmes for Local and Regional for Development": to support Tunisia's democratic transition

SFAX (TAP) - "European Programmes for Local and Regional Development" is the theme of a symposium held June 20-21 in Sfax, with the participation of Tunisian and foreign experts from several scientific and development institutions.

Organised by the Tunisian-European BioProtech project under the aegis of the Regional Development Ministry, the gathering aims to look into opportunities for better utilisation of European financing tools for local and regional development, notably after the January 14 Revolution, with a view to boosting co-operation with the European Union (EU) and backing up the democratic process in Tunisia, BioProtech Scientific Co-ordinator Hammadi Ayadi explained.

For his part, EU delegation representative in Tunisia Rajeh Khemiri spoke of the opportunities offered by the tools of bilateral, regional, cross-border or thematic co-operation and the EU additional support to democratic transition in Tunisia, specifying, in this connection, that the budget dedicated by the National Indicative Programme (NIP) for the 2011-2013 period --240 million euros—would be reinforced by an additional 150 million euros.

In partnership with the EU, this symposium offers opportunities to the different players (universities, technological parks and municipalities) to encourage investment, back up civil society activists and suggest ventures achievable as part of co-operation with the EU, such as the energy renovation project (Taparura) or that of the integrated solid waste management.

The agenda of the symposium includes two major parts. The first is focused mainly on introducing, through plenary conferences, various European financing tools.

The second part consists of workshops devoted to the project arrangements to be financed by the EU programmes and to the management of the existing projects, particularly those facing difficulties in their achievement or eligibility.

It is worth noting that, in addition to the BioProtech research team, several institutions are taking part in this symposium, namely Borj Cedria Biotechnology Centre, Sfax University, Sfax Technological park, the Taparura project, the German Technology Transfer Centre (Steinbeis), the BioPark Industry of Canavese (Italy) and the European Investment Bank.

The Tunisian-European BioProtech project (2010-2013) is meant notably to strengthen the development-research capacities of Sfax Biotechnology Centre. It is part of the 7th co-operation programme in matters of development research to enlarge the European space of research to neighbouring countries

Interim President receives participants in international conference on women and elections

June 25, 2011 CARTHAGE (TAP)- Interim President Foued Mebazaa received, on Saturday, a group of participants in the international conference on "Women and Elections: Law and Culture," led by Mrs. Laluma Xingwana, South African Women Minister, in the presence of Mrs. Lilia Labidi, Minister of Women's affairs.

The Interim President was briefed on works of the conference, commending the eminent contribution and rich debate which reflect the excellent scientific level and the wealth of experiences studied.

He stressed the privileged position held by women in the Tunisian society and political life, reminding of their key role in the Revolution and their outstanding contribution to the process of democratic transition in the country.

This role, he said, had been confirmed by the adoption of the principle of gender parity in the next elections of the National Constituent Assembly.

The guests expressed their appreciation of the Tunisian Revolution and women's participation, wishing to see this revolution strengthen the gains of Tunisian women, particularly their contribution to management of public affairs.

They also extended their thanks to Tunisia for the opportunity offered to them in this critical stage in its history, which opportunity will allow them to learn about the Tunisian experience in the promotion of women's conditions and the characteristics of the role of women in this stage of democratic transition.

ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT

Tunisian-German workshop on use of sewage sludge in agriculture

June 2, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - A workshop on "The Use of Sewage Sludge in Agriculture" was held on Wednesday in Tunis by the Agriculture and Environment Ministry organised, in association with the German Agency for International Co-operation (GIZ).

Secretary of State in charge of the Environment Salem Hamdi said that Tunisia which is developing a master plan for sewage sludge management seeks to make the most of the German experience in this area, particularly transfer

of technologies used in the use of sewage sludge (solid waste water treated in purification stations).

The Secretary of State also said that the Ministry of Agriculture and Environment has conducted several studies on different forms of soil degradation. These studies, he added, showed a dramatic decline in fertility, high salinity, waterlogging and an increasing erosion.

The department launched a five-year pilot programme on the use of sewage sludge in the agricultural sector in 2008.

Report on possible damages to the environment caused by activity of the Industrial Waste Processing in Jradou

TUNIS (TAP) - The Agriculture and Environment Ministry will receive, next week, a copy of a report worked out by experts appointed by the Zaghuan Court of First Instance. The report examines possible damages caused by activity of the Industrial Waste Processing Centre in the region of Jradou, 20 km south of Zaghuan, announced Agriculture and Environment Minister Mokhtar Jallali.

He said at a news conference held Saturday that if the report shows that the waste processing centre in Jradou harms human health and the environment, the Ministry "will not hesitate to close this unit immediately."

Moreover, if deficiencies are revealed by this same report, the Ministry will work to remedy the situation.

However, added the Minister, if the negative effects of the centre's activity are not proven it will be re-opened.

The Court of First Instance in Jradou has tasked experts in biology, environment and chemistry with testing samples and conducting a detailed study on the site, following a sit-in staged since February 28, 2011 by the local population who fear dangers of the centre's activity on human health and environment security.

The Minister deplored the behaviour of some resident of Jradou who prevented technicians from conducting maintenance operations while others dug under the centre's site to retrieve materials whose effects on human health and the environment are unknown.

The achievement cost of the Industrial and Special Waste Processing Centre of Jradou, which came into service a year ago, is about 30 million dinars.

The centre is not designed for destroying radioactive waste, explosive waste or those of medical care activities because its technologies do not allow such destruction.

Germany had financed 60 % of the project's achievement cost through a donation and Tunisia provided the remainder of the funding.

Germany's Embassy in Tunis said, in a press release published early March 2011, that the objective of Germany's contribution to funding this project is to help the centre process industrial and special waste through advanced technologies in this field, in addition to fighting health hazards that might result from dumping this waste in the natural environment.

Expertise report on Jradou Centre

June 7, 2011 ZAGHOUAN (TAP) - Experts tasked by the Zaghuan Court of First Instance with the file of the

Jradou industrial waste processing centre, Zaghouan, agreed on the need to stop this unit's activities, the local inhabitants' lawyer Kamel el Eir told, on Tuesday, TAP news agency.

Experts in geology, environment and chemistry had been appointed by the Zaghouan Court of First Instance to conduct an investigation on the centre where the local residents have staged, since last February 28, a sit-in in protest against the possible risks generated by these activities.

Mr. El Eir, who obtained a copy of the 150-page report illustrated with photos as supporting evidence, pointed out that the experts had confirmed that the activities of the Jradou centre are harmful to humans and environment, and that they pollute groundwater.

For its part, the National Waste Management Agency (ANGED) estimates, according to the related Ministry's information office, that the experts' proposals should be taken into consideration. Improvements will thus be carried out with a view to ensuring resumption of the centre's activities under the best conditions.

For ANGED, the negative aspects highlighted in the experts' report should be dealt with and efforts should be exerted to enhance the centre's positive aspects. The Agency will endeavour to establish a partnership with the local inhabitants' representatives regarding the site's future.

The court will set a date to look into the case. Agriculture and Environment Minister Mokhtar Jallali had said, last June 4, that in case the report proves that the Jradou industrial waste processing centre is of harm to human health and environment, the ministry "will not hesitate to close it immediately."

The Jradou centre came into operation a year ago, by means of investment worth 30 million dinars, 60% of which is a donation from Germany. It employs 54 persons, the majority of whom are local people.

Germany offers closer partnership with Tunisia in renewable energy

June 15, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - Mr. Ernst Burgbacher, Federal Commissioner for SMEs and Tourism and Parliamentary State Secretary of the Ministry of Economics, proposed a closer partnership with Tunisia in the area of renewable energy in which "Germany enjoys great experience and takes special interest in renewable energy and new resources."

This proposal was made during a meeting held Tuesday in Tunis with Industry and Technology Minister Abdelaziz Rassaa.

Mr. Burgbacher expressed his country's will to strengthen co-operation relations with Tunisia and support the January 14 Revolution.

"Tunisia's future will be an example to be followed by other countries seeking freedom," he argued.

For his part, Mr. Rassaa said Tunisia aims to position itself on the international scale in matters of renewable energies to meet the national energy growth and boost exports activities in this field.

Regarding partnership, the Minister said Tunisia should further develop its economic relations with the European

Union and promote its positioning on external markets in promising sectors.

He said that despite the disruptions recorded by the industrial sector, the volume of industrial exports rose compared with the previous year.

Tunisian-Italian technical co-operation programme in field of environment

TUNIS (TAP)- A Tunisian-Italian technical co-operation programme worth 9.5 million euros will start during the current month to address such fields as climate change, fight against pollution and protection of sea environment in the Mediterranean.

This programme (2011-2014) was the focus of a working session held Tuesday in Tunis by Secretary of State in charge of Environment Salem Hamdi with an Italian delegation led by Director-General at the Italian Environment Ministry Conrado Clini.

The Secretary of State expressed will to develop bilateral co-operation in the field of environment and diversify it through sustainable development in inland regions.

The Italian official voiced, for his part, readiness to develop this co-operation and promote inland areas as well as support growth and job creation.

Tunisian Renewable Energy Network launched

June 22, 2011 TUNIS (TAP)- A group of research, consultancy and support companies and institutions created recently a Tunisian national network of renewable energy to co-ordinate efforts between different stakeholders in order to promote renewable energy.

The launch of the network was announced on Tuesday at a meeting attended by representatives of different structures that have joined this network, such as the National Agency for Promotion of Scientific Research, the Centre of Research and Technologies of Energy at the Technopark of Borj Cédria, the Tunisian Electricity and Gas Company (STEG), the National Energy Control Agency (ANME) and National Syndicate of Renewable Energy.

The network seeks to mobilise scientific, technical and professional skills to create a value added based on green economy, prompting a qualitative change in the social and economic life of citizens. It also seeks to co-ordinate with other Tunisian and foreign networks.

Training sessions will be held as part of international co-operation, in addition to support for creation of innovating companies.

Higher Education and Scientific Research Minister Refaat Chaabouni stressed the importance of boosting co-operation with the Ministry of Industry and Technology and support the Tunisian network of renewable energy.

He said the rise in the consumption of fossil fuels and its impact on environment, in addition to the increase in the prices of oil and development of technologies related to the use of alternative energies have changed the international economic landscape in the area of renewable energy.

Minister of Industry and Technology Abdelaziz Rassaa reviewed the programme of the Interim Government in the

renewable energy sector involving the creation of complementary networks to set up an industrial and technological infrastructure that meets international standards.

He added that the achievement of major projects in the area of renewable energy requires development of scientific research and technological innovation activities in research institutions and companies.

TOURISM & CULTURE

Tunisia, WTO agree on tourism plan

June 1, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - Tunisia and the Madrid-based World Tourism Organisation (WTO), on Tuesday, agreed on a tourist co-operation plan for the years 2011/2013, announced the Trade and Tourism Ministry.

The co-operation plan was signed by Tunisian Trade and Tourism Minister Mehdi Houas, on a working visit to Spain, and WTO Secretary-General Taleb Rifai.

This plan determines joint actions to be taken in order to promote human resources and marketing, diversify the tourist product, improve quality and back up innovating projects in this field.

Other activities, including thematic workshops will be also carried out soon by Tunisia with the assistance of the WTO and its experts, the Ministry added.

Tunisia will also launch a communication plan and a large campaign of outdoor advertising in Spain, also in collaboration with the WTO, to promote its tourism.

Tourism professionals expect "disastrous" tourist season

June 3, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - The tourist season in Tunisia will be "disastrous," as a result of the 50% loss suffered by different indicators of the sector compared with 2010, tourist professionals said.

They underlined at a news conference held on Thursday that the situation in the country (sit-ins, strikes), events in Libya, lack of visibility for the next period and precariousness of tourism in Tunisia are factors that caused "this critical situation" experienced by the sector.

Mr. Mohamed Belajouza, Chairman of the National Hotel Trade Federation (FTH) added that illegal migration to the Italian island of "Lampedusa" also led to the collapse of the Italian market which is among the most tourist-provider markets to Tunisia.

The major concern of FTH is preservation of jobs offered by the sector (two million direct and indirect jobs), including 500 thousand permanent jobs, he said.

The federation asked for support of the concerned authorities to overcome this crisis.

Regarding the high season, he said "we are not sure the situation will improve."

Mr. Taher Saihi, Chairman of the Tunisian Travel Agencies Federation (FTAV) said the decrease in bookings for the high season is between 50% to 60%,

tourists having chosen such other destinations as Spain, Greece and Turkey.

The improvement of the situation depends on support from the State and taking urgent measures, he said, wondering about the fate of correspondences sent to the Tourism Ministry, which were examined at a cabinet meeting held last April 22 and on which a decree was established but not published at the Official Gazette.

He said that travel agencies are unable to pay their employees and meet their commitments, some of them are even threatened of bankruptcy.

The number of travel agencies in Tunisia is 700, providing 10 thousand direct and indirect jobs.

Mr. Boubaker Bouzrara, representative of the regional hotel trade federation in Sousse "sounded the alarm" because of the difficult situation experienced by local hotels.

Thus, out of the 104 hotels of the region, 30 shut down. He recommended involving professionals in decision-making.

Tourism professionals expressed their will to make special offers to encourage domestic tourism which ranks third in the number of overnight stays (3 million) after France and Germany and before Italy and Great Britain.

Tunisia-France: two twinning agreements to promote training in sector of tourism

June 11, 2011 TUNIS (TAP)- Two twinning agreements related to vocational training in the sector of tourism were signed Saturday in Tunis, with attendance of Trade and Tourism Minister Mehdi Houas and French Secretary of State in charge of Trade, Handicrafts, SMEs and Tourism Frédéric Lefèbvre.

These two accords are aimed at implementing a technical co-operation programme in vocational training in the sectors of bakery, pastry, catering and hotel management.

The two agreements were signed by the Seine-Saint-Denis Chamber of Trade and Handicrafts (France), and the Sidi Dhrif Tourism Institute and the Tourism Training Centre of Kerkouane (Hammamet), on the Tunisian side.

Mr. Lefèbvre expressed his country's will to support new Tunisia, especially in matters of tourism, handicrafts and trade.

In order to immediately implement these two agreements, Mr. Mehdi Houas said, 15 "ambassadors" (6 women and 9 men) of the Tourism Training Centre of Kerkouane will be hosted, as of next June 13, by the Seine-Saint-Denis Chamber of Trade and Handicrafts.

Interim PM meets tourism professionals

June 16, 2011 KASBAH (TAP) - Caretaker Prime Minister Béji Caïd Essebsi conferred, on Thursday in Tunis, with Messrs. Mohamed Belajouza, Tunisian Hotel Federation (FTH) Chairman, and Mohamed Tahar Saihi, Tunisian Travel Agencies Federation (FTAV) Chairman.

Mr. Belajouza said that the talk had offered the opportunity to submit solutions that would "help the tourist sector extricate itself from the crisis," adding that he had recommended to the Interim Government to urge banks and the National Security Fund (CNSS) "to lend hotel

enterprises seasonal credits and delay, for a few months, payment of CNSS dues."

For his part, Mr. Saihi said that he had raised, during the meeting, the issues of re-scheduling bank and leasing loans, liberalising organisation of the Omra, little pilgrimage, and Pilgrimage journeys, as well as the Open Sky question.

In this connection, he underscored the need to speed up promulgation of the enforcement text of the Presidential decree pertaining to "the crisis support measures to the hospitality industry in order to help it resume its activities."

On this occasion, the Interim PM announced that the organisation of the Omra and Pilgrimage stays will be regulated, starting from early 2012, by specifications, knowing that so far the National Services and Residences Company has monopolised this sector of activity.

FTAV Chairman pointed out that liberalising the organisation of the Omra and Pilgrimage activities will undoubtedly help make the staying period in Holy Places more flexible and generate price competitiveness.

The talk also provided the occasion to discuss domestic tourism and the professionals' role in develop this niche.

Tunisian tourist trade faces most serious crisis

June 18, 2011 KASBAH (TAP) - Tunisian National Tourism Office (ONTT) Director-General Habib Ammar said that the crisis tourist trade is facing is the most serious one in its history since its impacts are far greater than those of the Gulf War (1991), the effects of September 11 events and the Ghriba synagogue attack (island of Djerba) in 2002.

The sector revenues have dropped, up to last June 10, by 51% and the number of bed-nights fell, during the same period, by 55,3 %.

The number of tourists' arrivals dropped by 41%, he pointed out at the regular press briefing held last Friday by the communication department of the Prime Ministry. The ONTT Director-General reminded of the 53% decline in the number of European tourists and the 41% fall in the number of Maghreb tourists since the start of the Tunisian Revolution of last January 14.

He explained that the Ministry is working in co-ordination with the ONTT to help the tourism sector get out of this crisis through a variety of promotional campaigns intended for both traditional and maghreb markets.

MSC resumes cruises to The Goulette

TUNIS (TAP) - MSC Company, specialised in organising cruises to marinas across the world, said it will resume its cruises to the Goulette marina starting from next July.

Mr. Neil Palomba, an MSC Company official, said the company will operate, from next July to late October, 4 cruises a week to the port of the Goulette.

He said, during a news conference held on Friday at the tourist village of the Goulette Port, that four ships with a capacity of 2,000 passengers each will operate the 4 cruises.

Returning security in the recent period and the will of customers and the company to visit Tunisia have encouraged MSC to resume its cruises to the port.

Mr. Sahbi Azouz, Chairman of the Communication and Co-operation Division at the Board of Merchant Navy and Ports (OMMP) told TAP that cruises to the marina of Goulette started late April 2011.

A German vessel and an American one had docked last April 30 in the port of Goulette with 2,000 passengers on board of each of them.

Mr. Azouz expects that international organisations specialised in cruises to Mediterranean marinas will resume their activities to Tunisian destinations after this MSC's return.

Google's readiness to further promote Tunisian tourism on Internet

June 22, 2011 TUNIS (TAP)- Delegate Minister to the Prime Minister Rafea Ben Achour received, on Thursday afternoon in Tunis, North Africa Regional Google Manager Wael Fakharany who is presently visiting Tunisia.

In a statement to Tunis Afrique Presse (TAP) news agency, Mr. Fakharany said that his visit, the first in Tunisia, aims to establish contacts with the different Tunisian officials, reasserting Google's readiness to further collaborate with Tunisia.

Mr. Fakharany, who is Regional Manager for Google in Egypt and North Africa, said that the main project that he will present is to promote and support Tunisian tourism, notably by the use of new information technologies and Internet in particular.

He asserted that Google registers about 100,000 requests a month with such key words as "Tourism" and "Tunisia", underlining that this potential of target customers remains largely unused. In this context, he reiterated Google's readiness to further promote Tunisian tourism on the Internet, specifying that the high summer season is a period favourable for its promotion.

Furthermore, he pointed out that there are additional demands for tourist stays during Christmas and the new year holidays.

Mr. Fakharany said that this first visit will be followed by others in the coming months, underlining that Google counts in the future to bet on the Tunisian and Egyptian youths' know-how in matters of new information technologies.

In this connection, he said he had met Vocational Training and Employment Minister Said Aïdi, who asked him to ensure the training of trainers in matters of new technologies to be approved by Google.

In conclusion, he underlined that Google's interest in Tunisia increased with the start of the January 14 Revolution and the large use of its youths of new information technologies, which spread in several Arab countries.

Google, he went on saying, "wants to side with the Tunisian youths to support them in their initiatives and provide them with Internet services."

Campaign to control quality of hotel services to be launched soon

June 27, 2011 TUNIS (TAP)- A national campaign to control the quality of hotel services is to be launched next July 1, the Trade and Tourism Ministry announced Monday.

This campaign was decided by the National Board of Tunisian Tourism (ONTT) during a working session devoted to reviewing the tourist situation in the country.

The main objective of the 3-week campaign is, according to the ministry's statement, "to prioritise advice and training for managers of tourist institutions."

This decision was taken following the unprecedented slowdown recorded by the tourist sector since January 14, with a fall of 40% in arrivals and 50% in revenues.

More than 3,000 direct jobs were lost as well because of the situation prevailing in the country since the Revolution. The civil war in Libya has also worsened the situation.

ONTT's Director General Habib Ammar had told the media, previously, that the crisis of the tourism sector in Tunisia is the most serious in its history.

Indeed, its impact has exceeded those of the Gulf War in 1991, the September 11, 2001 and Ghriba (Djerba Island) in 2002.

Fifth festival of digital cultures, on June 23-26 at Carthage Acropolis

June 4, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - The fifth festival of digital cultures is due to be held on June 23-26, 2011 at Carthage Acropolis, with 16 concerts of various electronic music genre, dance, workshops as well as permanent installations devoted to digital arts.

The event is organised by the Echo Electric Association from France, in partnership with the International Organisation of la Francophony (OIF), the French Institute stemming from the French Foreign Ministry for development of cultural co-operation, the Paris city hall and the Cultural Institutes of France, Spain, United Kingdom, Germany and Italy in Tunisia, underlined Mr. Afif Riahi director of the Association and the Festival, to Tunis Afrique Press (TAP) news agency.

"The four-day festival includes in addition to music and artistic creations, digital installations to create a hybrid work with sound and vision" said Afif Riahi.

The event is placed, this year, on the theme of diversity which is an attempt to illustrate the Tunisian people expectations since January 14, 2011.

African Film Festival of Tarifa opens : 13 Tunisian films

June 10, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - The 8th session of Tarifa African Film Festival (TAFF, Spain) starts Saturday and lasts until next June 19. Three Tunisian films are participating this year in the three sections of the official competition and 10 films will be screened out of the competition.

In the official competition are the following films: "Vénus Noire" by Abdellatif Kéchiche in the feature film section, "Rêve Africain" and "Tabou" by Mériem Riveil (15 mn, 2010) as part of "L'Afrique en court" section and "Un conte de Faits" by Hichem Ben Ammar as part of the documentary section "De l'autre côté du Détroit".

Out of the competition, the festival scheduled a retrospective "films and censorship/films and democracy? the cases of Tunisia and Egypt " with 10 Tunisian long and short films, directed between 1988 and 2011 starting from Nouri Bouzid's "Sabots en Or" to the recent film by Nadia El Fani "Ni Maître ni Allah".

The Tunisian retrospective 5 long and 5 short films also includes the following films that were awarded prizes at several national and international festivals: "Essaida" (1996) by Mohamed Zran, "La Télé Arrive" (2006) by Moncef Dhoub, "Ouled Lénine" (2007) by Nadia El Féni, "Harga" or "Brulyre" (2009) by Leila Chaibi, "Condamnation" (2010) by Walid Mattar, "Vivre" (2010) by Walid Tayaa, "Vers le Nord" (2010) by Youssef Chebbi and "De Carthage à Carthage" by Khaled Barsaoui (2010).

A round-table meeting on the theme of this retrospective will be held and gather Tunisian and Egyptian participants to discuss the role of films, censorship, bureaucratic red tape as well as the role of films, notably in Tunisia.

Djerba to play host to World Islands Music and Islands Film Festivals

June 15, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - The 6th edition of the Djerba World Islands Music Festival will be held this year from July 16 to 24 with Cuba as guest of honour.

This edition will be marked by the award of the "Djerba Island Symbol" prize to reward best island film selected in the official competition which was launched for the first time this year, with the participation of nine films.

Unveiling the programme of this festival designed to boost artistic, cultural and tourist dynamics in different parts of Djerba, the founder of this event, created since, 2002 Lassaad Elghaieb told TAP news agency that celebrities will be present including singer Nathalie Cardone, Charanga Habanera group as well as artists coming from Cuba, Martinique, Madagascar, Sicily, Reunion, Mallorca and Greece as well as Kerkennah and Djerba.

An international symposium on the influence of insularity on arts and handicrafts innovation will be held next July 19.

Pilot project "Zama site, archaeology and development pole" kick-started

June 16, 2011 SILIANA (TAP) - The "Zama, archaeology and development pole" is the first integrated project to be of benefit to the midwestern Siliana region, since the January 14 Revolution. The fruit of an initiative taken by the citizens, members of the "Zama Archaeological Site Association," this project gathers several participants, including the culture, women affairs, trade and tourism, agriculture and environment, education, Transport and Equipment Ministries, in addition to several organisations and associations operating in the development area.

Meant to put an end to so many years of marginalisation, poverty and injustice which marked daily life of this region and its people, long ignored as the last concerns of policies and plannings, this project promises to open up the town of Zama onto the outside world, improve its inhabitants' living conditions and create new sustainable jobs, by means of a multi-sectoral strategy meant to rehabilitate its archaeological site and promote its human

resources, notably through training programmes for the benefit of youths and rural women.

This project was green-lighted on Thursday at the Siliana Higher Technological Studies Institute by Culture Minister Ezzedine Bach Chaouch, Women's Minister Lilia Laabidi and Trade and Tourism Minister Mehdi Houass, with attendance of the region's Governor, Mr. Moncef Khémiri, and officials from the involved Ministries.