



TUNISIA NEWSLETTER

May 2010

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TUNISIA AND JAPAN

Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi receives Japanese Deputy-Foreign Minister

KASBAH, May 18, 2010 (TAP) - Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi received, on Tuesday afternoon, Japanese Deputy- Foreign Minister Kenichiro Sasae, who is on a working visit in Tunisia.

At the end of the meeting, Mr. Kenichiro Sasae said that it had been an occasion to look at means to further develop relations between Japan and Tunisia.

He specified that the "meeting turned on the long-standing economic relations binding our two countries and on current international issues of mutual interest, such as bilateral co-operation in matters of climate change."

The Japanese guest laid emphasis on the mutual will to further energise high-level dialogue, multiply exchange of visits and intensify contacts, notably between students and in the field of culture.

He went on saying "we also looked at means that would further boost co-operation in trade and investment fields."

The meeting was attended by the Secretary of State to the Foreign Minister in charge of American and Asian Affairs Saida Chtioui and Japan's Ambassador in Tunis.

Foreign Affairs Minister Kamel Morjane receives Japanese Deputy-Foreign Minister - Tunisian-Japanese Joint Commission meets

TUNIS, May 18, 2010 (TAP) - Foreign Affairs Minister Kamel Morjane received, on Tuesday, Japanese deputy Foreign Minister Kenichiro Sasae, who is on a working visit in Tunisia on the 17th-19th instant, to attend the Tunisian-Japanese Joint Commission's 7th session.

Mr. Kamel Morjane voiced satisfaction, on the occasion, at the quality of Tunisian-Japanese relations which are characterised by mutual respect and regular consultation, reasserting Tunisia's will to give a strong boost to these relations in a spirit of mutually profitable partnership. The talk helped discuss regional and international issues of mutual interest.

In her opening address on opening the Commission's works which was co-chaired by Secretary of State to the Foreign Minister in charge of American and Asian Affairs Saida Chtioui and Mr. Kenichiro Sasae, Mrs. Chtioui voiced satisfaction at the noteworthy level reached by the co-operation and friendship relations binding Tunisia and Japan in all fields, thanks to the determination of the two countries' leaders to further hoist the exemplary bilateral relations to the level of a real strategic partnership.

She pointed out that the current session of the Tunisian-Japanese Joint Commission offers a new opportunity to deepen dialogue and exchange views about means to reach this objective.

"Japan," she specified, "is an important partner for Tunisia, in view of the considerable support it is providing to the country's development work and the joint achievement of projects in sectors vital for the country's social- economic development."

Mrs. Chtioui said that the two sides are called upon, in a context of a globalised economy, to establish a sustained strategic partnership, in the service of mutual interests, notably by encouraging the Japanese private sector to invest in Tunisia and boost triangular co-operation for the Arab and African countries' benefit.

For his part, Mr. Kenichiro Sasae highlighted the importance of co-operation relations tying the two countries, paying tribute to Tunisia for its political stability and economic performances.

He asserted his country's willingness to keep on supporting Tunisia's development effort, laying emphasis on Japan's will to reinforce bilateral co-operation with Tunisia and extend it to other sectors.

The Japanese official said that he was impressed by Tunisia's potential to boost bilateral co-operation, enlarge trilateral co-operation and opportunities of investment and opening on Europe.

At the end of works, the two officials voiced satisfaction at the session's convincing outcome, which testifies to the spirit of partnership characterising the Tunisian- Japanese relations.

Development and International Cooperation Minister receives Japanese Deputy-Foreign Minister

TUNIS, May 18, 2010 (TAP)- The Tunisian-Japanese co-operation relations and prospects for developing them were the key issues dealt with, on Tuesday in Tunis, during a meeting which gathered Development and International Co- operation Minister Mohamed Nouri Jouini and Japanese deputy Foreign Minister Kenichiro Sasae, who is on working visit in Tunisia.

Mr. Jouini stressed the importance to intensifying meetings between the two countries' private sectors, to better explore investment and partnership opportunities.

For his part, Mr. Kenichiro Sasae voiced his country's will to further develop efforts to lay the bases of a strategic partnership in the two countries' services.

The Japanese official asserted that the economic dynamics and stability which characterise Tunisia constitute attractive factors for the Japanese enterprises and businessmen to invest in Tunisia.

He called to boost meetings in the two countries to make these opportunities better known.

Additionally, the two sides discussed Tunisia's preparations to host the 2nd session of the Arab-Japanese economic congress, due to be held next December.

Summit of Japan-North African universities

GAMMARTH, May 14, 2010 (TAP) - A summit of Japanese-North African universities was held on Friday in Gammarth, northern suburb of capital city Tunis, with attendance of presidents, directors and representatives of several universities from Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Mauritania, Libya, Egypt and Japan.

Held for the first time in Tunisia, the gathering aims to look at means to boost scientific, technical and academic co-operation between Japanese universities and their counterparts from North Africa, to ease exchange of students, teachers and researchers and make the most of expertise in related fields.

Besides, the meeting is an opportunity to introduce the Japanese Education, Culture, Sports, Sciences and Technologies Ministry's plan to attract 300,000 foreign students by 2020, against 100,000 currently, and to consolidate academic and research co-operation with all countries from all over the world, and notably from North Africa.

In his opening address, Higher Education and Scientific Research Minister Béchir Tekkari pointed up the noteworthy development of Tunisian-Japanese co-operation in recent years, specifying that, in addition to the exchange of students, co-operation mechanisms between Tunisia and Japan include technical and financial aspects and triangular co-operation programmes for the benefit of African countries in the scientific, technical and academic fields.

Mr. Béchir Tekkari reasserted Tunisia's willingness to put all its experience in the service of African countries, to carry out joint projects and programmes in the environment protection field, softening the negative impact of climate change, in sustained development, human resources' good management, bio-diversity, agronomy and reproduction health.

POLITICS & DIPLOMACY

President Ben Ali's address on "Africa and Global Governance" at the France-Africa Summit

NICE, May 31, 2010 (TAP) - President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali made, at the 25th France-Africa Summit held on May 31- June 1, 2010 in Nice, an address on "Africa and Global Governance," read out on his behalf by Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi at the session devoted to this theme.

Here is the full text of the address:

"In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate

Your Excellency President Nicolas Sarkozy, President of the French Republic,

Your Excellencies Heads of State and Government

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The first issue on our Summit agenda concerns "Africa and Global Governance." This is, in our view, one of the

greatest African priorities to which the international community should give a special attention.

The African continent suffered from marginalisation and exclusion from participation in formulating the major international orientations and decisions.

In fact, the creation of the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions came in a critical historical period during which most of our countries were still subjected to foreign hegemony, and were not able, at that time, to take part in drawing up world policies.

While appreciating today the fact that our countries are members of the United Nations, we believe that offering Africa a permanent seat in the Security Council will allow it to defend its interests and have its opinion taken into consideration on all issues addressed by the Security Council, particularly those of concern to our Continent.

In this context, we consider that the United Nations Organisation is now in an urgent need for reform, especially in light of the current developments taking place in the world which require the establishment of a new world order, one that offers all world nations the opportunity to participate in taking major decisions of concern to the whole humanity.

In our view, economic governance is no less important than political governance. In fact, the latest financial and economic crisis that has had negative effect on African economies, and stressed the pressing need for a new governance system, one that allow the international community as a whole to participate in governing the world economy.

We consider the establishment of the "Group of Twenty" (G20) an important step in that direction, one that might offer opportunities to establish a new world economic order that takes into consideration the international balances.

The participation of the African continent in the meetings of this Group calls for optimism and hope for further increasing the presence of Africa in world economic forums.

Moreover, the participation of a number of African leaders in the G8 meetings offers them the opportunity to express our Continent's concerns. We look forward to a more efficient contribution, by both Groups, to tackling many development issues in Africa, and hope that the member states of both Groups stick to their decisions and honour their commitments. In this context, we rely on the role that France can play in supporting African causes within the framework of these Groups and in establishing a broad dialogue on these issues.

We are convinced that France will continue supporting Africa in its negotiations with the World Trade Organisation.

This in addition to its sustained efforts to sensitise the other partners to the importance of devoting 0.7% of their countries' GDP as an aid to developing countries, so as to alleviate the impact of the economic crisis and implement the Millennium Goals by the year 2015.

The development of our Continent, and its contribution to global governance at the political and economic levels, are prerequisites for world peace and security.

We attach a great importance to our partners' support to our efforts and our own potentialities, so as to serve our peoples' interests and ensure our active presence in the global governance system.

The historical relations and common denominators between France and Africa are factors of rapprochement that can only help both sides intensify dialogue and consultation, and prompt them to continue acting together as part of a multidimensional co-operation that can truly reflect the political will driving all of us to effectively join the new world order.

Thank you Mr. President."

President Ben Ali's address on "Climate Change"

NICE, June 1 (TAP)- Here is the full text of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's address on "Climate Change" to the 25th France-Africa Summit held May 31-June 1 in Nice, which was delivered on his behalf by Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi:

"In the name of God, Merciful and Compassionate,

Your Excellency President Nicolas Sarkozy, President of the French Republic,

Your Excellencies Heads of State and Government,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The international community has gained awareness of the serious dangers and grave threats that climate change poses for all humanity.

Though the African continent assumes no responsibility for the intensification of this scourge, as it is the region that least causes polluted gas emissions, the fact remains that this continent might turn out to be the most affected by climate change. Moreover, soil erosion, the shrinking of forests, sea-level rise and the scarcity of water resources are additional threats to sustainable development in our countries.

Our collective awareness of the danger posed by climate change for the future of all humanity requires us, more than ever before, to intensify action so as to preserve forests, increase tree-planting, fight desertification and soil erosion, reduce emissions that cause global warming, and encourage the production of alternative energies.

We have taken all these new challenges into consideration in formulating our general policies and development strategies at the national, regional and continental levels. We are convinced that our Western partners, particularly France, can facilitate the taking of courageous decisions that help face the threats posed by climate change, and can promote action for the advent of a new global economy that takes into account the protection of the environment and encourages the development of new technologies that use renewable energies, which will help create further jobs and sources of wealth. Africa, which contributes through its distinctive ecosystems and vast forests, to the preservation of the

global ecological balance, looks forward to a genuine solidarity on the part of industrialized nations, especially as regards funding and technology transfer.

Though the results of the Copenhagen summit were not up to the hopes placed in it, the fact remains that this should not weaken our determination, as the Copenhagen political agreement includes positive elements that we can build on. We will go to Caucun with the same sense of consensus and solidarity, so as to reach an agreement that can help stop global warming and preserve the interests of all. Thank you Mr. President".

Head of State's address on "Peace and Security"

NICE, May 31, 2010 (TAP) - President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali made, at the 25th France-Africa Summit held on May 31- June 1, 2010 in Nice, an address on "Peace and Security," read out on his behalf by Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi at the session devoted to this theme.

Here is the full text of these address:

"In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.

Your Excellency President Nicolas Sarkozy, President of the French Republic,

Your Excellencies Heads of State and Government,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my distinct pleasure to express to H.E. President Nicolas Sarkozy and to the friendly people of France my sincere thanks and deep gratitude for hosting our 25th Summit in the beautiful city of Nice.

I take this opportunity to express my deep consideration to our great friend President Nicolas Sarkozy, for his valuable contribution to strengthening partnership between France and Africa, and his continuous support to the sustained efforts of African countries for development and progress. Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This Summit of ours is being held at a critical international juncture marked by deep and rapid changes, as well as by successive crises and risks that pose serious challenges to our African continent at the political, economic and security levels.

The items included on our agenda reflect our deep awareness of the challenges that our Summit addresses, especially the issues that are of crucial importance to our Continent, such as "Africa and Global Governance," "Peace and Security" and "Climate and Development."

These issues lie at the heart of joint African action and involve huge challenges that our Continent has to meet so as to materialise our peoples' aspirations for progress and prosperity.

This is, in fact, an opportunity through which we seek to deepen active and balanced partnership with France.

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The success of the process of development and progress in Africa depends on promoting peace, security and stability in all its regions.

Hence the need to mobilise our Continent's potentialities so as to address the problems impeding its advancement toward prosperity and progress.

The African Union has materialised this orientation in its strategic plan for the period 2009-2012.

In this context, we have endeavoured to consolidate the structures of the Union and to formulate a policy for peace and security that seeks to prevent crises, relying on the early warning system, on the Committee of the Wise and on a set of arrangements that give room for mediation and good-willed endeavours.

Promoting peace and stability in Africa being an African responsibility in the first place, we believe that the international community is also concerned with the achievement of this objective.

That is why we attach a great importance to the promotion of co-operation with Africa and with its traditional partners, in particular France and the European Union, especially as regards peace-keeping, conflict settlement, disarmament, warrior reintegration and humanitarian aid to civilians.

I take this opportunity to express our appreciation of the support provided by France and the European Union so as to improve the security conditions in the African continent, through the "African Peace Facility" and also through enhancing capacity programmes for the African Union and regional organisations.

The African Union's proclamation of 2010 a "Year of Peace and Security in Africa" reflects our deep awareness of the importance of security and stability, as they go hand in hand with the process of development in Africa. Development and security are, in fact, so interdependent that one cannot be achieved without the other.

In this context, I would like to reaffirm Tunisia's determination to make all efforts so as to help establish an adequate climate for the promotion of peace and security in our African continent and to continue supporting the African Union's efforts.

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Border and racial conflicts, along with drug-trafficking, the propagation of organised cross-border criminality, money laundering and funding armed groups, are among the gravest risks threatening security and stability in our Continent.

Hence the need for more vigilance and co-operation so as to combat and eradicate them.

We are all called on to co-ordinate our efforts and act together, as part of regional and international co-operation, so as to eradicate these scourges that undermine our development efforts, and do harm to our African societies and also to our partners' societies.

Head of State receives Chinese Foreign Minister

CARTHAGE, May 18, 2010 (TAP) - Tunisian-Chinese relations and the current international issues were the focal points of President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali's meeting, on Tuesday, with Chinese Foreign Minister Mr. Yang Jiechi, who said he had been honoured to have met the Head of State to whom he had extended the greetings and cordial feelings of Chinese President Hu Jintao.

The Chinese guest added that he had informed the President of the Republic of the fruitful talks he had held in Tunisia, as part of strengthening the friendship and co-operation relations binding the two countries, stepping up contacts and increasing joint co-ordination on international issues.

The Chinese foreign minister said that President Ben Ali had praised the results the Tunisian and Chinese sides had reached, stressing the need to step up the exchange of visits, strengthen rapprochement, deepen economic, trade and tourist co-operation and boost investment.

The Chinese official said the talk had also turned on current international issues, particularly the Middle East issue, emphasising the two countries' similar views on major regional and international issues.

Mr. Yang Jiechi also said he had "expressed to the President of the Republic China's total readiness to back up Tunisia to host the 5th session of the ministerial meeting of the Chinese-Arab Co-operation Forum, as well as its support for Tunisia's hosting of the World Youth Congress."

The Head of State entrusted the Chinese minister with extending his greetings and feelings of friendship and esteem to President Hu Jintao, as well as his satisfaction at the distinguished level reached by the Tunisian-Chinese relations.

The meeting was attended by the Foreign Affairs Minister and China's ambassador in Tunis.

President Ben Ali receives Syrian Prime Minister

CARTHAGE, May 14, 2010 (TAP) - President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali took interest in the fraternity and co-operation relations binding Tunisia and Syria, as he received, on Friday, Syrian Prime Minister Mohamed Neji El-Otri,

The Head of State expressed satisfaction at the strong bonds tying the two countries.

He entrusted the Syrian Prime Minister with extending a message of fraternity and consideration to his brother President Bachar El-Assad, wishing Syria further progress and prosperity under his wise leadership.

At the end of the meeting, Mr. Mohamed Neji El-Otri said he had been honoured to have met President Ben Ali to whom he had conveyed the regards of his brother President Bachar El-Assad, highlighting the strong and long-standing relations between the two brotherly peoples.

He added that the meeting had focused on prospects of co-operation between Tunisia and Syria, in light of the outcome of the Tunisian-Syrian High Joint Committee which had examined different aspects of co-operation

between the two countries in the economic and development fields.

He out pointed, in this regard, the successful experiences of Tunisia and Syria. "We have established a mechanism to implement the signed agreements and set a schedule of meetings between the two countries' officials, in order to strengthen the relations of co-operation," the Syrian PM specified.

He added, in the same connection, that President Ben Ali had expressed satisfaction at this approach, emphasising the key role of think-tanks and follow-up committees in materialising the signed agreements.

The meeting was attended by the Minister of State, Special Adviser to the President of the Republic and Official Spokesman for the Presidency of the Republic and the Ambassador of Syria in Tunis.

Fraternal and co-operation relations binding Tunisia and Morocco focus of President Ben Ali's meeting with Moroccan Prime Minister

CARTHAGE, May 7, 2010 (TAP) - The fraternal and co-operation relations binding Tunisia and Morocco were the focus of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's meeting, on Friday, with Moroccan Prime Minister Abbas el Fassi. The Head of State voiced, on the occasion, deep satisfaction at the solid and constantly developing relations tying Tunisia and Morocco.

The President of the Republic entrusted the Moroccan Prime Minister with conveying to his Brother, King Mohamed VI, his fraternal regards and wishes of continuous success in leading the brotherly Moroccan people towards stronger welfare and development.

The Moroccan Prime Minister said that he had been honoured meeting the President of the Republic and conveying to him the fraternity feelings and respect of his Brother, King Mohamed VI.

He pointed out that the meeting had allowed to review progress of bilateral co-operation and discuss the outcome of the Tunisian-Moroccan High Joint Commission's 16th session, and several regional, Arab and international issues.

He also highlighted the two countries' convergent views and stands about various issues.

Mr. El Fassi added: "I expressed to Mr. President the pride of Morocco—Kingdom, Government and people—at Tunisia's progress in the social, economic, urban development, and diplomatic areas."

The Moroccan Prime Minister pointed out that the good relations between Tunisia and Morocco are recording further development thanks to the strong fraternal ties binding President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali and King Mohamed VI and the two brotherly peoples.

The meeting was attended by the Prime Minister and Morocco's Ambassador in Tunis.

Foreign Affairs Minister Kamel Morjane receives Commander of US Africa Command

TUNIS, May 31, 2010 (TAP) - Foreign Affairs Minister Kamel Morjane received, on Monday in Tunis, General William Ward, Commander of US Africa Command (AFRICOM).

The talk provided the opportunity to stress the quality of the traditional friendship relations binding the two countries which share the same commitment to peace, security and stability across the world, values without which no human progress is possible.

The foreign minister emphasised the importance of consultation between Tunisia and the United States, and the need to further enrich and diversify co-operation between the two countries in a spirit of partnership and respect.

He also stressed efforts exerted by Tunisia of the Change to contribute to consolidation of peace in Africa and gather factors for the Continent's development.

After the meeting, General Ward said the talk had looked at prospects for developing co-operation between the two countries, particularly in the military field.

Tunisia firmly condemns Israeli aggression against Gaza-bound humanitarian flotilla

TUNIS, May 31, 2010 (TAP) - Tunisia firmly condemns the aggression perpetrated by Israeli occupation forces in international waters, against the Gaza-bound aid flotilla, which killed and injured several people.

In a foreign ministry statement released on Monday, Tunisia reasserts its categoric rejection of these hostile practices which represent an affront to the international will and a violation of international and humanitarian conventions and resolutions, threatening to further complicate the situation in the region and undermine any hope for peace.

While reiterating its condemnation of all forms of collective punishment, Tunisia urges the international community, particularly influential powers, to intervene immediately to lift the unjust blockade imposed on the Palestinian people in Gaza and put an end to their suffering.

Prime Minister receives special envoy of President of Cameroon

LA KASBAH, May 26 (TAP) - Prime minister Mohamed Ghannouchi received here this morning President of Cameroon's Special Envoy Adoum Gargoum, Minister in the office of Cameroon's Foreign Relations Minister in charge of relations with the Islamic World.

At the end of the meeting, Mr. Gargoum said he was carrying "a written message from President Paul Biya to President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali."

He also said that his visit to Tunisia is part of strengthening the friendly ties of cooperation with Tunisia, "the first commercial partner of Cameroon," he added.

“An emergent and exemplary country, Tunisia is a sister country with which Cameroon is keeping up excellent relations,” he affirmed, reckoning that it is necessary to always forge ahead on the way of reinforcing and preserving these very strong ties.”

The meeting was attended by the Ambassador of Cameroon in Tunis.

Prime Minister opens 2nd “Meetings of the Mediterranean”

Hammamet, May 25, 2010 (TAP)- Prime minister Mohamed Ghannouchi opened this morning in the resort city of Hammamet the second “meetings of the Mediterranean”, held May 25-26 under the high patronage of president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, ahead of the summit of Heads of States of the Union for the Mediterranean Countries.

These meetings, gathering distinguished political officials, businessmen and renowned experts, are held by the Arab Institute of Business Managers (IACE) and the Economic Prospective Institute of the Mediterranean World, in collaboration with the European Institute for the Mediterranean.

The PM said, at the opening session that any increase of 1% in the GDP of the southern and eastern Mediterranean states leads to an increase of 0,2 to 0,3 % on average of the GDP of northern Mediterranean countries.

Conversely, any rise of 1% in the GDP of the European Union leads to an increase of 0,4 to 0,6 % of the GDP of Mediterranean states.

Hence the urgent need to consolidate the foundations of an effective and durable Euro-Mediterranean partnership, the PM affirmed.

He reminded that president Ben Ali had called, since 1993 in his address to the European Parliament in Strasbourg, for finding radical solutions to the different problems facing the two shores of the Mediterranean as part of a civilizational contract for co-development, which was confirmed during the Paris summit of the European Union, south and east Mediterranean countries held in July 2008. Nevertheless, the PM said, European investments in the South and East of the Mediterranean have remained limited just as the trade exchanges between the south Mediterranean states have remained poor, below 7 %. The European financial support to the South and East Mediterranean countries has also remained limited in spite of the improvement noticed after the conclusion of association accords, especially as part of the MEDA programme and the financial mechanism of the neighbourhood policy.

He went on saying that it is clear that the Barcelona process has not been up to it promises to reduce the development gap since the disparity of the per capita income between the countries of the Northern and Southern shores of the Mediterranean is increasing.

In view of these facts, the point is, according to the PM, to promote a new vision based on strategies likely to speed up the pace of Euro-Mediterranean economic integration

in a way that benefits all countries on both sides of the Mediterranean.

The new vision should take into account the progress achieved by most countries of the South and East of the Mediterranean and the changes that took place in the structure of their economies and societies by means of the fundamental reforms they carried out in the last two decades.

This approach allowed to speed up the pace of growth, increase competitiveness and further attract foreign investments which reached, in the period 2006-2008, about 160 billion dollars. The PM said that in Tunisia, a process of reforms had allowed to achieve a qualitative leap as regards the structuring of national economy, the diversification of its platform and the consolidation of activities with high knowledge content which accounted in 2009 for 25 % of the GDP. The country has managed to significantly improve the investment environment, which had a positive effect on the ability to attract foreign investments that stood at about 5 % of the GDP in the last 3 years, thanks to the increasing flows of FDI in high added value and high knowledge content activities like car parts, plane parts and ICT.

The PM went on saying that our destiny in the Euro-Mediterranean area is thus to further strengthen relations of cooperation at all levels, look at all possible ways and means for complementarity and interdependence of interests and take advantage of all potentialities to consolidate the foundations of a solidarity-based regional group capable of interacting with the data and realities of today's world characterized by a fierce competition and the emergence of great economic powers with huge production capacity and increasing competitiveness.

So the common vision of the Euro-Mediterranean area should take into account the need to boost interconnection of the economies of the Northern and Southern Mediterranean states. This would favour new opportunities of growth for both sides in view of the positive impact of such an approach on the increase of trade exchanges between the two shores and the improvement of competitiveness vis-à-vis other groupings. The PM declared that our aim is to adopt common strategies in priority fields including notably the protection of the Mediterranean against pollution since this sea represents our common heritage and vital space on which our present and future depend. It is necessary to join efforts to protect it against all the ecological risks threatening it. Its waters, he reminded, represent only 0,1 % of the global seawaters volume and are renewable only once every 100 years. It is in this context that lie the suggestions of president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali at the Paris summit “Barcelona Process-Union for the Mediterranean”, and especially those relating to the creation of a Mediterranean agency for the protection of the environment and the coastline. Alternative and renewable energies are also among the main fields under focus and notably solar energy. There actually is a pressing need to activate the Mediterranean solar plan and endeavour to fulfil the objective set by the first summit of the Union for the Mediterranean consisting in producing 20 000 additional megawatts of renewable energies by the year 2020.

The point is also, he added, to promote joint projects in scientific research and technological innovation, which implies strengthening ties and partnership between research centres and units on both sides of the Mediterranean, establishing a Euro-Mediterranean network to this end, valorising patents, boosting cooperation and exchange of expertise between technological poles in all Euro-Mediterranean countries and promoting development-related research units within economic enterprises, particularly those operating in promising sectors and innovative activities.

It is also important to strengthen ties and cooperation between academic institutions through exchange programmes for students and teachers, enhancing and establishing equivalence between joint university degrees, in addition to boosting cooperation and partnership in matters of competence certification for higher education graduates in scientific and technological fields.

The PM reckoned that it is important to speed up the launching of projects set as part of the Union for the Mediterranean, especially maritime highways, electric connection and increase of broadband internet speed, in addition to networking the infrastructure of South Mediterranean states, notably highways and railways. It is necessary, he said, to reinforce the existing funding mechanisms by allowing South Mediterranean countries that have made large strides in the process of integration within the Euro-Mediterranean area, to have the benefit of European structured funds and specialized agencies so that they can accelerate the pace of their integration. It is also necessary to establish a Euro-Mediterranean development bank to support the efforts made in matters of improving infrastructures, developing human resources and promoting private initiative.

Economic actors and businessmen on both shores of the Mediterranean have an essential role to play in consolidating channels of communication between them, further exploring opportunities and possibilities of joint ventures, taking advantage of mechanisms adopted in matters of cumulative rules of origin and joining Euro-Mediterranean networks of marketing and distribution.

The PM said that economic enterprises in the Euro-Mediterranean area are also urged to show further opening out onto markets outside this area, especially African markets and to carry out joint ventures there. The interdependence and connection of enterprises on both sides of the Mediterranean are now offered large opportunities in many sectors, particularly in the textile and clothing industry and mechanical and electrical industries, not to mention the large possibilities provided by the services sector in view of the human resources available in South Mediterranean states who are increasingly meeting the requirements of the new economy.

In conclusion, the prime minister affirmed that our area has many and enough assets that entitle it to be a shining development pole at international level.

Foreign Minister Kamel Morjane receives the Deputy Speaker of the Duma

TUNIS, May 24, 2010 (TAP) - Foreign Minister Kamel Morjane asserted, when receiving on Monday Mrs. Nadejda Guerassimova, deputy Speaker of the Duma, Russia's lower representative house, Tunisia's determination to establish privileged and fruitful relations with Russia.

The minister said that the friendship and co-operation relations binding the two countries would help identify new practical formulas to deepen bilateral co-operation, pointing up, in this regard, the positive role played by the Tunisian-Russian parliamentary dialogue in further reinforcing co-operation ties in the various sectors, in service of the two countries' and two friendly peoples' interests.

The meeting also turned on regional and international issues of mutual interest and on means to enhance security and peace in the world, particularly in the African continent.

In a statement to Tunis-Afrique Presse news agency, Mrs. Guerassimova expressed Russia's attachment to strengthen co-operation relations with Tunisia in several sectors, notably investment, energy, environment, tourism, youth and sports, pointing out, in this connection, Russia's support to President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali's initiative to proclaim 2010 "International Youth Year," which had been approved of by the UN General Assembly.

Besides, the Russian guest highlighted the important position held by Tunisia in its regional and international environment, voicing wish to further bolster Tunisian-Russian relations and enrich them in the various fields.

Tunis Declaration on celebration of Africa Day

TUNIS, May 24, 2010 (TAP) -Tunisia expressed pride at belonging to the African continent and resolute commitment to forge ahead on the way of promoting relations of co-operation and solidarity among African states, reinforcing peace and security in the continent and securing the attributes of comprehensive development for all the peoples of the region.

In a declaration published on the occasion of the celebration, Tuesday, May 25, of Africa Day, Tunisia outlines the great value it has been attaching, since the change under the leadership of President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali, to the African dimension in its foreign policy.

The declaration highlights that the concomitance of the celebration of this date with the proclamation of 2010 as year of peace and security in Africa can only testify to the deep awareness of African peoples about the importance of keeping security and reinforcing the foundations of peace and stability, so as to fulfill the aspirations of the continent peoples to further prosperity and development and increase the African countries' capacity to take up common challenges and win stakes through the adoption of an approach that favours the close connection between peace and security on the one hand and development and solidarity on the other hand.

Tunisia, the declaration says, keeps on actively contributing to the efforts of the United Nations Organisation and the African Union to maintain a climate

of peace and stability in the region, contain hotbeds of tension, settle conflicts peacefully and prevent their triggering in the different regions of the continent.

This initiative, the declaration adds, arises from Tunisia's constant care for peace, justice and stability and its deep faith in the right of African citizens to a decent life in security and peace.

Besides, the declaration stresses the importance of joining efforts to forge ahead on the way of boosting African joint action so as to favour the integration of the continent into the world economic process.

It also appears that this year's celebration of Africa Day under the theme « keeping and reinforcing peace through sports in Africa » provides the occasion to reaffirm Tunisia's will to consecrate the noble values of sports since they represent an adequate way to develop youths' talents and a major factor for rapprochement and understanding between peoples and for the dissemination, on the largest scale, of the values of peace, openness and tolerance.

The declaration reminds, in this regard of the adoption, on November 3, 2003, by the UN General Assembly following the initiative of the President of the Republic, of a resolution proclaiming 2005 an International Year of Sport and Physical Education in the service of peace and security in the world.

In conclusion, the declaration reiterates Tunisia's constant commitment to actively contribute to the efforts aimed to boost the comprehensive development process, reinforce the attributes of peace and security all over the African continent and strengthen ties among peoples for the benefit of mutual interests and in order to secure a better future for young generations.

Tunisian-Chinese working session focuses on ways to strengthen bilateral relations

TUNIS, May 17, 2010 (TAP) - The Tunisian-Chinese co-operation relations and ways to strengthen and boost them were the focus of a working session, held on Monday afternoon under the chairmanship of Foreign Affairs Minister Kamel Morjane and his Chinese counterpart Yang Jiechi, in the presence of the two countries' delegations.

Mr. Kamel Morjane stressed, on the occasion, Tunisia's strong will, as instructed by President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali, to foster the long-standing ties of friendship between the Tunisian and Chinese peoples, intensify political consultation with China on issues of mutual interest and seek to strengthen the fruitful economic and trading co-operation between the two countries, expressing Tunisia's wish to hoist these relations with this friendly country to the level of strategic partnership.

The two sides praised the remarkable level of bilateral relations and the continuous consultation and co-ordination between the two countries as part of international organisations on key regional and international issues of mutual interest, while stressing determination to consolidate bilateral co-operation in the different economic, political and cultural fields.

They also commended the forthcoming holding of the 8th session of the Tunisian-Chinese joint committee next July in Beijing.

The two ministers also emphasised the need to enrich South-South dialogue and co-operation through interdependent horizontal development projects that create adequate conditions for more balanced international relations in a world marked by swift and deep changes.

Mr. Kamel Morjane underlined, in this regard, the need to increase Chinese direct investments in Tunisia by making the most of the opportunities of co-operation favoured by the Chinese-Arab Co-operation Forum and the Chinese-African Forum.

He said that Tunisia's foreign policy is based on compliance with international law, contribution to establishment of bonds of co-operation among peoples, reminding of the role of Tunisia in seeking a fair and comprehensive settlement to the Middle East problem and the need to carry on efforts to boost the peace process and pointing to Tunisia's constant support to the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people through the creation of an independent Palestinian State on its own land.

For his part, the Chinese Foreign Minister praised the gains and successes of Tunisia at all levels, thanks to the pertinent leadership of President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali, expressing his country's sustained will to boost Chinese-Tunisian co-operation by making the most of all opportunities offered by the strong partnership relations based on mutual confidence and respect and lauding the remarkable Tunisian participation at the Shanghai Universal Exhibition.

He also expressed China's support to President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali's initiative to proclaim 2010 International Youth Year and to hold, next year in Tunisia, an international conference on youth, calling on the international community to contribute to the success of this conference.

On the Middle East issue, he pointed out that China supports the Arab causes, first and foremost the Palestinian people's cause and backs up the Middle East peace process to reach a comprehensive and just settlement in the service of peace, security and stability in the region and the world.

After the working session, the two ministers signed an economic and technical co-operation agreement, providing for a donation from the Chinese Government to the Tunisian Government worth 4 million dinars to finance a development project, and a draft agreement to send Chinese medical teams to Tunisia.

During a news briefing after the working session, Messrs. Kamel Morjane and Yang Jiechi expressed both sides' strong commitment, under the impetus of the two countries' leaders, President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali and President Hu Jintao, to further boost the relations of friendship and co-operation between Tunisia and China in all fields and elevate them to the highest levels to serve the mutual interests and the causes of justice, peace and development in the world.

The Chinese minister said his talks with Mr. Kamel Morjane had been highly fruitful and taken place in a constructive and positive atmosphere. The Chinese FM emphasised his country's commitment to a peaceful and just settlement of the Middle East issue and its support to diplomatic efforts designed to reach a peaceful settlement to the Iranian file.

Foreign Minister Kamel Morjane receives Italian European Affairs Minister

TUNIS, May 17, 2010 (TAP) - Foreign Minister Kamel Morjane received on Monday, Italian European Affairs Minister Andrea Ronchi.

The foreign minister pointed out that the Tunisian- Italian relations have always been characterised by a fruitful and constructive dialogue at the bilateral level, as well as the edification of an interdependent and coherent Euro-Mediterranean community.

The two ministers looked at prospects for deepening Tunisia's relations with the European Union.

At the end of the meeting, the Italian minister said that, for Italy, "Tunisia represents a strategic partner," pointing out that his visit to Tunisia is part of reinforcing the "excellent" ties binding Italy and Tunisia.

He voiced satisfaction at the two countries' economic relations, mentioning in this regard the already announced large-scale projects, notably in the energy sector, more particularly the solar energy.

Mr. Ronchi also specified that the meeting had provided the opportunity to reassert joint will to strengthen relations between the Maghreb and Europe.

Tunisia takes part in Arab-Chinese Co-operation Forum

TIANJIN, May 14, 2010 (TAP) - Foreign Affairs Minister Kamel Morjane led the Tunisian delegation to the 4th ministerial meeting of the Arab-Chinese Co-operation Forum, held on May 13-14 in Tianjin and whose opening session was chaired by Premier of the State Council of the People's Republic of China Wen Jiabao.

In an address at the meeting's works, Mr. Morjane stressed progress of Arab-Chinese relations and the need to further boost them to hoist them to the level of a strategic partnership.

He also stressed the necessity to energise co-operation in the areas of investment, education, environment, technology and scientific research, given the importance of these sectors in the success of development programmes and in strengthening the capacity of the countries' economies to adjust to ups and downs the world economy and shield themselves against the fallout of the current economic and financial crisis.

In the final statement of this meeting, participants praised the United Nations General Assembly's adoption of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's initiative to proclaim 2010 "International Youth Year."

They called upon the Arab countries and China to participate actively in events to be held as part the International Youth Year by organising national and regional activities.

They also expressed satisfaction of the Arab countries and China at Tunisia's choice to hold in 2012 the 5th session of the Arab-Chinese Co-operation Forum.

During the closing ceremony, Chinese President Hu Jintao expressed consideration to President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali, praising the choice of Tunisia's hosting of the 5th Forum in 2012. He voiced confidence to see this session be crowned with success, given Tunisia's reputation in matters of hospitality and organisation of large-scale events.

Three documents were signed at the end of works. They are:

- Tianjin declaration on establishing relations of strategic co-operation between China and Arab countries,
- Final declaration of the forum and
- Executive programme of the Forum for the 2010-2012 period which stresses the importance to strengthen mechanisms of political consultation and contacts.

Works of Tunisian-Syrian High Joint Committee's 11th session close

TUNIS, May 14, 2010 (TAP) - Works of the 11th session of the Tunisian-Syrian High Joint Committee ended, on Friday, under co-chairmanship of Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi and his Syrian counterpart Mohamed Neji El-Otri, with attendance of the two countries' delegations.

The two prime ministers signed the minutes of the session.

They also signed the following agreements, memoranda of understanding and action programmes:

- Executive action programme for (2010-2011) between the Exports Promotion Centre and the Syrian Exports Development and Promotion Organisation.
- Co-operation agreement between the Sfax port and Syria's Tartous Port's General Authority.
- Executive programme of the co-operation agreement in higher education for 2010, 2011 and 2012.
- Memorandum of understanding on co-operation in small and medium enterprises development field
- Framework agreement between the Central Bank of Tunisia and the Central Bank of Syria.
- Legal and judiciary co-operation agreement in civilian and commercial areas.

Mr. Mohamed Ghannouchi expressed satisfaction at the outcome of the Tunisian-Syrian High Joint Committee's 11th session works which ended with devising action programmes for the coming period.

He said the noteworthy progress made by the two countries at the level of bilateral co-operation encourages them to move forward on the path of further promoting this

co-operation, giving the available frameworks such as the Arab trade zone.

He emphasised the keenness expressed by both sides during this session to boost Tunisian-Syrian co-operation on strong and lasting bases, in line with the will driving President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali and his brother President Bachar el-Assad, to meet the aspirations of the two brotherly peoples.

He also stressed the need to make the most of available means to boost trade exchanges and joint investments and develop co-operation in all areas.

For his part, Mr. Mohamed Neji El-Otri expressed satisfaction at the fraternal atmosphere that had marked the committee's works and the keenness to remove obstacles and foster co-operation, in accordance with directives of two countries' leaders.

He said that co-operation between the two sisterly countries is part of strengthening Arab joint action, expressing conviction that the signed agreements will become effective.

Tunisia-EU: Launching of Tunisia friends group at European Parliament

Brussels, May 13, 2010 (TAP)- As part of his working visit in Brussels, Foreign Minister Kamel Morjane presided, together with Belgian Minister of State and European MP Louis Michel, over a ceremony to launch Tunisia friends group at the European parliament, in a friendly and convivial atmosphere, with attendance of European MPs members of this group and European Commission officials.

The FM expressed satisfaction at the setting up of this group, stressing that it testifies to the excellent relations between Tunisia and the European Parliament and affirming that partnership with the European Union is for Tunisia a strategic and well considered choice based on mutual trust and respect.

He said that under chairmanship of Louis Michel, a leading European figure and a friend of Tunisia, the group will be able to actually provide its contribution to the rapprochement between Tunisia and the European Union. As to Tunisia friends group chairman Louis Michel, he stressed the fact that the aim of the group is to "launch a spirit of dialogue between men and peoples, between cultures and religions at a time when mankind is more than ever before in need of tolerance, understanding and solidarity".

In this context, he described that day as historical in that it signals the start of a new stage in the rapprochement with Tunisia, "a key partner for the European Union in the Arab world".

He also hailed the Tunisian development model and the exemplary achievements in the Arab and African world, affirming that Tunisia is "a country capable of providing its population with a set of basic services that other countries in the region could not bring into play".

He expressed will to endeavour, in collaboration with the European MPs friends of Tunisia to support Tunisia within

the European Parliament and contribute to strengthen a friendship "that will enable us to further get acquainted, understand and appreciate each other to build up together a shared future".

The foreign minister had met before with European parliament president Jerzy Buzek, with attendance of foreign affairs commission president Gabriel Albertini and president of Maghreb delegation at the European Parliament Pier Antonio Panzeri.

The meeting allowed to highlight the quality of relations of co-operation between Tunisia and the European Parliament and prospects to further boost them.

The FM stressed Tunisia's will to strengthen relations of partnership with the European Union, wishing to be able to rely on the support of the European Parliament in this crucial stage to deepen Tunisia-EU relations while assuring his interlocutors that Tunisia is entering this new stage with conviction and confidence in its capacities and potentialities.

The president of the European Parliament hailed Tunisia's efforts on the way of development and modernity and the progress recorded in the economic and social fields, voicing satisfaction at the state of furtherance of partnership between Tunisia and the European Union and wish to further reinforce relations of co-operation between Tunisia and the European Parliament and Europe in general.

As to the chairman of the foreign affairs commission, he hailed Tunisia's development work and expressed satisfaction at the revival of co-operation between Tunisia and the European Parliament which found expression notably in the holding of the 13th inter-parliamentary meeting and the fruitful dialogue held on the occasion.

He expressed readiness of the European Parliament to back Tunisia in this stage of deepening its relations of partnership with the Union.

Besides and on the sidelines of the 8th meeting of the Tunisia-EU Association council, the FM conferred with NATO secretary general Anders Fogh Rasmussen about relations between Tunisia and NATO, established in 1994 and means likely to develop them as part of the Mediterranean dialogue.

Tunisian-Moroccan High Joint Committee concludes set of agreements

KASBAH, May 7, 2010 (TAP) - The 16th session of the Tunisian-Moroccan High Joint Committee closed works, on Friday morning in Tunis, under co-chairmanship of Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi and his Moroccan counterpart Abbas el Fassi with attendance of the two countries' delegations.

During this meeting, the two ministers signed minutes of the session which was also marked by the signing of several agreements, executive programmes and protocols.

They are:

- Co-operation agreement between the Exports Promotion Centre (CEPEX) and Maroc-Export.

- Framework agreement between the National Water Exploitation and Distribution Company (SONEDE) and the Moroccan Drinking Water Board (ONEP).
- Framework co-operation agreement between the Moroccan Renewable Energy Development Centre (CDER) and the Tunis International Environment Technologies Centre (CITET).
- Convention to exchange information and expertise and develop applied research in the civil engineering, environment and industry fields.
- Executive programme of the co-operation protocol in religious affairs for the 2010-2012 period.
- Executive co-operation programme in the environment protection field for 2010-2011.
- Executive programme of the industrial co-operation agreement for the 2010-2012 period.
- Executive programme of the co-operation agreement in energy saving and renewable energy fields.
- Memorandum of understanding for the mutual recognition of maritime capacities and certificates between the Board of Merchant Navy and Ports of Tunisia (OMMP) and the Moroccan Navy Authorities.
- Protocol annexed to the mutual administrative co-operation convention in matters of prevention and identification of customs infractions.
- Framework co-operation agreement between the Moroccan Ministry in charge of Relations with Parliament and the Government's Secretariat-General in charge of Relations with the Chambers of Deputies and Advisers.
- Co-operation agreement in youth and sports field.

Mr. Mohamed Ghannouchi voiced satisfaction at the positive results of this session's works which, he said, were crowned with the signing of several agreements.

He pointed out that this meeting provided the opportunity to review the development of bilateral co-operation and prospects for developing it and examine ways to iron out difficulties impeding the process of complementarity to serve the interests of the two brotherly peoples.

In this context, he emphasised the common will to give a fresh impetus to trade exchanges to increase their volume to at least 500 million dollars in 2011, in addition to the rise of joint investments and reinforcement of competitiveness of the two countries in their regional and international environment.

The importance that President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and his brother King Mohamed Vii attach to the progress of relations between the two sisterly countries and their will to hoist them to higher levels, he pointed out, is the best guarantor to bolster ties of rapprochement and co-operation between the two countries on the basis of a future-oriented and coherent approach that meets the two peoples' aspirations.

In this regard, the prime minister stressed the need to make the most of the positive framework governing the relations of bilateral co-operation to foster partnership between Tunisian and Moroccan economic enterprises in

order to enhance their efficiency and strengthen their positioning in the Euro-Mediterranean space.

He also pointed to the need to make the most of opportunities offered to promote co-operation in promising sectors, including alternative energies, information and communication technologies, scientific research and technological innovation.

For his part, Mr. Abbas el Fassi expressed satisfaction at the climate of understanding and co-operation which marked this session's works, reminding that Tunisian-Moroccan co-operation which dates back to the beginning of independence has been strengthened continuously in all political, economic, social and diplomatic areas.

He commended, in this context, the strong ties of fraternity binding King Mohamed VI and President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali as well as the two brotherly peoples, pointing out that the common stands on regional and international issues and the similarity of the two countries' choices help boost bilateral co-operation.

The excellent political relations between the two sisterly countries, he underlined, are evidenced in the large participation of Moroccan parties in the international symposium held annually in Tunisia as part of the celebration of the November 7 anniversary.

In conclusion, the Moroccan Prime Minister praised the efforts made continuously by Tunisia to boost the Maghreb construction, paying tribute to President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali for his role in strengthening the Arab Maghreb Union construction process.

Foreign Affairs Minister receives Moroccan Secretary of State and Pakistani Deputy FM

TUNIS, May 5, 2010 (TAP) - Foreign Affairs Minister Kamel Morjane underlined, when receiving on Wednesday, Mrs. Latifa Akharbach, Moroccan Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and Co-operation, that Tunisia is striving to strengthen its bonds of fraternity, co-operation and complementarity with Morocco and reinforce the historical relations tying the two countries to serve their mutual interests.

The minister also said that intensification and diversification of bilateral co-operation are likely to contribute to strengthen the great Arab Maghreb edifice.

For her part, Mrs. Latifa Akharbach commended Tunisia's success in organising the eighth ministerial meeting of the "5 +5 Dialogue," pointing to Morocco's support to the initiative of President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali to proclaim 2010 International Youth Year.

The Moroccan Secretary of State, who is visiting Tunisia as part of the meeting of the 12th session of Tunisian-Moroccan follow-up and co-ordination committee, expressed Morocco's will to strengthen the Tunisian-Moroccan relations to serve the two brotherly peoples' interests.

The meeting also focused on ways to consolidate partnership relations in the Mediterranean region and in the African continent.

The foreign minister also received Mr. Nawabzada Malik Amad Khan, Pakistani Deputy Foreign Minister, who is leading his country's delegation to works of the 7th session of the Tunisian-Pakistani joint committee.

Mr. Kamel Morjane stressed that the Tunisian diplomacy endeavours works untiringly, under President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali's impetus, to enrich dialogue between different groupings to gather appropriate conditions to develop its relations with sisterly and friendly countries.

Tunisia, he added, is also prone to boost its co-operation with these countries to strengthen peace, security and solidarity among States. Having stressed the interest that Tunisia takes in boosting joint Islamic action to enhance the values of tolerance, moderation and golden mean, the minister highlighted the opportunities of fruitful exchange offered by Tunisian-Pakistani co-operation, thanks to the consultation established between the two countries and the sincere will to boost them at all levels and hoist them to the level of an active partnership.

The Pakistani deputy minister commended, on his part, the positive role of Tunisia in establishing international relations based on peace, security, stability and solidarity, expressing Pakistan's determination to give a fresh impetus to its relations with Tunisia at all levels, particularly at the social and economic ones.

Prime Minister receives Pakistan's Deputy Foreign Minister

TUNIS, May 5, 2010 (TAP) - Prime minister Mohamed Ghannouchi received, Wednesday morning in Tunis, Pakistan's deputy foreign minister Nawabzada Malik Amad Khan, currently on a working visit to Tunisia.

At the end of the meeting, the Pakistani deputy minister said the meeting offered an opportunity to discuss the development of the excellent relations between Tunisia and Pakistan and prospects to boost them.

Talks, he added, also provided the occasion to look at means to implement the planned setting up of a joint business council, to strengthen ties between the two countries' investors and to increase bilateral trade exchanges.

The Pakistani official out pointed in this regard the strong will of the two countries' leaders to take the best advantage of the available opportunities of cooperation for the benefit of mutual interest and in order to meet the expectations of the two brotherly peoples.

The meeting was attended by the secretary of state in the foreign minister's office in charge of American and Asian affairs.

Tunisian-Pakistani Joint Commission's 7th session opens works

TUNIS, May 4, 2010 (TAP) - The first session of Political Consultations and the Tunisian-Pakistani Joint Commission's 7th session are held on the 4th-6th instant in Tunis, under co-chairmanship of Secretary of State in the Foreign Minister's office in charge of American and

Asian Affairs Saida Chtioui and Pakistan's Deputy Foreign Minister Nawabzada Malik Amad Khan.

Opening works of the session, Mrs. Chtioui pointed out that these meetings are part of the tradition of consultation established between the two countries on regional and international issues of mutual interest, and the consolidation of the friendship and co-operation ties binding Tunisia and Pakistan.

She expressed Tunisia's will to further boost technical, scientific and industrial co-operation between the two countries, stressing the importance of ensuring regularity of contacts between senior officials and the economic operators, laying emphasis on the private sector's role in energising and diversifying trade exchanges.

For his part, Mr. Nawabzada Malik Amad Khan lauded Tunisia's political stability, its economic performances and its active role in service of peace and security across the world, expressing Pakistan's wish to further boost co-operation and partnership with Tunisia.

The two officials highlighted convergence of views on international issues of mutual interest and pointed out the importance of meetings and consultations between the two countries' officials.

These meetings are expected to be crowned by the signing of agreements on lifting visas for holders of diplomatic and special passports, co-operation between the Exports Promotion Centre (CEPEX) and the Pakistani Trade Development Authority, between Tunis Afrique Press (TAP) news agency and Pakistan's Associated Press, and between the Tunisian Industry, Trade and Handicrafts Union (UTICA) and the Pakistani Federation of the Chambers of Commerce and Industry to create a joint business council, and the signing of minutes of the Tunisian-Pakistani Joint Commission's 7th session.

Tunisia takes part in ministerial meeting of Arab Peace Initiative Committee

CAIRO, May 4, 2010 (TAP)- Secretary of State in charge of Maghreb, Arab and African Affairs Abdelhafidh Harguem led the Tunisian delegation to the ministerial meeting of the Arab Peace Initiative Committee held in Cairo.

The Secretary of State emphasised, in this regard, the constant position of principle of Tunisia, under the leadership of President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali, towards the Palestinian just cause and its support to all initiatives and efforts designed to reach a just and comprehensive settlement to this issue, in accordance with international law, references of the peace process and the Arab peace initiatives, to allow the Palestinian people to recover all their legitimate rights and establish their independent State.

Mr. Abdelhafidh Harguem stressed the need to gather appropriate conditions to make the most of the positive stands of the United States, the European Union and the international Quartet on the Middle East issue, to continue pressurising Israel to drive it to stop aggressions against the Palestinian people and comply with international law.

He also underlined the importance of inter-Palestinian reconciliation which is the best guarantor of the unity and force of the Palestinian stand.

Interior and Local Development Minister announces final results of municipal elections

TUNIS, May 10, 2010 (TAP) - Interior and Local Development Minister Rafik Belhaj Kacem held, on Monday morning, a news conference, with attendance of Secretary of State in charge of Regional and Local Communities Mongi Chouchène, during which he announced the final results of May 9, 2010 municipal elections.

The minister started the conference by stressing the efforts exerted by the department's various sections, in materialisation of President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali's care to combine all the required conditions so that this political event be characterised by transparency and compliance with the Law, in order to contribute to the consolidation of the country's democratic and pluralist process.

The minister reviewed, in this regard, the various measures taken at the central, regional and local levels to provide all conditions of success for these elections, be it regarding the material and legal organisation, notably through constant revision of electoral lists and fitting-out of polling stations, or reception of the declarations of the candidate lists and the organisation of the electoral campaign, up to voting day and the organisation of the vote-counting and inventory operations.

He recalled, in this regard, the amendments brought to the Electoral Code with a view to consolidating the pluralistic and democratic process, citing in particular lowering the ceiling of the number of seats obtained by a single list from 80 to 75% out of the total number of seats and reducing the number of polling stations from 6,661 in 2005 to 5,617, in addition to the legal guarantees offered by the Electoral Code and the mission falling on the National Municipal Elections Observatory which was tasked by President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali to oversee the various stages of the electoral operation.

The minister, then, made an account on the parties running lists and the independent ones, pointing out that 406 lists obtained final receipts for 4,478 seats in the 264 municipal constituencies, specifying that 86 running lists did not receive approval receipts as they did not meet the legal conditions.

He added that, among the lists which obtained the final receipt, 142 belong to the opposition parties or independent lists against 90 which had obtained final receipts in 2005.

Mr. Rafik Belhaj Kacem discussed the conditions in which took place the electoral campaign, as regards notably refitting of needed spaces to the running lists to organise their meetings and present their electoral manifestos.

The minister underlined that the electoral campaign and vote casting were characterised by fair competition and compliance with the Law.

No abuse or any claim has been recorded by the administration, he asserted, commending the attitude of

the running lists who all acknowledged neutrality of the administration which saw to it, he specified, that the electoral rules be strictly respected.

Members of the National Municipal Elections Observatory discharged their mission in total freedom and independence, by relying, in this regard, on the statement made by the Observatory chairman about the positive atmosphere which marked the good organisation of the electoral operation and the respect of the Electoral Code provisions and required conditions.

The observers chosen by the political parties and the independent lists to guarantee the follow-up of progress of the elections have been able to fulfil their mission in normal conditions, he said, adding that the foreign observers and the regional organisations were also able to follow progress of vote casting and pointed up the voters high turnout and the good organisation of democracy and political pluralism in Tunisia.

After reminding that the governors had proclaimed publicly the number of votes obtained by each list in the 264 constituencies, as well as the distribution of seats among the various running lists, on the basis of minutes drafted to this effect, the minister announced that the final results of the municipal elections are presented as follows:

- Number of seats: 4,478
- Number of registered voters: 3,104,615
- Number of votes cast: 2,591,271
- Overall turnout rate: 83.47%
- Number of spoiled ballots: 62,037
- Number of counted votes: 2,529,234

On the basis of votes won by the different lists having obtained 3% of the registered votes in the concerned constituencies, he pointed out, the RCD got 75% of the seats, while remaining seats were shared out among the other running lists:

- MDS: 154 seats
- PUP: 119 seats
- UDU: 66 seats
- PSL: 35 seats
- PVP: 29 seats
- Independent lists: 15 seats

Hence, the total number of municipal councillors representing the opposition parties and the independent lists are 418 councillors, i.e. a rise of 150 councillors compared with the 2005 municipal elections.

In this context, he asserted that success of the 2010 municipal elections is to enrich the gains of the municipal action and favour the qualitative change achieved since the Change, thanks to the support that President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali has incessantly lent to town-halls.

In this connection, he reasserted the new municipal councillors' commitment to enrich the gains of municipal action on the basis of a new vision of regional and local

development which draws its tenets and orientations from President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali's vanguard programme "Together, We Meet The Challenges," which will undoubtedly strengthen the attributes of living quality and guarantee the right of the Tunisians, men and women, in the present as well as in the future to a balanced living environment.

Answering questions of media representatives, Mr. Rafik Belhaj Kacem said the municipal elections are a new stage that reflects the concrete progress on the way of consecrating the pluralistic process, pointing out that the electoral system in force guarantees the Opposition's presence in municipal councils and the Chamber of Deputies up to at least 25%.

On the filing of nominations and reception of final receipts, the minister stressed the role of the arbitration of law between all sides, pointing out that the administration rules on granting these receipts only if they comply or not with law.

Moreover, he added that registration on electoral rolls is made as part of the implementation of Article 6 of the Electoral Code, saying that electoral rolls are valid on a continuous basis; they are revised on a permanent basis according to the conditions set forth in the present code, he added.

He reminded, in this regard, that on the occasion of preparations for these elections, the administration conducted, in accordance with the presidential instructions, an awareness campaign via written and audiovisual media to inform citizens who lost their voting cards of the possibility to change them and receive a copy till voting day.

Regarding the assessment of youth's participation in this electoral event, the Minister of the Interior and Local Development pointed out that this participation recorded a noticeable increase compared with the 2005 municipal elections, thanks to the vanguard presidential decision providing for lowering voting age from 20 to 18 years, a step which materialised during the recent revision of the Electoral Code.

In conclusion, the minister underlined that attributes of political development in Tunisia have made strides since the advent of the Change, at both the level of Law and practice, thanks to the great reforms carried out in the electoral system and political life in general.

He said that any neutral observer can but admit that the pluralistic democratic process in Tunisia advances with steady steps and in an irreversible manner, thanks to the firm will and wise leadership of President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali.

Large turnout, perfect evidence of consecrated pluralism

TUNIS, May 9, 2010 (TAP) - Voting for the municipal elections took place on Sunday in a positive atmosphere which, according to all participants and foreign observers, has come to materialise the high degree of maturity of Tunisian society in practicing healthy democracy and its attachment to the rules of fair competition and civil

behaviour, within the framework of compliance with the provisions of the Law.

The climate which characterised the voting process across the country's different governorates certainly reasserts President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali's strong commitment to ensure that the citizens' free choice of their representatives in the elected institutions be a perfect translation of pluralism and the wealth of the national political scene.

Citizens' streaming in large numbers to polling stations, particularly youth among them, girls and boys, has come to materialise deep awareness of the importance of this new electoral event to choose 4,478 councillors for the 264 town halls.

This interest is reflected in the high turnout which reached, two hours before closing of the polling stations, 80.84%.

This has been a pertinent indicator of the Tunisian citizens' confidence in the elections and credibility of the electoral process which was held in total transparency and fair competition between the six running parties and the independent lists, in accordance with the Electoral Code.

The large participation in these elections also shows the deep faith Tunisians have in the efficiency of municipal action as a mechanism to participate directly in the management of public affairs.

This has also been an evidence of the dynamics Tunisia's political action has been witnessing and a confirmation of the vitality of different spheres of political and intellectual freedoms in the country.

The municipal electoral campaign provided the opportunity to the different candidates, during a 6-day period, to meet with their parties' activists and sympathisers and with the citizens, and to lend a receptive ear to their concerns and expectations.

The campaign also helped establish a fruitful debate in different media. Those discussions gave way to an opinion confrontation in line with consecrating the right of partisanship and allegiance only to Tunisia.

This approach was largely welcomed by the running political parties and foreign observers who came to Tunisia to oversee the electoral process and become acquainted with the progress the country has made in matters of political participation.

The various parties praised conditions in which the electoral process has been held, emphasising that their participation in this new political event demonstrates their deep conviction that elections are the only way to consecrate democracy and entrench pluralism.

Visiting several polling stations in different regions of the country, foreign observers voiced satisfaction at the large participation of Tunisian citizens in the municipal elections of 2010, particularly youths among them, as well as the efforts exerted by the concerned authorities to gather all conditions of success.

Tunisia's success in organising these elections comes undeniably to enrich the performances made by Tunisia in the previous political events, particularly the presidential

and legislative elections of October 25, 2009 which had provided the opportunity to reassert Tunisians' cohesion around President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali and their adherence to his civilisational project and his future programme which has set as a target to improve the citizens' living standards and quality of life, in addition to strengthening the attributes of dignity, political stability and economic progress.

SOCIETY

President Ben Ali on celebration of Labour Day

CARTHAGE, May 1st, 2010 (TAP) - President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali honoured trade unionists, workers and heads of firms as he chaired Saturday a ceremony on Labour Day.

The Head of State delivered a speech, on the occasion, in which he highlighted the vital role played by professional organisations, along with the State, in raising awareness of new developments and innovations in the world, especially as regards the job market, patterns of labour, modes of production, investment opportunities and the requirements of competitiveness and export.

He called upon all social partners to adhere to the tradition of dialogue and consultation so that they settle all problems and reach consensus on all issues that are currently posed or that might be posed in the future within a climate of entente, co-operation and complementarity.

The Head of State voiced satisfaction at the fact that regular and periodic holding of social negotiations had become a distinctive feature of the country and their success in reinforcing inter-professional relations and enriching the traditions of dialogue and consensus among production partners, making of the Tunisian experience in the matter a model to follow having earned the respect of specialised regional and international organisations.

He recalled that 2009 had been marked by paying the second portion of the 7th three-year pay-increase programme and the wages of workers in the sectors not governed by sectorial collective conventions or by special statutes.

He expressed wish that these increases will serve as a catalyst for stepping up effort and improving performance.

The President of the Republic announced the increase of the minimum guaranteed wage in the agricultural and non-agricultural sectors, pointing out that the Government will set the amount of these increases after consulting with the concerned inter-professional organisations.

The Head of State called for further activating responsible and equitable social dialogue within enterprises and for rationalising inter-professional relations among all the structures involved, based on a collective awareness of rights and duties.

He announced, in this regard, a set of decisions concerning the sectors of employment, vocational training, the reform of retirement system and occupational safety.

President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali expressed constant attachment to ensure the indissociability of economic efficiency and social justice in all fields, reasserting that peoples' progress can only be achieved through generous efforts and good performance by all production partners.

Given the major global challenges currently faced in all fields, he affirmed, there is no other path but to rely on oneself, step up efforts and show a sense of initiative and audacity to overcome difficulties and obstacles and forge ahead on the path of achieving a comprehensive and balanced national development.

Then, the President of the Republic awarded the Labour Medal of the Exceptional Category to trade union executives and officials as a token of consideration for their efforts to establish professional relations based on entente and dialogue, so as to gather all factors of development and favour balance between the requirements of economic efficiency and social progress.

President Ben Ali also awarded the Exemplary Worker Prize to those labourers who distinguished themselves by their sense of initiative, labour and devotion and their commitment to increase production and improve productivity.

The Head of State also honoured several firms which distinguished themselves by their sustained effort to develop production means, improve working conditions, promote their workers' professional level and build their skills by presenting them with the Social Progress Prize.

He also awarded the Prize of Enterprises' Consultative Committees and Representatives of Employees to three consultative committees which distinguished themselves by their efficient contribution to the organisation of work to increase production and productivity, enhance vocational re-training of workers, promote human resources and develop and make the most of social projects.

In materialisation of the decision he had announced on last year's May 1 to establish an Occupational Health and Safety Prize, President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali honoured two enterprises when presenting them with this prize in consideration for their sustained efforts in matters of occupational health and safety by fitting out work stations, ensuring best hygiene conditions within the enterprise and strengthening prevention of occupational risks.

Earlier, Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT) Secretary-General Abdesslem Jerad had delivered an address in which he had voiced satisfaction at the climate of development and stability prevailing in Tunisia and the achievements accomplished in the various fields.

He asserted that they are achievements which testify to President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's clear-sighted and pertinent approach to boosting the national development process and to hoisting Tunisia to the highest levels of progress.

He reaffirmed the President of the Republic's conviction that respecting Man's dignity, developing relations at work, improving the individual's income and fairly sharing the development fruits all constitute the sine-qua-non conditions for guaranteeing economic prosperity and social progress.

Mr. Abdesslem Jerad extended, on the occasion, to the Head of State the trade unionists and labourers' acknowledgement for the support he has constantly provided to social negotiations, which could but evidence his attachment to improve the wage-earners' buying-power and working conditions.

He also reasserted the workers' commitment to contribute to the materialisation of the ambitious objectives set by the Presidential Programme for the coming years and to support the process of reform and Change which has been led by President Ben Ali with perspicacity and wisdom to help Tunisia make new strides on the path of materialising the attributes of democracy and consolidating the foundations of the Tunisian society based on welfare and solidarity.

President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali also had a meeting with members of UGTT Executive Board before the start of the ceremony which was attended by the Prime Minister, Speakers of the Chambers of Deputies and of Advisers, the Constitutional Democratic Rally (RCD) Politburo members, Government members, the Mufti of the Republic, the secretaries-general of political parties, chairmen of the national organisations, official bodies and consultative councils and several senior officials and national figures.

[Here is the full text of the speech](#)

Prime Minister underlines Tunisia's strong commitment to the development model based on correlation between the economic and social dimensions

TUNIS, May 11, 2010 (TAP) - The Higher Development Council met, on Tuesday in Gammarth, under Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi's chairmanship. The Council's works, which focused on the five-year draft development plan 2010-2014, was attended by several Government members, representatives of political parties, national councils and local councils.

The prime minister said the draft five-year plan, the first of the kind, sets a transition between the 11th and 12th Plans.

Mr. Ghannouchi reviewed the positive balance sheet of the first three years (2007-2009) of the 11th Plan, which spans over the 2007-2011 period, with an annual growth rate averaging 4.6% at constant prices, despite the fall of growth during 2008 and 2009 as a result of the fallout of the global financial and economic crisis, the worst one since 1929.

Another indicator cited by the prime minister: the per-capita income which reached 5,630 dinars, helping improve the citizen's buying power and making consumption the driving engine of growth, contributing to the latter by 72%.

Creation of jobs, he added, reached 195,000, which helped keep under control unemployment at a rate of 13.3% in 2009. In addition, overall investment went up by 10.8%, up from the forecast 8.7%, with an increase in the share of private investment reaching 60.3% out of the total investments, thanks the significant rise recorded by

foreign direct investments, i.e. 8,064 million dinars (MTD), compared with forecasts of 4,565 MTD by the 11th Plan.

All indicators show soundness of the approach to preservation of the country's financial balances earned Tunisia good ratings from the international agencies

The prime minister also said that national savings neared 21.9% of the GDP and the current average deficit of the balance of payments reached 2.9% of the GDP.

The rate of foreign debt compared to the GDP fell from 43% in 2006 to less than 39% in 2009. Foreign currency reserves rose from 4.6 billion dinars, reaching 13.3 billion dinars.

Mr. Ghannouchi pointed out that all indicators show soundness of the approach to preservation of the country's financial balances, which earned Tunisia good ratings from the international agencies.

He underlined that Tunisia yearns, during the next five-year period, to achieve an annual GDP growth rate of 5% at constant prices in order to increase the per-capita income up to 8,300 dinars by 2014.

The purpose, he said, is to cover all additional job demands, to cut the unemployment rate by over 2%, i.e. bring it down to 11.6%.

Emphasis will also be placed on targeting jobless university graduates in order to lower unemployment among this social segment from 21.7% in 2009 to 13.6% by 2014.

Tunisia also seeks to decrease foreign debt to less than 30% of the GDP, he said.

The prime minister underlined that achieving the hoped-for targets requires mobilising significant investments whose volume would reach no less than 98 billion dinars, i.e. 26% of the GDP.

The prime minister said the State will earmark no less than 26.5 billion dinars as part of the development budget to finance basic infrastructure and community facilities projects, in addition to programmes to support enterprises, promote research and consolidate the development process in priority regions.

Mr. Ghannouchi pointed out that the private sector is called to increase its share in investments to 13.8% per year, while placing emphasis on innovating sectors and high added-value sectors with high job capacities for university graduates.

Worth noting that the approach adopted in this area aims to attract 17.2 billion dinars of foreign direct investments (FDI), i.e. nearly 29% of the private sector's overall investments, compared with 8.4 billion dinars in the 10th Development Plan and 8.1 billion dinars in the period between 2007 and 2009.

Local development is a priority for the next stage

The objective for the next five-year period is to increase the rate of exports (+6.5%) and raise this sector's share in the GDP (+40%).

The prime minister pointed out that achieving these targets requires stepping up efforts to improve the

national economy's competitive edge by adopting a new generation of reforms aimed to enhance the administration's performance and ensure efficiency of services (logistics, transport and banking services).

He emphasised the will to strengthen intangible investments to reinforce their contribution to productivity and consolidate growth (+40% of the GDP).

The prime minister stressed that local development is a priority for the next stage, emphasising keenness to step up efforts to develop poles of industrial and technological competitiveness and establish a system of adapted incentives.

He highlighted Tunisia's keenness to show prudence, in light of the difficult changes, adopt a monitoring system to preserve the financial balances through a set of rules.

The latter provide for cutting the State budget deficit within the limit of 2% and reduce equalisation expenditure (oil, general equalisation fund and transport) to 1,500 million dinars per year.

These rules, added Mr. Ghannouchi, also consist in reducing classified debts so that they would reach 7% of the total commitments.

Tunisia will also strive to mobilise 17.2 million dinars of FDI and 7.9 billion dinars of loans repayable at advantageous conditions, and will keep commercial loans within proportions that do not exceed 6.4 billion dinars. The prime minister underlined Tunisia's strong commitment to the development model based on correlation between the economic and social dimensions, by preserving remittances whose share of the GDP is significant (20%), improving social coverage whose rate will increase to 98% in 2014 and supporting and guiding categories with special needs and low- income people.

Declaration on National Day for Disabled

TUNIS, May 29, 2010 (TAP) - Under the high auspices of the President of the Republic, Tunisia is observing on Saturday, May 29, 2010 the National Day for the Disabled under the motto "Disabled Youth: Pride of Achievements and Readiness to Take up Challenges."

The Declaration released, on the occasion, indicates that this national day is a renewed opportunity to remind of the gains and achievements accomplished for the benefit of disabled persons, thanks to President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali's sustained care for this social segment, and as part of a coherent human rights system that confirms equality of chances for all. The Declaration also underlines that this year's theme of the National Day for the Disabled falls in line with a national and international event consisting in proclaiming, at the Head of State's initiative, 2010 International Youth Year by the United Nations General Assembly.

In this regard, Tunisia has made of the protection of the disabled a national responsibility in which handicap prevention holds a permanent priority. Social protection of the disabled has, in turn, experienced a remarkable development to provide them with the appropriate conditions of a decent life, particularly within families

thanks to health care, fixed allowances, assistance and pensions.

The Declaration also points to the existence of a significant legal foundation for social integration of the disabled and their participation in public life, as well as the numerous measures aimed to establish a suitable environment to ease their integration.

The Declaration recalls the interest that Tunisia takes in the economic and professional integration of the disabled through the ratification of the International Convention n° 159 on professional adaptation and employment of the disabled.

This Convention calls for establishing a national policy for the professional promotion of the disabled and setting up appropriate mechanisms and programmes to ease their integration.

The Declaration highlights civil society's role in backing up State efforts to promote the disabled and improve their conditions.

Tunisia has 10 associations for the protection of the disabled which benefit from the State's support, particularly through the achievement of three presidential programmes to upgrade specialised centres (16.7 MTD), granting subsidies (18 MTD) and supplying each year 20 buses for the transport of the disabled.

The Declaration also points out that, thanks to the gains made for their benefit, youth with special needs have managed to demonstrate their capacities to take up challenges and win stakes.

They have distinguished themselves on the Arab and international scale, particularly in disability sport by winning Olympic medals at the Atlanta Paralympics (1996), 11 medals at Sydney Games (2000) and 21 medals at Beijing Games (2008).

The Declaration also stresses Tunisia's keenness, thanks to a constant political will, to develop its approaches and fields of intervention in order to anchor the culture of integration and guidance of the generations to help them become impregnated with noble values, particularly solidarity, mutual help and respect of peculiarities of the different social segments.

Symposium on contribution of Mediterranean youths to develop Euro-Mediterranean relations

TUNIS, May 27 (TAP)-"The contribution of Mediterranean youths to develop Euro-Mediterranean relations " is the subject of the 9th annual symposium on Euro-Mediterranean partnership held, Thursday in Tunis, by the Arab League Tunis Centre.

This conference is part of the initiative of president Zine el Abidine Ben Ali to proclaim 2010 an International Youth Year, unanimously adopted last December by the UN General Assembly. Its main aim is to look at means to fulfill the objectives of this initiative as regards notably strengthening ties of rapprochement and solidarity among world youths and particularly between youths of the two shores of the Mediterranean, and reinforcing the values of

dialogue, tolerance and consensus, far from all forms of fanaticism, withdrawal and discrimination.

Arab League deputy secretary-general and chairman of the Arab League Tunis Centre Chadli Neffati said this event is a good occasion to highlight the role of Mediterranean youths in consolidating Euro-Mediterranean co-operation and discuss means to increase this role in all the policies aimed to boost Euro-Mediterranean partnership.

It is necessary, he affirmed, to provide youths with the opportunity to express their concerns and views over the issues relating to their present and future and to set up the mechanisms favouring their contribution to decision-making.

The point is to further let them share in identifying solutions to the problems and challenges facing the region, to boost the burst of solidarity, co-operation and partnership between Mediterranean states, reinforce dialogue and tolerance between peoples of the region and deep-root the values shared by Euro-Mediterranean young people.

Tunisia observes World Family Day

TUNIS, May 14, 2010 (TAP) - Tunisia observes on Saturday, May 15, World Family Day, placed under the theme: "Impact of Migration on Family in the World."

The choice of this theme reflects awareness of the significant changes the world witnesses today and challenges posed particularly in the area of migration.

Observance of this day also shows the importance Tunisia grants to the family as fundamental cell of society and essential guarantor of its balance, stability, well-being and development.

The number of Tunisian families in 2008 reached 2,407,200 families, while the number of Tunisian expatriates stood 1,089,212 in 2009.

The Day provides an opportunity to highlight the gains made for the Tunisian family since 1987, thanks to President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's forward-looking approach.

Efforts have focused on materialising the modernist social project backed up by the complementary economic and social dimensions of development work.

To build up the family's capacities and enhance its participation in devising future policies, to enable it to be up to the renewed civilisational mission entrusted to it, the Head of State set for it, in his 2009-2014 programme, great objectives and vanguard orientations, summed up in the 7th Chapter: "Tunisian Women: Symbol of Authenticity and Modernity - The Family: a Pillar for Social Cohesion."

The programme plans to conduct a forward-looking study of social changes to grasp the contours of tomorrow's family.

The aim behind this approach is to adopt these results to prepare the 3rd national plan for the family, in order to promote the status of the family, make comprehensive

policies and devise adapted programmes and mechanisms.

The presidential programme for the next period has opened up wide prospects for strengthening the gains of all members of the family.

The emigrant family also benefited from a special interest as part of this programme in its 9th Chapter "Tunisians Abroad: Always at the Heart of the Nation." This chapter recommends developing the system adopted to guide the Tunisian expatriates, enhance their cohesion through upgrading spaces of expatriate families and taking into consideration the demographic and cultural changes in different programmes dedicated to them.

The regional and international leadership of the Tunisian experience is undeniable in the area of promotion of family and women potentials and enhancing of their participation in policy-making.

In this regard, the initiatives of First Lady Leila Ben Ali, Chairwoman of the Arab Organisation (AWO), to enhance the role of Arab women in the development process of their country helped promote the cause of women.

Trade Union Confederation of Arab Maghreb Workers holds regular meeting

TUNIS, April 30, 2010 (TAP) - The Trade Union Confederation of Arab Maghreb Workers (USTMA) Secretariat-General held its periodic meeting Wednesday in Tunis.

Chaired by Secretary-General Abdesslem Jrad, the meeting was attended by permanent members in charge of finance, programmes and information.

The meeting allowed to review the Union's activities and assess the general situation in the Maghreb region and look at prospects for energising the Maghreb trade union organisation's role in the Maghreb building-up process.

The secretariat-general worked out to this end a schedule for the coming period aimed to improve USTMA's output and consolidate co-operation fields with sister and friendly countries' union organisations.

The work schedule includes holding of a regional conference on the Maghreb trade unionists' role in stimulating the International Labour Charter published by the International Labour Organisation, next May 28-29 in Tunis, and the organisation of a meeting between the Maghreb trade unions to create co-ordination between Maghreb countries' professional unions and to start materialisation of co-operation agreements concluded with Norway's Labourers Union and the Spanish Labourers' Commissions, including a set of conferences and surveys over the next three years.

The secretariat-general looked notably at the Union's participation in the Annual Labour Conference, due next June in Geneva, and the 2nd World Congress of the International Trade Union Confederation, to be held next June 20-26 in Canada.

Study Day in Tunis focuses on Technology as vector of integration and solidarity

GAMMARTH, April 27, 2010 (TAP)- Technology as a vector of integration and solidarity was the topic of a Study Day held on Tuesday in Tunis.

The meeting, which stands as a "Connection Day," is held for the first time by the Microsoft Tunisia Company, with the participation of several representatives of associations.

The event is designed to publicise the potentials (training, certification, equipment) which Microsoft company makes available for associations as part of its Citizenship Programme to ensure a broader coverage in new information and communication technologies (ICTs).

Microsoft Tunisia is carrying out several co-operation projects with the Tunisian Government (ministries of education and higher education) and civil society including the Basma Association for the Promotion of Employment for the Disabled chaired by First Lady Leila Ben Ali and the Tunisian Social Solidarity Federation.

Secretary of State in charge of Social Promotion Mrs. Najah Belkhiria Karoui stressed, in an address, the objective set by the presidential programme to strengthen the foundations of the knowledge society.

She reviewed the numerous measures taken by the State to guarantee the access of persons with special needs to new technologies.

Mrs. Belkhiria Karoui emphasised the role of associations in enhancing digital solidarity which is likely to narrow the digital divide within society. She reviewed the interventions of the Basma association in matters of training and qualification of the disabled in the area of ICTs as part of its different co-operation programmes with Microsoft.

It should be noted that an e-disabled project is in progress. The project, which is carried out by the Social Affairs Ministry, helps bring closer disabled from different administrative services thanks to adapted software which also target disabled children to allow them to progress in their studies.

BUSINESS & ECONOMY

Prime Minister opens Second Maghreb Businessmen's Forum

TUNIS, May 10, 2010 (TAP) - Works of the two-day Second Forum of Maghreb Businessmen were opened, on Monday in Tunis, under chairmanship of Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi.

Placed under President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali's high auspices, this forum is organised by the Maghreb Employers Union (MEU), the Tunisian Industry, Trade and Handicrafts Union (UTICA) and "Iktissad Wa Aamal" Group, with the participation of nearly one thousand

Maghreb businessmen, several Maghreb senior officials, chairmen of employers' organisations and representatives of several national and regional organisations.

Mr. Mohamed Ghannouchi highlighted, on the occasion, the fruits of a dynamic recorded in the joint Maghreb action, as testified to by the succession of ministerial and sector-based meetings and the economic and trading events organised in the various Maghreb countries.

Exchanges between Maghreb countries are still modest and below the available opportunities and capacities.

The prime minister specified that, in spite of the efforts exerted to boost trade exchanges between Maghreb countries, results are still modest and below the available opportunities and capacities.

As a matter of fact, exchanges between Maghreb countries do not exceed 3% of their exchanges with foreign countries; this rate reaches 70% with the European Union countries.

He pointed out that joint investments, too, are limited in spite of some improvement due to the rise in the number of jointly achieved projects, notably in the fields of industry, agriculture and services, and that the Maghreb countries' economic weight remains, in the absence of complementarity and integration, below the opportunities and capacities of the region's countries.

The prime minister said that it appears from the experts' reports that the Maghreb countries' economic integration helps increase by 2% the GDP growth and attract about 3 billion dollars direct foreign investments a year, so as to create an important additional number of jobs, especially as the number of the jobless exceeds at present, 3 million in Maghreb regions (over 12% of the active population).

Mr. Ghannouchi pointed out that regional integration is possible as it is encouraged by all Maghreb countries' adoption of the market economy, a system resting on openness and integration into the globalisation process. He praised the drive of several Maghreb enterprises to step up investments in the region, stressing efforts exerted by Tunisia to strengthen this trend, attract Maghreb investments and ease investment of Tunisian enterprises in Maghreb countries.

Governments' role, he went on, is essential in enhancing this drive to avoid impeding initiatives launched by promoters and economic operators, to ease customs procedures, harmonise standards and mutual recognition of conformity certificates and speed up the removal of customs duties to prompt the setting up of a Maghreb free-trade zone and reduce the volume of parallel trade.

Setting up of a Maghreb free-trade zone and reduce the volume of parallel trade

The prime minister emphasised the role of basic infrastructure in boosting exchanges at all levels, reviewing the beneficial effects of achieving large-scale infrastructure projects in Maghreb countries.

He expressed hope, in this regard, to see the pace of construction of the Maghreb motorway speeded up, pointing out that Tunisia has started achievement of the section on its territory, in addition its upgrading of the

railway network and completion of the Maghreb telecommunications cable and power inter-connection between the Union's countries.

Mr. Ghannouchi underlined that the setting up of the Maghreb Bank for Investment and External Trade (BMICE) is a necessary mechanism to finance joint projects, ease the transfer of capitals and develop trade exchanges, expressing will to see this bank's activity in the shortest terms. The Forum, he pointed out, is an opportunity to develop the co-operation and partnership relations in such vital sectors as renewable energies, pharmaceutical industries, information and communication technologies and scientific research and technological innovation.

The prime minister called for the need to deepen study for the creation of a Maghreb joint fund designed to contribute to innovating capitals and projects and valorise patents.

He also recommended to follow up the creation of a Maghreb economic label to be awarded to products of joint ventures, in addition to the adoption of rules of origins for Maghreb countries and the creation of a Maghreb data base to collect statistics, economic data and risks of changes at the Maghreb level.

The point, he said, is to ease operations of currency transfer directly between the region's countries without resorting to foreign currencies.

Maghreb Employers' Union (MEU) chairman Ibrahim Hafedh el Omrani laid emphasis on the potentialities of the Maghreb region which extends over 6 million square km and has a total population of 85 million, a number which is expected to reach 100 million in the near future.

He pointed out that Maghreb economic complementarity will help achieve vanguard projects to meet the needs of the region's markets and favour reduction in production costs.

He called for the creation of Maghreb civil engineering and infrastructure firms to establish various links and set up modern communication means with the aim of reinforcing integration between AMU countries.

MEU chairman also recommended the creation of large-scale Maghreb companies in agriculture and farm-produce industry and intensification of trade exchanges between all AMU countries, pointing in this regard to a noteworthy progress of exchanges between Tunisia, Libya and Algeria.

Follow up the creation of Maghreb economic label to be awarded to products of joint ventures

UTICA chairman Hédi Djilani said, in his address, that various surveys show that there are shortcomings that need to be remedied in matters of growth, representing a loss of more than 200,000 jobs/year.

He laid emphasis on the need to combine efforts and speed up setting up of the Arab Maghreb economic grouping to face up to the emergence of new economic groupings.

AMU Secretary-General Habib Ben Yahia called for boosting Maghreb economic co-operation, notably at the

level of the private sector, as regards inciting economic operators to increase their production capacity and establish a Maghreb partnership favouring AMU economies' integration. A survey conducted by AMU Secretariat-General showed that creation of a Maghreb economic grouping constitutes an opportunity to jointly solve the problems caused by unemployment, by bringing down its rate by 1%, but also by the market's limited size.

Maghreb conference on railway transportation closes

TUNIS, May 29, 2010 (TAP) - Participants in the Maghreb conference on railway transportation, held on the theme "Railway as a Vehicle of Maghreb Integration," recommended devising a master plan of Maghreb high-speed railway lines accompanied by a precisely dated schedule.

They called for harmonising the structuring technical choices of projects and developing inter-technical and administration operation between the two Maghreb networks, in addition to curbing the logistics cost considered as relatively high in the region's countries compared to Europe.

They also recommended integrating railway transportation into the Maghreb strategy to promote logistics, providing storage sites that meet international standards and reserving and fitting out logistic spaces, zones and platforms in the public railway property.

Participants also called for conducting necessary studies to set up Maghreb corridors and inter-connect them with European and Machrek corridors. Secretary of State in charge of External Trade Chokri Mamoghli emphasised the importance of setting up an efficient and modern transport infrastructure which represents one of the components of firms' competitiveness at national and regional levels.

He stressed the importance of the Maghreb railway connection project which is the cheapest transportation means in terms of cost and time which are the only guarantors of firms' competitiveness.

The Maghreb railway project, which is part of the Arab plan adopted by the Economic Summit held in January 2009 in Kuwait and aimed to create a terrestrial link between Arab countries, will undoubtedly strengthen integration and connection between Maghreb and Machrek railway transport networks.

Official start of Zituna Bank's operations

KRAM, May 28, 2010 (TAP) - Zituna Bank, the first Tunisian specialised commercial bank founded by Businessman, Mr. Mohamed Sakher El Materi, Chairman of Princesse Holding Group, officially started operations on Friday at Le Kram.

The inaugural ceremony, held at the Bank's head offices which architectural style is typically Tunisian, was presided over by Messrs. Taoufik Baccar, Governor of Tunisia Central Bank (BCT), and Finance Minister Mohamed Ridha Chalhoun, with attendance of the

Bank's founder and several businessmen and finance professionals.

Mr. Mohamed Sakher El Materi voiced consideration to President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali for providing him with the opportunity to create this financial institution which will undoubtedly contribute to strengthening the banking sector by offering new modern financial products, mechanisms and services to the private individuals, professionals and enterprises.

Mr. Taoufik Baccar said this institution will enrich Tunisia's banking landscape which comprises some twenty institutions. This Bank, he added, will certainly contribute to diversifying the services offered to enterprises and individuals, as part of materialising the targets set by the five-year presidential programme, especially Chapter 12, "Tunisia, a Pole for Banking Services and a Regional Financial Centre."

The Bank, which will operate in compliance with the Tunisian laws in force in matters of finance, will offer thirty new products, he pointed out, adding that this institution will open 4 agencies at a first stage before reaching out to the regions with other subsidiaries.

In turn, Mr. Ridha Chalghoum said that the creation of the Bank is part of strengthening financing mechanisms of the national economy and developing the pace of savings-raising.

He added that this institution's diversified financial services and products are henceforth known internationally and will allow Tunisian companies to choose suitable mechanisms to finance their projects and investments.

With a capital of 35 million dinars (MTD), Zituna Bank was created by 7 shareholders representing the largest Tunisian private groups, including Princesse Holding Group as leading shareholder.

By 2011, the Bank's share capital will reach 100 MTD to accompany the Bank's strategic development plan.

Zituna Bank also seeks to impart a regional dimension on its activities, particularly in the Maghreb region, all the more so that it is the first specialised bank not belonging to a foreign banking group.

The Bank will also seek to forge strong relations with the Maghreb and Mediterranean banks to ensure needed flow of financial operations for its customers.

Call to set up economic union in Mediterranean

HAMMAMET, May 26, 2010 (TAP) - Business managers from countries of the two Mediterranean shores, who met on May 25- 26 in Hammamet as part of Second Mediterranean Meetings, called at the end of their works on heads of state and government to lay down the foundations of a real economic union in the Mediterranean and pledged themselves to ensure a high, sustained and shared growth of the zone.

They invite Europe to draw inspiration from the large regional groupings in America and Asia, stressing the shared destiny binding Europe and its southern and eastern neighbours.

They emphasise their adherence to the seven projects recommended to heads of state and government of the Union for the Mediterranean and call upon the latter to put them into effect.

These projects were worked out in partnership with the region's major players and co-ordinated by the Institute of Economic Prospection of the Mediterranean (IPEMED).

The Second Mediterranean Meetings was held jointly by IPEMED and the Arab Institute of Business Managers.

"Global Enabling Trade Report" :Tunisia does better than emerging countries and Euro zone

TUNIS, May 25, 2010 (TAP) - The "Global Enabling Trade Report" of the Davos Economic Forum ranked Tunisia 38th in the world out of a total of 125 countries. The "Global Enabling Trade Report 2010" analyses the measures that ease international trade exchanges.

The Enabling Trade Index used in the report gauges such factors as policies and services which favour free flow of goods across borders up to their delivery point.

The Index focuses on factors that encourage trade in four spheres: market access, customs administration, infrastructure and communication and commercial environment.

Tunisia is up three ranks compared to 2009 (41st out of 121 countries in 2009). With this score, it has done better than several countries from the Euro zone, such as Croatia (45th), Italy (51st), Greece (55th), Poland (58th) and Turkey (62nd).

It also scored remarkable results compared with several emerging countries, such countries as China (48th), Mexico (64th), India (84th), Brazil (87th) and Argentina (95th).

Tunisia ranked second at the Africa level and first in the Maghreb region. By sub-pillars, Tunisia achieved an excellent score (1st) with regard to specific tariffs to boost investment.

It also ranked 7th in foreign-trade law and is well ranked in the areas of efficiency of State intervention, ease and affordability of shipment.

This progress made by Tunisia in terms of easing across-borders exchanges in 2010 reflects President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali's pertinent approach, thanks to which the country has established mechanisms and taken needed measures in due time to mitigate the impact of the falling international growth on the national economy.

Tunisia's good ranking is a new acknowledgement of the Davos Economic Forum, which is well known for its credibility and its neutrality; and this Forum has already ranked Tunisia 40th at the international level in its 2009-2010 report, the first at the African level in the area of global competitiveness and also the first at the African and Maghreb levels in its report on the information and communication technologies for 2010.

Flow of FDI in Tunisia increases by 6,2%

TUNIS, May 19, 2010 (TAP)-Flows of foreign direct investment (FDI) in Tunisia during the first four months of 2010 are of 569.3 millions dinars including 24,7 MD of portfolio flow against 542 MD during the same period of 2009, say a growth of 6.2% as stated by the latest statistics released by the Foreign Investment Promotion Agency (FIPA).

These investments helped generate 4,626 new jobs, 3,700 of which in the manufacturing industry sector, achieve 94 extension operations of foreign enterprises which provide the main FDIs (504.7 MTD) and allowed 67 new enterprises of foreign participation to start their operations in the country.

The sectoral sharing-out of these investments shows strong concentration in the energy and manufacturing industries sectors, which attracted FDIs worth 320 MTD (a 7-per-cent decline compared with the same period last year) and 133.5 MTD (a 1.1-per-cent rise compared with the first four months of 2009), respectively.

FDIs are also oriented towards industry (133.5 MTD), services and other sectors (59 MTD) and tourism and real estate (56 MTD). The most important investments were achieved as part of two projects. The first one regards entering into operation on the Tunisian market of the 3rd telephone operator, "Orange Divona," for FDIs amounting to 17.6 MTD out of a total investment of the project worth 35.3 MTD.

The second achievement concerns the golf course of the Emirian Abou Khater project which is worth 17 MTD.

Regarding the industrial sector, electrical and electronic industries attracted the highest amount of foreign investments (over 27 MTD) which helped finance 19 projects.

Mechanical industries, ranking second, benefited of FDIs worth 22.7 MTD (27 projects), and the textile-clothing sector recorded a real dynamics with investments worth 20.27 MTD (44 projects).

Debate on Tunisian-European cooperation in agricultural field

TUNIS, May 18, 2010 (TAP) - Minister of Agriculture, Water Resources and Fisheries Abdessalem Mansour met, on Tuesday in Tunis, with members of European Union member countries (EU) accredited in Tunisia.

The meeting provided the opportunity to deepen thinking on prospects for agricultural co-operation between Tunisia and the EU, particularly as part of the new European policy aimed to liberalise the exchange of agricultural produce.

After reminding of the strong relations between Tunisia and the EU, the minister emphasised the qualitative leap made by Tunisian agriculture as a result of several factors, particularly the quality of business environment prevailing in Tunisia and its being favourable for the creation of partnership projects, diversification of investment in the areas of agriculture, processing activities and relevant services.

Mr. Juan Ramon Martinez Salazar, ambassador of Spain in Tunisia, whose country is chairing the EU, underlined that the ambassadors of European countries take special interest in recommendations proposed by Tunisia as part of consultation with the European side.

He expressed the readiness of the European side to strengthen co-operation with Tunisia to take up economic challenges in general and agricultural in particular.

Several issues were discussed during the meeting, particularly competitiveness of the agricultural sector, mobilisation of water resources in Tunisia, exchange of expertise in the area of water desalination, organic farming promotion and development of farming production techniques.

Tunisia-USA: ICT business opportunities into focus

TUNIS, May 18, 2010 (TAP) - Prospects for information and communication technologies (ICT) in the United States of America and business opportunities that could be seized by Tunisian promoters were the focal points of a conference held on Tuesday at the El Ghazela Technopark.

This event is part of a set "Doing Business with the USA" seminars held by the embassy of the United States in Tunisia, the Fund for Access to Exports Markets (FAMEX), the Technical Packaging Centre (PACKTEC), the Tunisian-American Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Centre of Juniors Managers (CJD) and the Junior Chamber International of El Menzah.

Papers presented on the occasion stressed the American companies' firm will to broaden their activities to external markets that witness a growing use of mobile applications and attract rival companies for a merger likely to strengthen their production chain.

Presentations also show the conformity of Tunisian laws with those the legal arrangements in force in the USA and the potential of trade exchanges in ICTs available between the two countries.

Avenues worth exploring to develop Tunisian-Finnish partnership

TUNIS, May 18, 2010 (TAP) - A mission of businessmen and representatives of Finnish enterprises took part, on Tuesday, in the Tunisian-Finnish Economic Forum held in Tunisia with attendance of Finland's Under Secretary of State for External Economic Relations Pekka Huhtaniemi, who is on a working visit in Tunisia.

The meeting aims at exploring avenues likely to develop partnership and intensify trade exchanges between Tunisia and Finland, which has managed along the years to develop a competitive economy driven by the information and communication technologies and has set itself as a real Silicon Valley.

Tunisian and Finnish participants agreed that the sectors which represent a real potential for partnership are mainly those of energy, environment, water, forestry, metallurgy, wood, finance, new information and communication technologies (ICTs), education and health.

Mr. Pekka Huhtaniemi asserted that co-operation between Tunisia and Finland has been developing in the past years, describing the Tunisian market as an "attractive one."

Tunisia exported the value of 1.904 million dinars to Finland, in 2009, and imported the value of 128.732 million dinars. Tunisia was Finland's 78th supplier and 68th customer in 2008.

Importation of Tunisian merchandises by Finnish firms is too modest, amounting 5.7 million euros in 2007 and 16.7 million euros in 2008. Raw materials stood at 56% of the Finnish exportations to Tunisia in 2009.

The main products imported from Finland are wood, cork, wood pulp, machines, transport material and industrial machines and equipments.

The Finnish enterprises import from Tunisia mainly varied manufactured articles, clothes and accessories.

Exposés were presented, on the occasion, on the activities of Finnish enterprises represented in this forum and Tunisia's comparative advantages as an investment site.

Seminar in Tunis on trade relations between Tunisia and USA

TUNIS, May 18, 2010 (TAP) - Trade relations between Tunisia and the United States of America (USA) were the focus of a seminar held on Tuesday in Tunis.

This meeting, designed to identify business opportunities between the two countries, is part of a set of "Doing Business with the USA" seminars held by the US embassy in Tunis, Fund of Access to Exports Markets (FAMEX), PACKTEC, the Tunisian- American Chamber of Commerce, the Centre of Junior Business Managers, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of the Centre and the El Menzah Junior International Chamber.

Tunisia, the 94th customer of the United States, exports to this market, particularly food products, jewels and textile products.

Exports in the period between 2004 and 2008 rose by 30%. They account for 1.37% of the total Tunisian exports (average in the 2004-2008 period). The poor volume of Tunisian exports on the American market has mainly to do with the lack of visibility of Tunisian products, lack of communication and the unbalanced sales of food products.

For instance, although it is the 4th world producer of olive oil, Tunisia exports not much of this product to the American market.

To remedy this situation and access the US market, the first world economic power, participants recommended to command English, create optimum marketing supports (in video, on the web and by resorting to the services of a marketing expert to conduct studies on this market, devise an appropriate promotion strategy, improve the quality and products and the option for innovation).

Knowledge of distribution networks is also needed to access this market which has 450 food distribution channels.

Organic and natural products have a great opportunity on the American market whose consumers are increasingly interested in these products.

To facilitate access of Tunisian exports to this market, FAMEX brings support and assistance in drawing out a market- capture strategy and a financial assistance (50% for an enterprises and 70% in case of a grouping or a consortium).

These seminars provide an opportunity to inform Tunisian entrepreneurs of all aspects of trade with the United States and introduce a special programme of customs duties exemption called Generalised Preferences System.

Similar events will be held at the technological park of El Ghazala and in Bizerte, Sfax and Sousse.

Tunisia-AMU: Trade exchanges

Tunis, May 17, 2010 (TAP)-Tunisia's exports to the Arab Maghreb Union countries stood at 2,035 million dinars in 2009, while imports are estimated at 1,520 million dinars.

Libya holds the first rank with 53 % of Tunisia's exchanges with AMU states, ahead of Algeria (36 %), Morocco (9,9 %) and Mauritania (0,7%)

Second meeting of the Tunisian-Libyan future prospects committee: toward economic integration

TUNIS, May 11, 2010 (TAP) - The second meeting of the Tunisian-Libyan future prospects committee, held on Tuesday in Tunis, was devoted to looking at means to boost bilateral economic co-operation by setting up mid- and long-term action plans, and contributing to achievement of the hoped-for economic integration.

The meeting, co-chaired by Development and International Co-operation Minister Mohamed Nouri Jouini and Libyan Secretary of General People's Planning and Finance Committee Abdelhafidh Zelitni, is part of materialisation of the orientations set by President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali and his Brother, Colonel Mouammar Kadhafi, on identifying means and mechanisms that would develop economic relations between Tunisia and Libya and hoist them to the level of complementarity and integration. Besides, the meeting is held in accordance with what had been agreed upon during the 22nd Tunisian-Libyan High Joint Committee, held in Libya in December 2009.

Mr. Jouini voiced, at the opening works of the meeting, satisfaction at the high level reached by the bilateral co-operation, in addition to the solidity and diversity that had characterised it during the last two decades under the impetus of the two sisterly countries' leaders.

For his part, Mr. Zelitni stressed that the opportunities that the two sides offer and the change experienced by the world require to speed up the co-operation pace and strive to achieve integration between Tunisia and Libya, to materialise economic progress and social growth.

The two sides highlighted the future prospects committee's role in conceiving of policies, the aim being to vitalise a fruitful co-operation on the qualitative and quantitative levels.

They agreed to establish a joint action plan giving concrete shape to large-scale proposals and orientations to be adopted to achieve complementarity between Tunisia and Libya on the mid-term.

Additionally, action will be followed to implement the projects scheduled between the two countries and conceive of new projects in such vital sectors like basic infrastructure, energy, transport, communications, water, food security and others.

The two ministers also decided to set up mechanisms to make investment and creation of joint projects easier, in addition to the orientation of conquering foreign markets.

Adoption of Tunis Declaration at the end of Maghreb Businessmen Forum

TUNIS, May 11, 2010 (TAP) - Participants in the second Maghreb Business Forum, held on May 10-11, 2010, recommended, on Tuesday in Tunis, to strive to ensure free circulation of goods and persons in the Maghreb region, transfer of capitals, as well as freedom of ownership and investment in this regional space.

They underlined in the Tunis Declaration, adopted at the closing of the Forum, the interest to view the Maghreb economic integration as a solution to achieve the targets of the region's hoped-for development.

Working out joint Maghreb strategies in the different economic sectors and providing the needed information on the investment opportunities available in the region are also included in the recommendations of the Tunis Declaration, the aim being to strengthen public-private partnership.

Maghreb promoters called for ironing out the obstacles hindering the launch of a free trade-zone among the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) countries and gradual harmonisation of Maghreb economic and commercial legislation. They also recommended to create a Maghreb Fund of Financing and Guaranteeing Investment initiated by small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and a Maghreb Fund for financing and inciting creation of innovative projects in ICTs.

They also agreed to organise, all year round, specialised sector-based fora, in the different countries of the region. The third Maghreb Businessmen Forum is to be held on May 10-11, 2011 in Marrakech, Morocco.

Tunisian organic products, strong potential

TUNIS, May 10, 2010 (TAP) - Works of the national conference on organic farming, one of the events of the Tunisian Organic Product Week, held from May 10 to 16, under the high patronage of President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali, started on Monday in Tunis.

This event, co-organised by the Ministry of Agriculture, Water Resources and Fisheries and the Tunisian Union of

Agriculture and Fisheries (UTAP), is designed to look at ways to promote this buoyant sector on which Tunisia relies today to develop its agricultural exports.

Demand of organic products soared over the past years in Tunisia and everywhere in the world.

Figures presented on the occasion bank on a 20% rise of international demand on organic products in the five year period 2003-2007, compared with only 1% in ordinary food products.

International exchanges of organic products increased in the same period from a value of 33 billion dollars (2002) to more than 46 billion dollars (2007).

Minister of Agriculture, Water Resources and Fisheries Abdessalem Mansour said organic farming in Tunisia has become a strategic choice, given the country's potential and its capacity to produce it and the advantages of this activity in rational use of natural resources and their perennality.

The minister reviewed the decisions taken to promote this sector and the incentives granted to promoters to encourage investment in this activity. The minister called upon farmers to promote partnership projects in the sector with foreign investors, which will certainly guarantee technological transfer and develop techniques of production, management and promotion of exports, in addition to easing access to distribution and marketing channels of organic products.

UTAP chairman Mabrouk Bahri stressed the importance of developing co-operation between the profession and the administration to contribute to boost this farming sector in general and organic farming in particular.

He reviewed, in this regard, the qualitative leap made by organic farming in Tunisia thanks to the set of incentives decided by the Head of State, emphasising farmers' awareness of the role of organic farming in agricultural development.

Earlier, Mr. Abdessalem Mansour had visited, at UTAP premises, an exhibition on services related to organic farming and Tunisian organic products (vegetables, fruits, cereals, dates and others).

3rd Conference of the African Chief Information Officers

HAMMAMET, May 6, 2010 (TAP) - Works of the (AFROCIO) were opened on Thursday in Hammamet.

This AFROCIO's two-yearly meeting, organised by the African Events Planning and Media Society (SAFREM), aims to improve computer applications and systems and develop e- exchanges among African countries.

It is also meant to create a network of African information systems to serve as a platform for co-operation and exchange of expertise, and help narrow the digital divide separating Africa and other countries.

In her opening address, Secretary of State in charge of Computers, Internet and Free Softwares Lamia Chaffai Sghaier pointed out that holding this event was part of the African countries' orientation to reinforce pan-African

partnership, exchange expertise and incite to investment in Africa.

She highlighted the role of computer systems in improving the economic enterprises' competitiveness and profitability and increasing investments. The conference is attended by public and private information officers from Senegal, Ivory Coast, Morocco, Mali, Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Tunisia, France and Belgium.

Orange Tunisia to launch 2G/3G+ mobile services on May 5

TUNIS, May 4, 2010 (TAP) - The new Tunisian operator, Orange Tunisia, an alliance between Tunisian group Investec (51%) and France Télécom (49%), and third telecommunications operator in Tunisia after Tunisie Télécom and Tunisiana, is launching on Wednesday, May 5, 2010, its mobile second- and third-generation (2G/3G+) telecommunications services.

According to Mr. Marwan Mabrouk, President of Orange Tunisia, in a news conference held on Tuesday in Tunis, in the presence of Messrs. Didier Lombard, President of France Télécom Orange, and Thierry Marigny, CEO of Orange Tunisia, the new operator will launch, for the first time in Tunisia, third-generation mobile services.

"The date of May 5 will mark a historic turning point in the field of information technology in Tunisia on which President Ben Ali has made a bet, while striving to develop the country's human capital considered as the finality of the development process."

He pointed out that the operator has adhered since its establishment to the civilisational project of the Head of State and sought to contribute to the achievement of no less than ten objectives of the five-year program "Together We Meet Challenges."

The official added that granting of the third concession for mobile telephony services to Orange Tunisia materialises the guidelines of the 19th item of the presidential programme: "Modern Basic Infrastructure and Communication Network Meeting International Standards."

Regarding employment, the new operator hired 1,000 persons among university graduates, he said, adding that this number will be increased to 1500 by the end of the present year and that each direct job will generate two indirect jobs in corollary activities.

"The network of third-generation mobile telephony will certainly help democratise 3G technology and give everyone access to Internet services," said the official, indicating that this process will allow all Tunisians to surf the web wherever they are, through a WiFi key and without having to connect to the fixed telephony network.

Mr. Didier Lombard, President of France Télécom praised, on his part, the support lent by the Head of State to the project to establish the third public telephone operator in Tunisia, expressing the Group's will to expand its partnership with Tunisia to culture and education.

The total cost of this project is estimated at 1 billion dinars (nearly 500 million euros), he reminded, saying that

Orange Tunisia will benefit, as part of its partnership with France Télécom, from the expertise and know-how of the Group's 4000 engineers and researchers who serve 190 million customers in 32 countries of the world.

This project will also allow Tunisian economic operators to benefit from cutting-edge technology in the areas of mobile telephony, fixed telephony and Internet, he added.

Mr. Thierry Marigny, Director General of Orange Tunisia, underlined that the operator will provide more than 50 advanced services to Tunisian customers: inter alia, unlimited Internet connection, 3G mobile telephony offers at one dinar, free calls with numbers of choice, etc. Mr. Marigny added that other innovations and new services will be offered to customers in the coming weeks.

Services of Orange Tunisia cover, with the coming into service of the operator, 45% of the Tunisian population. This rate will be brought to 75% by late this year, he announced.

Mr. Marigny also said that Orange Tunisia plans to launch, subsequently, fixed telephone services to become the first operator to join mobile and fixed telephone and Internet services.

The Ministry of Communication Technologies had announced on June 26, 2009 the granting of licence of new telecommunications operator to Tunisian-French group Investec and Orange France Télécom, the founder of Orange Tunisia group. This licence allows the Group to install and run a public telecommunications network, Internet services and fixed and mobile services of second and third generation.

Orange Tunisia is an alliance between Investec (formerly-Divona, with 51%) and Orange France Télécom (49%).

Tunisia's approach to money laundering

HAMMAMET, May 3, 2010 (TAP) - The 11th plenary meeting of the Middle East and North Africa Financial Action Task Force (MENAFATF), whose rotating presidency is assumed by Tunisia, was held on Monday in Hammamet.

The three-day meeting is part of efforts designed to strengthen international standards in matters of fight against money laundering and funding of terrorism.

In his address, Governor of the Central Bank of Tunisia (BCT) Taoufik Baccar emphasised Tunisia's contribution to the international community's efforts to fight transborder criminality under all its forms.

He reviewed the structural reforms decided by the country in this area since the Change, which helped the country hold a prime position at the regional and international levels.

BCT Governor reminded that Tunisia has earned honourable ratings by different authorities specialised in the financial sector, including the Kennedy Institute of Governance stemming from the American Harvard University which placed Tunisia on top of the region's countries in the areas of governance, rule of law,

transparency and fight against corruption. Other performances cited by Mr. Baccar include Tunisia's ratings by the Davos Economic Forum, 5th, 11th and 16th in management of public spending, protection of small savers and confidence in political decisions, respectively.

He pointed out that Tunisia, which is also one of the first Maghreb countries to chair MENAFATF, will spare no efforts to ensure compliance with international standards, modernise regulatory and institutional systems and develop co-operation between countries.

Mr. Adel Bin Hamad Alqulish, Executive Secretary of MENAFATF, underlined in turn that this group plays a key role in strengthening mechanisms of regional co-operation between member countries, adding that it also seeks to promote efforts of these countries to comply with international standards regarding the fight against money laundering and funding of terrorism, through multiple mechanisms, the most recent being the creation of a forum of financial information units of the Group's member countries.

The official also emphasised the need to hold training programmes and co-ordinate efforts with donors to provide needed technical assistance to concerned countries to help them improve their systems of fight against money laundering and funding of terrorism.

State representatives, international organisations and regional bodies members of the MENAFATF are taking part in this event.

Tunisia takes part in Shanghai Universal Expo

SHANGHAI, May 1, 2010 (TAP)-The 2010 Universal Expo opened on Saturday in Shanghai, with the participation of 192 countries including Tunisia and starts receiving thousands of visitors among the 70 million visitors expected.

An official ceremony, held on Friday evening, had marked the start of one of the biggest events of the year, in the presence of the Chinese President and 38 heads of state and government.

The 1000-square-metre Tunisian pavilion is distinguished by an attractive concept that showcases the ancient heritage and the major achievements in recent years.

A selection of traditional costumes and art works are carefully arranged in the stand.

Modern Tunisia is also showcased through its advanced technology. A set of Tunisian events are scheduled in the stand at Shanghai Expo 2010, including particularly a tourist week due to be held early June. Tunisia's Day will be held on September 19, while and Investment and Partnership Forum is scheduled for September 20.

The record number of visitors of the Tunisian stand registered on the first day heralds a success of Tunisia's participation, which is co-ordinated by a the Exports Promotion Centre (CEPEX) and benefit of the contribution of different stakeholders.

ENERGY & ENVIRONNEMENT

Progress of joint power interconnection project under focus

TUNIS, May 4, 2010 (TAP) - Progress of the Tunisian-Italian joint power interconnection project, ELMED, was the focus of a working session co-chaired, on Monday evening, by Messrs. Afif Chelbi, Industry and Technology Minister, and Claudio Scajola, Italian Economic Development Minister.

The ELMED project, which is meant to export power on the Italian market, includes a submarine cable connection with a transit capacity of 1000 MW and a power plant of 1200 MW designed to ensure the economic profitability of the project.

The project is carried out by Italian TERNA company in association with the Tunisian Electricity and Gas Company (STEG).

Messrs. Chelbi and Scajola reviewed the action programme of the concerned companies to materialise this project under best conditions. "My presence in Tunisia, on the launch of the tender for the achievement of the Tunisian-Italian joint ELMED project is indicative of the support to this large-scale project for the Euro-Mediterranean region which gives a fresh impetus to our bilateral co-operation," said Mr. Scajola.

He added that it reflects the interest Italy takes in this project, stressing the prospects it generates for Tunisian-Italian partnership in the area of renewable energy.

Mr. Chelbi reminded of the importance of this project which was picked by the Tunisian Solar Plan.

In carrying out this project, Tunisia confirms its status of a "Mediterranean energy hub" after having hosted in 1983 the pipeline connecting Algeria to Italy whose economic effects have been beneficial for the two shores of the Mediterranean, the minister also recalled.

Water governance, a challenge to be taken up by MENA region

TUNIS, May 31, 2010 (TAP) - The 5th international forum of partners was held, on Monday in Gammarth, on the theme "Water Governance in Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region: Sharing Benefits, Costs and Responsibilities."

Launched in 2005, this water governance project in the MENA region is aimed to strengthen regional co-operation in water resources matters and lay down the foundations of a participative strategy likely to help achieve food and water security.

It also seeks to set up a network of the region's partners in the water sector to raise awareness of all social segments about problems related to this issue.

The forum provides an opportunity for all partners of this project --Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Jordan, Palestine, Syria and Yemen-- to exchange expertise and strengthen co-operation in matters of water governance in the region.

It will certainly help participants identify solutions to capitalise on the sharing of benefits, costs and responsibilities between countries of the MENA region.

Opening the forum, Agriculture, Water Resources and Fisheries Minister Abdessalem Mansour called on the region's countries to work out a guidebook on water governance and devise a strategy to guarantee water self-sufficiency.

He said that in Tunisia, a country that has a water deficit, the quantity of consumed water is estimated at 480 annual cubic metres/inhabitant, compared with an international average of 500 cubic metres.

Water resources in Tunisia depend on weather hazards, including the succession of periods of drought, silting up basins of dams and over-exploitation of underground water.

The agriculture ministry has set up a strategy by 2016 aimed to mobilise nearly 95% of water resources and adopt a new approach in matters of water management.

Mr. Abdessalem Mansour reminded of the objectives set by the presidential programme "Together We Meet challenges," aimed particularly to draw up prospective studies by 2050 and mobilise, by 2016, 95% of water resources. The five-day forum is held by the ministry of agriculture, water resources and fisheries, in association with the German Technical Co-operation Agency, GTZ, and the Arab Water Council.

Workshop on water management

TUNIS, May 24, 2010 (TAP) - A workshop on "training of skills in conducting awareness campaigns on rational use of water in Arab countries" started, on Monday in Tunis.

The event is organised by the German Organisation for Development of Human Resources (INWENT) and the Arab Countries Water Utilities Association (ACWUA), with the support of the International Centre of Environment Technologies of Tunis (CITET).

The workshop, attended by several Tunisia and Arab experts from Algeria, Morocco, Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Palestine and Yemen, is aimed to strengthen regional co-operation in staging awareness campaigns on water use.

This five-day gathering provides the opportunity to introduce Tunisian expertise in awareness-raising about rational use of water.

Several papers are to be presented to this effect. They focus essentially on drinking and irrigation water saving, intensification of farming production, treatment of waste water and its re-use in farming irrigation.

Will to strengthen Tunisian-Libyan environment co-operation

TUNIS, May 24, 2010 (TAP) - Environment and Sustainable Development Minister Nadhir Hamada conferred, on Monday in Tunis, with Secretary of the Libyan General People's Committee for Health and Environment Mohamed Mahmoud Hijazi.

The minister stressed the quality of Tunisian-Libyan relations established under the wise leadership of the two countries' leaders.

He reviewed gains made in Tunisia in environment protection, particularly in areas pertaining to transport, green technology, sanitation, waste management and preservation of land and marine bio-diversity, adding that these gains will be further strengthened as part of the presidential programme "Together We Meet Challenges."

Mr. Hamada stressed the potential of co-operation between Tunisia and Libya, particularly in matters of environment, sanitation and waste management, pointing to the importance for the two countries to enhance their participation in relevant international events.

For his part, Mr. Hijazi reviewed programmes in place in Libya to protect eco-systems and bio-diversity and valorise Saharan regions.

He expressed his country's readiness to strengthen Tunisian-Libyan co-operation in the environment field, emphasising the need to step up the exchange of expertise between the two countries.

The two sides agreed to think deeply on prospects for strengthening action plans between the two countries, particularly in the environment field. The Libyan delegation members became acquainted, as part of this visit, with activities of several Tunisian environment structures and achievements accomplished to protect bio-diversity, preserve genes and valorise domestic waste.

They also familiarised with activities of several local structures active in the area of environment and preservation of natural resources.

End of national competition on biodiversity in Zaghouan

ZAGHOUAN, May 23, 2010 (TAP)- Environment and Sustainable Development Minister Nadhir Hamada handed over, on Sunday in Zaghouan, the prizes crowning the national competition on biodiversity to winners among the 27 environment clubs of schools in the governorates of Ben Arous, Bizerte, Jendouba, Kasserine, Gafsa, Sidi Bouzid, Kebili, Médenine and Zaghouan, regions housing Tunisian reserves and national parks.

The competition consisted in working out surveys and collecting data on means to preserve biodiversity within the country's national parks. Organised by the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development in collaboration with the Education Ministry and the German Agency of Technical Co-operation «GTZ»-Tunis, this event is part of Tunisia's celebration of World Biodiversity Day and of Tunisia's support to the UN convention on biodiversity aimed to raise young generations' awareness about the importance of biodiversity and of preserving its durability.

The minister got acquainted, on the occasion, with the production of the schools' environment clubs which highlights the role played by the nine national reserves in matters of environment protection and development and handed over prizes to the best productions.

Environment challenges facing the Mediterranean

TUNIS, May 23, 2010 (TAP)-A new report on environment and sustainable development in the Mediterranean area was presented, on Saturday in Tunis, as part of celebrating International Year of Biodiversity and International Youth Year.

Worked out by the Plan of Action for the Mediterranean (PAM), the report shows the impacts expected from climate change on the region, reviews the environment situation in the Mediterranean (natural resources...) and speaks of the main challenges facing the Mediterranean and regarding especially environment protection and economic activities durability.

The report, which also assesses the strategies adopted by countries bordering on the Mediterranean in matters of environment preservation, recommends to increase consultations in the Mediterranean region, and boost inter-Mediterranean co-operation so as to identify solutions likely to help take up the challenges facing the region.

The point is notably to reach a rational management of natural resources, to fight against climate change, to preserve biodiversity, to manage waste and promote renewable energies.

Actually the report revealed that the scarcity of water resources and the preservation of biodiversity represent the main challenges facing the region.

Vulnerability of North African costal cities under focus

TUNIS, May 18, 2010 (TAP) - The regional study on North African costal cities' vulnerability to climate changes and natural disasters was the focus of a round-table held on Tuesday in Tunis.

This event is held by the Environment and Sustainable Development Ministry, in association with the World Bank and the Marseilles Centre for Integration in the Mediterranean.

The study focuses on three cities of major importance in the region, namely Alexandria (Egypt), Tunis and Casablanca (Morocco).

The study is financed by the fund run by the World Bank.

It is designed to assess vulnerability of these urban areas by 2030 to climate changes through scientific estimation of these changes, evaluation of vulnerability of urban infrastructure, the expected urban expansion and estimated socio-economic costs of the impact of climate change.

Chairing this round-table, Minister of Environment and Sustainable Development Nadhir Hamada pointed to the importance granted by Tunisia to sustainable development, namely the fight against pollution, preservation of the quality of live, biodiversity and sustainable management of natural resources and ecosystems, particularly fight against the possible harmful effects of climate change.

Seeing the extent of climate change, Tunisia has invited the international community, through solemn calls of President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali, to act to avert the consequences of climate changes by adopting an integrated approach based on principles of sustainable development, as part of a global partnership as agreed upon at the Johannesburg Summit.

Regarding preservation of biological diversity, a network of protected spaces covering nearly 7% of the country's total area was established. This network includes islander, marine, Saharan, mountain, forest and dry ecosystems, Mr. Hamada said.

The rate of forest and agro-pastoral cover also rose from 7% in 1987 to nearly 13% of the national area at present time, he added.

All these measures have been strengthened by the working out since 2007 of a national strategy to adjust agriculture and ecosystems to climate changes, the minister pointed out.

Mr. Hamada also announced that national investment for projects designed to adjust to climate change is finalised, in consultation with all active parties.

EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Euro-Arab dialogue of UNESCO National Commissions: think tank meeting on quality education

TUNIS, May 29, 2010 (TAP) - A think tank meeting on the theme: "Education for All: from Quality to Excellence," is held on the 29th-30th instant in Tunis.

The meeting is organised by the Tunisian National Commission for Education, Science and Culture, jointly with regional organisations.

The gathering, held at the initiative of UNESCO National Commissions for Euro-Arab Dialogue as part of the international co-operation based on sharing experiences and promoting best practices in this area, will consider major factors for quality education.

Emphasis was placed, on the occasion, on the key role played by organisations, such as ALECSO, ISESCO and UNESCO, to take up the challenges inherent to knowledge society's edification by enhancing education.

The meeting also discussed the approach adopted by Tunisia to improve methods and curricula of pre-school education and devise a new programme to upgrade primary schools and basic and secondary education by making the most of new technologies in the educational system, enriching school life by diversifying cultural and leisure activities and instilling among youths the culture of voluntary work and the spirit of initiative and community action from the very first school years.

The event is attended by experts and representatives of organisations from Arab and European countries

members of the Euro-Arab Dialogue Group, as well as representatives of the civil society.

The Euro-Arab Dialogue was launched at the initiative of the Tunisian National Commission for Education, Science and Culture and the UNESCO German Commission, at a meeting on the sidelines of the 46th International Conference on Education held in September 2001, in Geneva.

The main objective of this Dialogue is to urge the civil society's components and social players to support the goals of UNESCO's programmes in the education, science, culture and communication fields by means of co-operation mechanisms between the two regions' national commissions and joint co-operation programmes.

Tunisia-UAE: Partnership in education, vocational training and employment

TUNIS, May 21, 2010 (TAP) - Tunisian-UAE partnership in the areas of education, vocational training and employment and means to reinforce it were the focal points of the meetings between the Chairman of Abu Dhabi Educational Council, Mugheer Khamis al Kaili, and Education Minister Hatem Ben Salem, on the one hand, and Vocational Training and Employment Minister Mohamed Agrebi, on the other.

During his meeting on Friday morning with Mr. Hatem Ben Salem, Mr. Al Kaili expressed his country's wish to make the most of the Tunisian experience in the education field which is constantly developing, and of Tunisian skills, so as to consolidate the Emirian educational system, notably in the Arabic language teaching.

Mr. Hatem Ben Salem asserted readiness to increase the number of Tunisian guest workers in the United Arab Emirates in the education and training fields, and to extend bilateral co-operation to new specialties in this field.

On Thursday, during Vocational Training and Employment Minister's meeting with his Emirian guest, emphasis was laid on Tunisian-Emirian co-operation in vocational training and employment fields, on means likely to reinforce it and make the most of the Tunisian expertise and skills.

The meeting helped review the national strategy of vocational training development aimed to support employment policies and improve labour's output.

Mr. Mugheer Khamis al Kaili voiced satisfaction at the achievements accomplished in Tunisia in the vocational training and employment field, particularly in development of human resources and upgrading of the training system in order to adjust skills to the requirements of the job market.

He reiterated his country's will to make the most of the Tunisian experience in this field and of Tunisian skills in all specialities.

Tunisia heads for technologies

GAMMARTH, June 4, 2010 (TAP)-" Heading for Technologies: Assets and Decisive Factors of a Choice "

is the theme of the 12th Carthage Investment Forum which works started Thursday afternoon in the northern suburb of Gammarth.

1300 participants including 498 from 34 countries are taking part in this gathering.

The aim of this new forum is to highlight and brief Tunisia's different partners about the progress made by the site of Tunisia in matters of ICT, the drive of basic infrastructure in this sector, the various distinctions awarded to Tunisia in matters of ICT, the development of technological poles and the efforts expended in matters of human resources promotion.

Development and International Co-operation Minister Mohamed Nouri Jouini said that this forum, which has become a reference event in the Mediterranean area, is being held at a time when the world is living through one of the most serious economic crisis in spite of some signs of revival.

In spite of this difficult situation, he added, Tunisia has carried on looking for fruitful partnerships, diversifying its industrial fabric and stepping up the integration of its economy into its international environment.

Besides, he underlined that the government strategy is focused on developing a high technological content economy, commanding new technologies and achieving sustainable growth.

Tunisia's Industry, Trade and Handicrafts Union (UTICA) Chairman Hédi Djilani affirmed, for his part, that in view of the setting up of new regional groupings and the opening out of new markets, Tunisia has adopted the different mechanisms meant to improve the competitiveness of its economy which now depends on the command of advanced technologies.

He reminded, in this context, of Tunisia's constant investment in knowledge as well as the development of infrastructure, one of the major State concerns, aimed to provide a climate favourable to investment.

He also stressed the will of Maghreb businessmen to set up the Maghreb market, adding that "the dearest wish is Euro-Africa.

Then, Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi handed over prizes to this year's winning firms, namely Yazaki Group (car cable manufacturing), Rieker company (anti-stress and safety shoes production), Téléperformance (customers' relations), Sagem Software and technologies, Somfy Group, Altran Telnet Corporation and GITAS.

Tunisia, a magnetic ICTs pole

TUNIS, May 27, 2010 (TAP) - Tunisia has managed, over the past years, to enhance its presence as regional and international site of innovating and high added-value activities. Success of the Tunisian approach, scored particularly thanks to the positive indicators recorded by the information and communication technologies (ICTs) sector, was widely acclaimed by international rating agencies.

In actual fact, Tunisia has topped rankings in Africa and got 39th place in the world, according to the Ninth Global Information Technology Report for 2009-2010.

This report, co-produced by the World Economic Forum and the European Institute of Business Management, assesses countries' capacities to command communication technologies according to three criteria: the appropriate political and economic climate for development of new ICTs and the level of technological progress.

Tunisia ranks 6th (State's success in ICTs promotion) and 7th for the index of importance given by the State's policy to this sector

The report devotes a whole chapter to the Tunisian experience, reviewing the national plans and programmes that have earned Tunisia to be ranked 6th (State's success in ICTs promotion) and 7th for the index of importance given by the State's policy to this sector.

These ratings reflect the Head of State's will to ensure Tunisia's integration into the process of innovation in which ICTs hold a prime position.

The national strategy to promote this sector has focused, in particular, on developing basic infrastructure, strengthening of human resources and digital services and boosting contents industry and the business and innovation environment.

The ICTs sector generates at present nearly 90,000 jobs

This approach helped the sector contribute by more one third to the country's economic growth rate and achieve a growth of over 16% in 2009, in addition to its contribution to the national employment effort (6,300 jobs/year).

The ICTs sector generates at present nearly 90,000 jobs.

Tunisia has also managed to achieve continuous improvement of the rate of broadband Internet connection.

Tunisia's Internet bandwidth connection to the global Internet network is of 37.5 gigabits/second now, compared to 27.5 gigabits in 2009.

The number of Internet users reached 3.6 million in March 2010, compared with 3.5 million in 2009, and the rate of families owning at least one personal computer reached 26%, thanks to the Tunisian households' improved buying power.

Subscribers in broadband Internet network reached 408,000 by late March 2010, compared with 368,000 in late 2009.

The number of subscribers in broadband Internet per 100 inhabitants stood at 3.7% in 2009, compared with 2.2% in 2008, which is well above averages recorded in several other African and Arab countries.

Materialisation of the presidential programme pertaining to the promotion of digital economy

The measures decided at last Wednesday's cabinet meeting, held under President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali's chairmanship, are part of improving the communication technologies sector's contribution to materialisation of the presidential programme in its chapter pertaining to the

promotion of digital economy and boosting this strategic sector.

These measures particularly aim to further bring down broadband Internet fees, generalise connection of all ministries to very high-speed Internet and spread this network to 50 additional areas among the services areas, industrial zones, university campuses and hotel centres in 2010, in addition to increasing Tunisia's Internet bandwidth connection to the global Internet network to 40 gigabits/second by late 2010.

Role of ICTs in Arab women's empowerment

HAMMAMET, May 26, 2010 (TAP) - The International Workshop on the Role of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in Arab Women's Empowerment opened works, on Wednesday, under the high auspices of Mrs. Leila Ben Ali, wife of the Head of State and Arab Women Organisation (AWO) Chairwoman.

Presiding over opening of the workshop, held on May 26-June 4 at the Women and Sciences Association's initiative, Communication Technologies Minister Mohamed Naceur Ammar asserted that, according to a study conducted by the ministry on women and communication technologies, 78% of Tunisian women own cell telephones, 45% use computers at home, work, in educational establishments or in cybercafés and 34% browse the Internet.

The minister also said that Tunisia's development approach considers Tunisian women as partners in all political and social-economic fields and consecrate the important position Tunisian women hold at national and international scales, as testified to by Tunisia's chairmanship of AWO, in recognition for the achievements accomplished in the matter.

He recalled that Tunisia is endeavouring to reinforce women's capacities, facilitate their integration into the economic life and their adjustment to the new economy's requirements by encouraging them to opt for scientific subjects such as information technology, mathematics and engineering.

Boosting Tunisian-Finnish bilateral co-operation in ICTs

TUNIS, May 19, 2010 (TAP) - Secretary of State in charge of Computers, the Internet and Free Software Lamia Chafai Sghaier conferred, on Wednesday in Tunis, with Finland's Under Secretary of State for External Economic Relations Pekka Huhtaniemi, who is on a visit in Tunisia leading a delegation to attend the Tunisian-Finnish Economic Forum, which had been held on May 18.

The meeting helped review the prospects of bilateral co-operation in the information and communication technologies (ICTs) field and means to consolidate it, notably in matters of research, technological innovation, the exchange of expertise and investment in the sectors of computer security, e-signature, technological poles and improvement of digital services.

Mr. Pekka Huhtaniemi expressed his country's will to enhance bilateral co-operation in ICTs field, laying

emphasis on the role of the private sector which is called to make the most of the set-up mechanisms.

He also voiced satisfaction at the strides made by Tunisia on the path of materialising the recommendations of the World Summit on the Information Society, organised in Tunis in 2005.

International conference on modeling and simulation

HAMMAMET, May 10, 2010 (TAP) - The 8th international conference of modeling and simulation is held on May 10-12, 2010 in Hammamet, with the participation of researchers and specialists coming from 51 countries and five continents.

The Conference focuses on issues related to "assessment and optimisation of innovating systems of goods and services production," owing to the importance of this field in strengthening development and preserving the country's economic profitability by boosting enterprises' competitive edge.

At the opening of the conference works, Secretary of State in charge of Scientific Research Refaat Chaabouni underlined, in particular, that during the 2009-2014 period, Tunisia is seeking, under President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali's leadership, to cross a new stage in its socio-economic process, a stage to be marked by the development of new high added-value activities, the achievement of new competitive advantages for scientific research, innovation and reinforcement of the national scientific research system and technological innovation to improve its performance.

The Conference is co-held by the CEREP Research Unit, the Tunis Sciences and Techniques School, the Laboratory of Industrial Engineering and Production of the University of Paul Verlaine in Metz, France, and scientific associations.

It provides the opportunity to present the latest scientific developments related to modeling and simulation and fields of their use, particularly in the health, industry and transport sectors and in systems of quality control and e-protection.

Modeling and simulation are scientific specialties studied at doctoral level, after engineering studies. They help set up thorough computer systems allowing to establish modern management methods that assist decision-making and cut production costs.

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Maghreb portal on higher education

TUNIS, May 3, 2010 (TAP) - A portal on higher education and scientific research in the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) countries is under construction, in association with the AMU Secretariat-General, higher education structures and academic and applied research centres in the Arab Maghreb.

According to a communiqué released on Monday by AMU Secretariat-General in Rabat, the portal is meant to be database on higher education systems in Maghreb countries and provide periodic publications on research activities and results, while shedding light on Maghreb young researchers in the area of technological creation and innovation.

The decision to create this portal was taken at the Maghreb Education, Higher Education and Scientific Research Council's meeting held last June in Tripoli.

TOURISM & CULTURE

Béni M'tir, a future spa tourism destination

TUNIS, May 24, 2010 (TAP) – In the heart of the very small town of Beni M'tir (governorate of Jendouba) an extraordinarily delightful haven of peace, backed by hills of lush vegetation and teeming greenery to the eye, rocked by a very mild temperature, starts to form a spa to draw, as it should, on profuse flowing streams.

A field tour recently organized by the National Balneology Authority offered a unique opportunity to accurately measure the high potential of this charming country spa whose reputation is confirmed nationwide.

Works on the project, worth 6 million Dinars, started February 2009, says Faiez Rouissi, owner of the site.

The little fresh water project is financed by the Bank for Financing Small and Medium Enterprises (BFPME) and the European Union. It will spread over a plot of 1200 m². Its components are tempting: a spa, cottages equipped with personal Jacuzzis and other amenities for the well-being of spa guests.

It also includes a health tourism unit, a hotel, a restaurant, a beauty center, and sports and environmental activities spaces.

Among the ambitious goals it targets, the project aims at developing ecological tourism. In effect, then site draws on a hot spring called "Hammam Salhine," one of Tunisia's and the world's hottest springs.

This spring is known for healing rheumatic, inflammatory and epidermal diseases, as pointed out by Faisal Jebari, local tourism commissioner.

The new spa is expected to create a market dynamics in the region and provide national and international spa guests with an opportunity to enjoy the amenities available and enhance Tunisia's' capacity for ranking second global destination for its spas.

Club Med makes its presence more felt in Tunisia

MEDENINE, May 18, 2010 (TAP) - French group "Club Med" is making its presence more felt in Tunisia by inaugurating, on Monday in Djerba, a new hotel unit named "Calypso."

The unit was inaugurated by Tourism Minister Slim Tlatli, in the presence of Henri Giscard D'Estaing, chairman of the group.

The minister stressed the quality of partnership between Tunisia and "Club Med," which shows, he said, the confidence enjoyed by the country among foreign investors.

Before entering into operation, the new unit underwent upgrading works at a cost of 10 million euros, the purpose being to adapt it to the group's new orientations which aim, in particular, to promote top-of-the-notch family tourism.

"Calypso" has 179 rooms whose decoration is inspired from the local heritage and even Djerba's handicrafts.

The new unit is part of the tourist project "Djerba la Douce." This village stretches over 20 hectares and has nearly 613 rooms, 3 swimming pools, a children's club and a space for congresses.

Investments earmarked for this village reached nearly 30 million euros. "Club Med" has 5 villages in Tunisia shared out between Djerba, Hammamet and Nabeul.

These units hosted 60,000 tourists from 25 nationalities in 2009.

uring a news conference, Mr. Giscard D'Estaing said the success of the chain in Tunisia is the result of many factors, particularly the beauty of the sites, mildness of water, partnership with the Tunisian administration and the quality of business environment prevailing in Tunisia.

He said the Club seeks to create a sports school in Tunisia to introduce children aged between 6 and 12 to tennis.

New cruising packages to be marketed in Tunisia

TUNIS, May 8, 2010 (TAP)-A partnership agreement has been concluded between the French Latitude Sud company, general agent in France of cruise lines Royal Caribbean International, Celebrity Cruises and Azamara Club Cruises (RCCL Group) and D'Alessandro Travel agency by virtue of which the latter is empowered to market the Group's cruise products on the Tunisian market.

Tunisian customers will hence have an opportunity to plan a large range of cruises across the world payable in Tunisian dinars according to the inclusive tour current regulations as defined by the Tourism Administration.

In a statement to TAP News Agency, Chairman and Managing Director of D'Alessandro Travel explained that the partnership has a two-fold goal. First, today Tunisians have by far a higher purchasing power and can target a larger range of tourism products. Therefore, the signatories to the agreement offer a package of cruises worldwide on the best cruise liners in the world.

Second, he added, introducing the new products on the Tunisian market will allow partners among travel agencies in Tunisia to diversify their offer and consolidate their turnover.

The Tunisian market is promising thanks to the harbour infrastructure achieved including the cruising village built at, and the extension of the platform of La Goulette Port, with the prospect of extending the project to other Tunisian ports.

He specified that this niche will empower cruise tourism in Tunisia to move up to top-of-the-range tourism and offer Tunisia a nice showcase thanks to the quality infrastructure available.

For her part, Ms. Robiha Deloubrière, General Manager of Latitude Sud praised "the prospect of having Tunisian customers on RCCL Group cruise liners over 290 destinations thus contributing," she said, "to further enlarging the extraordinary panel of nationalities on board 35 liners the Group counts."

The latter, she pointed out, organizes 4-to-7 day mini-cruises on ships with a hosting capacity of 100 up to 6000 cruise tourists at very competitive prices. For example, the cost of a 4-day European cruise is of 350 Euros.

Established until 2009 as Navitour—the oldest travel agency in Tunisia—became D'Alessandro Travel. The latter opened a branch in Tunis and won the exclusive representation of Royal Caribbean, Celebrity Cruises and Azamara Club Cruises in Tunisia.

Tunisian film "El icha" won prize at Spain's Tarifa African Film Festival

TUNIS, May 30, 2010 (TAP) - Tunisian film « EL ICHA » (life) by Walid Tayaa won, on Saturday evening, as part of the official competition of short films « Africa in short", the Radio TV Andalucia prize for audiovisual creation, at the 7th African Film Festival of Tarifa, Spain.

The jury awarded the prize to this film for it reflects daily life, any culture and any place, and for the way it dealt with the rising religious intolerance, said festival director Mane Cisneros.

The film tells the story of Hayet, a forty-year-old Tunisian widow whose 20 year old son went to Canada.

She lives with her mother in a working-class district of Tunis and works in a French call centre relocated in Tunis. She goes to work everyday and life is falling into a heavy routine.

In addition to « El Icha », two other Tunisian films were competing this year in this festival : Dowaha (Raja Amari), and "L'enfant roi" (Mohamed Houssine Grayaa). This year, the festival of Tarifa screened 113 films of 36 countries.

Simone and Cino Del Duca Foundation awards World Archeology Prize to Tunisian-French team

TUNIS, May 26, 2010 (TAP) - The Simone and Cino Del Duca Foundation's Committee, the Institute of France, awarded the World Archeology Prize to the Tunisian-French team who are in charge of excavations and researches on the archeological Ammaedara-Haidra site, in the Governorate of Kasserine.

Awarded on proposal of the jury chaired by chairman of the "Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres" Professor Pierre Sylvain Filliorat, this prize is a reward to a fifteen- year work which helped conduct studies on a number of monuments on this site --Byzantine churches, thermaes, roads, pagan and Christian epigraphs, Roman and Moslem ceramics, mosaics, sculptures, etc.

Findings of the excavations were published in two large books by the Rome-based French Institute, and a third one under printing.

This prize also rewards efforts exerted by Tunisia in the research field and in shedding light on the country's sites, including Ammaedara's which benefits of an important presidential project aimed to preserve it.

4th International Tunis film festival May 27-30

TUNIS, May 26 (TAP)- The 4th international Tunis film festival will be held next May 27-30 in the northern resort town of La Marsa under the following theme "Femmes je vous aime" ("women I love you").

This event is intended as a renewed occasion to honour not only the artists but also all the women.

Six films will be competing: "Jelly" (USA), "Im Anhang Lebenslauf" (Germany), "Club Da Calceta" (Spain), "Kaméleon" (Hungary), "Land Gold Women" (United Kingdom-India), and "16 to life" by Becky Smith (USA).

Start of 17th International Springtime Arts Festival of Kairouan

SOUSSE, May 16, 2010 (TAP)- The 17th International Springtime Arts Festival of Kairouan started on Saturday on the following theme "Arts and values ", with attendance of several guests coming from Syria, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Morocco, Algeria and the United Arab Emirates.

The festival, due to last until next May 19, includes poetry, films, theatre plays and music.

Culture and Heritage Preservation Minister Abderraouf Basti presided over the opening of this annual cultural event, saying that it had become an imperative and regular annual meeting for creators to exchange cultural experiences.

International conference on role of universities and scientific research centres in dialogue of religions and civilizations

TUNIS, May 13, 2010 (TAP) - The role of universities and scientific research centres in the dialogue of religions and cultures is the theme of an international meeting held on Thursday and Friday in Tunis, with the participation of academics and researchers from Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Egypt, Kosovo, Finland, Germany, Belgium and Italy.

Organised by the UNESCO Chair for Comparative Studies of Religions in Tunis, the meeting focuses on ways to develop traditional teaching and research disciplines to better take into consideration pluralism, inter-culture, openness, tolerance and training of skills in religions and cultures, while resorting to such fundamental subject matters as history, arts and languages, in addition to deepening experience of centres of dialogue of religions and civilisations and cultures in universities.

It will also examine youth's role in promoting dialogue of religions and cultures.

Participants stressed, in particular, the need to spread the culture of tolerance, the golden mean and intellectual and religious pluralism, in addition to respect of others in educational curricula at all levels. Emphasis was also placed on the activities of Ben Ali's Chair for Dialogue of Civilisations and Religions.

Tunisia, guest of honour at Memphis International Festival

TUNIS, May 7, 2010 (TAP) - The 34th Memphis International Festival picked Tunisia as guest of honour.

A reception was hosted, on the occasion, during which Culture and Heritage Preservation Minister Abderraouf el Basti chaired an official ceremony, on the Tunisian side, along with the Mayor of Memphis, on the American side with attendance of Tunisia's ambassador in Washington and officials from the state of Tennessee and American culture and media people.

In his address on the occasion, the minister thanked the organisers of the Festival and officials of the city of

Memphis for having chosen Tunisia as a guest of honour at this edition, underlining that the Tunisian participation in this great international event benefits from the large support of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali who sees in it an opportunity to foster the historical ties binding the two peoples.

Mayor of Memphis expressed, on his part, his consideration for the efforts made by Tunisia to ensure a remarkable presence in the Memphis Festival and its different activities.

He evoked his positive impressions on Tunisia's progress during his visit last March, stressing his will to strengthen co-operation with Tunisia which he considers as a model in promoting values of tolerance, moderation, openness and dialogue.

The Tunisian participation in the Memphis Festival, which will last till the end of this month, includes, in particular, plastic arts and cultural heritage exhibitions, in addition to an exhibition on Tunisian women through the ages at the Museum of Human Rights which reviews Tunisia's reform heritage, the fundamental pact of women's liberation and women's access to the rank of partners in society.

The Tunisian participation also includes artistic shows (songs and dance), film screening and lectures on dialogue of religions and cultures, architecture, opportunities of partnership and investment in Tunisia, in addition to the promotion of Tunisia as a cultural tourist destination.