



TUNISIA NEWSLETTER

September 2011

TUNISIA & JAPAN	3
New Tunisian Ambassador to Japan presents copy of Credentials to Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs	3
Tunisian-Japanese project of forest development.....	3
Tunisia to issue stamp for Japan World Stamp Exhibition "PHILANIPPON 2011".....	3
POLITICS	3
Security situation and the proposal of a referendum on the National Constituent Assembly (NCA) focal points of High Authority for Achievement of Revolution meeting	3
"Declaration of Transition Process"	4
Sixteen hundred tickets for NCA elections at home and more than 150 abroad.....	4
Draw of electoral campaign schedule in public national media	4
DIPLOMACY	5
President Mahmoud Abbas praises Tunisia's support to Palestinian cause	5
Bolstering Tunisian-Libyan co-operation, focus of President Foued Mebazaa - Libyan National Transition Council Libyan National Transition Council Chairmain meeting	5
US commitment to back up all initiatives aimed to support Tunisia.....	6
Prime Minister Beji Caïd Essebsi receives Belgian Foreign Minister	6
Foreign Minister Mouldi Kéfi receives Italian Interior Minister	7
G8 boosts aid to aspiring Arab democracies.....	7
Foreign Minister takes part in 66th session of UN General Assembly	7
"Turkey is always ready to support Tunisia and its people " Erdogan says	7
'Council of Europe to send 30 observers to Tunisia' (Andreas Gross).....	8
BUSINESS & ECONOMY	8
Round table in Tunis focuses on situation and prospects of businesses after Revolution	8
Minus 3 % growth in first half of 2011.....	9
Positive indicators of industrial activity	9
FDI drop by 26.3% in first 7 months of 2011	9
Tunisian economy able to achieve 1% growth rate in 2011 (Minister)	10
Tunisia ranks 40 th in Global Competitiveness Report.....	10
Development of foreign trade in first eight months of 2011	11
Central Bank of Tunisia decides to cut again its main interest rate to boost economic activity.....	11
UTICA to open office in Tripoli.....	11
Exports up by 9.8% thanks to food industry and EMIs	11
Government introduces "Jasmine Economic and Social Plan"	12

Tunisia Newsletter

SOCIETY	12
Emergency employment plan revolving around 4 axes	12
Employment and Regional Development Month launched: mobilising all energies to serve employment.....	13
TOURISM & CULTURE	14
Tourist entries slope down by 39%.....	14
Developing Kef tourist circuit.....	14
Tourist season: lack of visibility for next quarter.....	14
Three working teams for valorising Tunisian museums	15
Tunisian Amazigh Culture Association born.....	15
Angouleme French Film Festival: Homage to Tunisian cinema	15
Ridha Behi's 'Always Brando' selected to premiere at Toronto Film Festival.....	15
Tunisian Revolution as main theme of Rotterdam Arab Film Festival.....	15
Caretaker President receives group of Tunisian film makers	16

TUNISIA & JAPAN

New Tunisian Ambassador to Japan presents copy of Credentials to Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs

The newly appointed Tunisian Ambassador to Japan, H.E. Mr. Elyes KASRI, presented, on August 30th, 2011, a copy of his Credentials Letters, to H.E. Mr. Kenichiro SASAE, Japanese Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs.

The meeting was an opportunity to thank the Japanese Government for its support to Tunisia after the January 14th "Jasmine" Revolution.

Mr. SASAE expressed, on this occasion, the thanks of Japan and its gratitude to Tunisia for the friendship and solidarity it showed in the aftermath of the March 11th earthquake and tsunami.

The meeting also permitted to express satisfaction about the well established relations of friendship and the fruitful cooperation between Tunisia and Japan, and discuss means and ways to further strengthen and consolidate these relations for the benefit and interests of the two friendly peoples.

Ambassador KASRI arrived in Japan on August 22nd, 2011.

A career diplomat since 1979, Ambassador Elyes KASRI served as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the Republic of India (and concurrently to Sri Lanka, Nepal and Maldives), between 2001 and 2006, and Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the Republic of Korea, between 1995 and 1998.

At the Foreign Ministry, Mr. KASRI was in charge of several responsibilities, including Special Advisor to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (1994-95 and 1998-2001), and Director General for American and Asian Affairs (2007-2011).

He is holder of a Master of General Administration from Maryland University (U.S.A.) and a Master of Philosophy from the University of Tunis.

Ambassador Kasri is married with three sons.

Tunisian-Japanese project of forest development

August 31, 2011 EL KEF (TAP)- The Tunisian-Japanese project of forests' integrated management in the El Kef region helped renewing, since 2010 until now, 1,500 ha of Aleppo pine.

The actions also includes the plantation of 500 ha of fodder trees and the afforestation of wadis' borders over 120 ha to prevent erosion.

Besides, the programme contributed to refitting a natural reserve in Saddine and launching a development grouping.

Worth 5 million dinars, the Tunisian-Japanese project, which is due to continue until 2015, aimed to ensure the sustainable management of forests, the safeguarding of biodiversity and the improvement of the people's living conditions in the forest zones by means of boosting

income sources and reconciling people with their environment.

Tunisia to issue stamp for Japan World Stamp Exhibition "PHILANIPPON 2011"

July 27, 2011



TUNIS (TAP) - Tunisia's post office announced Wednesday that it will issue, on Thursday, a stamp dedicated to the World Stamp Exhibition "PHILANIPPON 2011" held in Yokohama, Japan, from July 28 to August 2 under the following theme: "Stamps Link the World." The aim of the exhibition is to promote and disseminate the culture of philately among all peoples of the world and especially children.

POLITICS

Security situation and the proposal of a referendum on the National Constituent Assembly (NCA) focal points of High Authority for Achievement of Revolution meeting

September 08, 2011 BARDO (TAP) - Security situation in the country, reactions to the Caretaker Prime Minister's speech and the proposal of a referendum on the National Constituent Assembly (NCA) were the focal points of debates held on Wednesday, within the High Authority for the Achievement of Revolution Objectives, Political Reform and Democratic Transition.

Several participants warned against the sensitive situation the country is living through and the resurgence of retrograde forces who seek to block the democratic transition process and hamper the October 23 elections for narrow reasons and objectives.

They called the various national players to close ranks against these counter-revolutionary forces and contribute to restore security and stability nationwide.

The proposal of political parties and civil society components to organise a referendum next October 23, on the duration of NCA's mandate and its exact mission were strongly criticised by a large number of participants. They denounce "the manoeuvres of some parties to restrict the Assembly's action and limit its mission before the elections."

In another connection, the High Authority members warned against the dangers of a conflict between the military and security institutions.

They asserted that "Tunisian and foreign sides are behind these ploys to prevent Tunisia from succeeding its democratic transition."

They called political parties and the government to be vigilant, in order to protect the country from the risks of

drifts and infringement of public and individual freedoms in the period preceding the elections.

Other participants criticised the Caretaker Prime Minister's speech and "his threats to restrict the security officers' right for unions," calling Mr. Caid Essebsi to apologise to the security forces.

Besides, the draft decree-law on the freedom of audiovisual communication and the creation of a High Authority of Audiovisual Communication (HAAC) was discussed in the presence of Independent National Authority for the Information and Communication Reform (INAICR) Chairman Kamel Laabidi.

Two draft decree-laws on parties and associations will be adopted this week by the government and will be published next Tuesday, in the official journal.

"Declaration of Transition Process"

September 15, 2011 18:11

TUNIS (TAP) - Parties represented in the High Authority for the Achievement of the Revolution Objectives, Political Reform and Democratic Transition (HAARO) signed, on Thursday in Tunis, the Declaration of Transition Process.

These parties are: the Democratic Forum for Labour and Freedoms (FDTL), "Ettajdid" Movement, the Socialist Democrats Movement (MDS), the Party of Green Tunisia (PTV), the Progressive Democratic Party (PDP), the En-Nahdha Movement Party, the Party of Patriotic and Democratic Labour (PTPD), the Arab Democratic Vanguard Party, the Socialist Left Party (PSG) and the Party of Reform and Development (PRD).

The Congress for the Republic party did not attend the conference and did not sign the Declaration, despite its contribution to drafting this text, said Mr. Yadh Ben Achour, Chairman of the HAARO.

The document provides for total commitment of signees to October 23, 2011 as the date for the Constituent Assembly's election and the Code of Ethics of Political Parties and Candidates worked out by the Independent High Authority for Elections (IHAE) throughout the transitory stage to ensure mutual respect among candidates in the election and guarantee neutrality of places of worship, educational and administrative institutions and workplaces.

The Declaration also stipulates that the tenure of the Constituent Assembly should not exceed one year so that the country could focus on urgent fundamental issues, particularly the social and economic ones.

The Declaration urges to carry on consultation and harmony between different parties to well manage this transition stage and adopt a comprehensive and flexible approach for the peaceful transfer of powers immediately after the election of the Constituent Assembly.

This approach stipulates that the current interim President and interim Government carry on their duties till the election of a new President of the Republic and the formation of a new government by the Constituent Assembly.

According to the Declaration, after proclamation of the election results, the interim President will convene the Constituent Assembly for a first meeting to elect the speaker of the Assembly to chair its works, organise its

sessions and create a committee tasked with drafting the internal rules of the Constituent Assembly.

The Declaration also stipulates that the Constituent Assembly defines the new regime of public powers under which the new President of the Republic will be elected.

Under this Declaration, the new head of state will appoint a personality to form a government after consultation with the Constituent Assembly's groups.

Management of state affairs will be the responsibility of the interim government till the formation of a new government.

The prime minister will submit the line-up of his government team and its programme to the Constituent Assembly for approval.

The Constituent Assembly, the new President of the Republic and the Government will carry out their mission until the setting up of durable institutions, in accordance with the new Constitution drafted by the Constituent Assembly.

Sixteen hundred tickets for NCA elections at home and more than 150 abroad

September 10, 2011 TUNIS (TAP)- The number of tickets in the different electoral constituencies is of 1,600 at home and more than 150 abroad, according to a document released, on Saturday, by the High Independent Authority for the Elections (HIAE).

The candidates issued from the parties total in the electoral constituencies in Tunisia 845 lists (52.8 %) while 678 independent lists presented represent 42.2 % of the total lists and 77 lists are made up with coalitions.

Concerning the electoral constituencies abroad, the HIAE received, according to temporary statistics, 152 lists distributed over six constituencies (Paris, Marseille, Italy, Germany, Canada and Abu Dhabi).

Draw of electoral campaign schedule in public national media

September 13, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - The draw of the electoral campaign schedule in public national media started on Tuesday at the Tunis Congress Palace.

Over 1,300 tickets were approved of, out of 1,600 shared out between parties, coalitions and independents.

Recording will take place in the television from September 15 to October 2, while airing will expand over the official campaign from October 1 to 21.

The draw, held by the Independent Higher Authority for the Elections (HIAE), does not involve tickets abroad as the result of the time difference.

At the opening of the meeting, HIAE Chairman Kamel Jendoubi reminded of the importance of this event, which completes the previous stages and prepares for those of the future in the Constituent Assembly election process.

He said that the IHAE will treat all tickets fairly, expressing hope that all participants will abide by the legal provisions inherent to the electoral process.

The start of the draw caused reactions from several representatives of independent lists and others from political parties regarding the organisational framework of

the draw and parties' compliance with the IHAIE's decision to ban political advertising from September 12.

Chairman of El Majd Party Abdelwaheb El Hani said that some parties do not respect this rule, saying that "any party that infringes this decision should be excluded from the electoral process and brought to justice, and to the exclusion of the offenders from the race".

In response to some parties that accused the Progressive Democratic Party (PDP) of not respecting the decision to ban political advertising, Mr. Iyed Dahmani, PDP politburo member said the decision of the HIAIE is not grounded in any legal reference and that "our presence in the draw shows our respect of the electoral process," adding that political advertising is a legitimate act.

For his part, Mr. Larbi Chouikha, IHAIE member said that the decree-law n°35, establishing the IHAIE, authorises it to intervene and take coercive measures that ban political advertising by depriving concerned parties of any public funding and eliminating their lists.

He reiterated the authority's will to "put the national interest above all other considerations."

DIPLOMACY

President Mahmoud Abbas praises Tunisia's support to Palestinian cause

August 24, 2011 TUNIS (TAP)- Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Khémaies Jehenaoui had a meeting, on Tuesday in Doha, with President of the Palestinian Authority Mahmoud Abbas, on the sidelines of Tunisia's participation in the meeting of the Committee on Follow-up of the Arab Peace Initiative.

The talk reviewed the latest developments of the Palestinian cause and efforts made to go to the United Nations General Assembly in its next session to seek recognition of the Palestinian State and grant it full membership in this UN authority.

The two sides examined the strong relations of brotherhood and co-operation binding the two brotherly peoples.

The Palestinian President expressed hope that the Tunisian people achieve their ambitions and expectations for freedom, democracy and better future.

He praised, in this regard, Tunisia's permanent support to the Palestinian cause and the support of the Tunisian diplomacy to the Palestinian efforts on the international scene.

During his address to the Arab meeting, the Secretary of State reasserted Tunisia's strong commitment to the just cause of the Palestinian people and support to all efforts and initiatives aimed to help them recover their national rights, first and foremost to establish their independent State on their national territory with Al Quds as capital.

Mr. Jehenaoui said Tunisia, which is member of the Committee on Follow-up of the Arab Peace Initiative, continues its active participation in this committee's works to support the Palestinian people and their leadership.

Bolstering Tunisian-Libyan co-operation, focus of President Foued Mebazaa - Libyan National Transition Council Libyan National Transition Council Chairman meeting

September 03, 2011 CARTHAGE (TAP) - Interim President Foued Mebazaa received, on Saturday at Carthage Palace, chairman of the Libyan National Transition Council (NTC) Executive Bureau Mahmoud Jibril, who was notably accompanied by Libya's Information Minister Mahmoud Chamam and NTC representative in Tunis Ahmed Jouzandar.

On this occasion, Mr. Foued Mebazaa highlighted the close fraternal relations and common history binding Tunisia and Libya, pointing out that these ties have been evidenced, once more, through the solidarity and support brought by the Tunisian people to their Libyan brothers during the hard test they have endured, in the last period.

The events which had taken place in Libya, he asserted, bode well for the future of this sisterly country, as well as for the whole region.

Tunisia, he went on saying, will continue its support to the Libyan people and will spare no effort to strengthen co-operation with Libya in all fields, the aim being to contribute to the construction of a better future for the two countries and for the two peoples.

After the talk, Mr. Mahmoud Jibril said he had had "a fraternal meeting" with Mr. Foued Mebazaa, one which has come to materialise the deep relations binding the two peoples.

He said that the audience had provided the opportunity to express Libya's gratefulness and consideration to Tunisia, people and government, for the historic role it had played in this hard test that Libya had gone through in the last period.

Besides, Mr. Jibril said he had examined with the interim President means to strengthen relations between the two brotherly peoples on the short and long terms, in this time of revolutions led by youth who "will always be at the vanguard and to whom we will mark the path to build the future," he underlined.

The talk was attended by interim National Defence Minister Abdelkrim Zbidi and Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Radhouane Nouisser.

TUNIS (TAP) - Chairman of the Libyan National Transition Council (NTC) Executive Bureau Mahmoud Jibril voiced delight to be in Tunisia, the cradle of the three revolutions of North Africa, pointing out that Tunisia had inspired the region's youths and set in motion "a new process which is to draw the future of the whole Arab nation."

Following his talk, on Saturday morning in Tunis, with interim Prime Minister Béji Caïd Essebsi, Mr. Jibril paid a particularly ringing tribute to the Tunisians who, he said, had hosted the Libyans in their homes, offered them the best care in their hospitals, and provided them with the needed help.

In this connection, he reasserted the Libyan people's gratefulness to Tunisia "for its highly honourable support to Libya, as well as for the historic role it played during that hard test."

Accompanied by a delegation, which notably included NTC official spokesman Mahmoud Chammam and Justice Minister Mohamed Allagui, the chairman of the Libyan NTC Executive Bureau said he had examined with the interim Prime Minister "the issue of short-term and long-term bilateral security, which at the present stage is urgent." Sorting out this issue, he pointed out, requires combining efforts of the two countries, on the political, economic and military levels.

He also said that he had suggested to Mr. Béji Caïd Essebsi to launch a dialogue gathering youths of Tunisia, Libya and Egypt, to help them develop a better understanding among themselves and adopt a common language in drawing the outlines of their new states.

Mr. Caïd Essebsi seized the opportunity to commend the well deserved victory of the Libyan people, thanks to their efforts, their fight, militancy and sacrifices, estimating that that victory could not be won by any country, particularly in the same conditions and in a relatively short period time.

The talk was attended by the interim Interior Minister, the interim National Defence Minister and the Joint Chief of Staff.

September 02, 2011 PARIS (TAP) - Interim Prime Minister Béji Caïd Essebsi reaffirmed on thursday in Paris Tunisia's total commitment to support the brotherly Libyan people in building up new Libya.

Addressing the international conference of support to new Libya held at the initiative of France and Great Britain with attendance of some 60 countries and international organisations, the PM stressed that the future of relations between Tunisia and Libya is more than mere economic co-operation and trade exchanges.

"The point will be to favour strategic complementarity for the benefit of the interests of the two brotherly peoples and the regions of the Maghreb, Africa and the Mediterranean," he reckoned.

Caïd Essebsi called on the international community to provide all the guarantees to support Libya in this decisive stage, stressing the need to respect the will of Libya's people and paying tribute to the national transitional council (NTC) which is seeing to preserve the unity of the people and the country.

The changes that happened in Tunisia, in Egypt and in Libya represent a historic change in the region and in the world and testify to the will of peoples to free themselves from the yoke of oppression and corruption, he said.

"The success of Arab Revolutions will definitively put an end to dictatorial systems of government ", Caïd Essebsi affirmed.

On the sidelines of the conference, the PM had talks with the heads of delegations of brotherly and friendly states including French president Nicolas Sarkozy, the Emir of Qatar, Morocco's Prime Minister, the Secretary General of the United Nations, the President of the African Union, the President of the European Commission and the UAE Foreign Minister.

US commitment to back up all initiatives aimed to support Tunisia

September 02, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - "The United States of America is particularly committed to contribute to boosting

Tunisia's economic development process, after the January 14 Revolution, through encouraging economic exchanges between the two countries," said Mr. Ronald Lee Wyden, US Democratic Senator.

At the end of his meeting, on Friday in Tunis, with Secretary of State to the Foreign Affairs Minister Khemaies Jhinaoui, Mr. Wyden expressed satisfaction at the development of the friendship and co-operation relations binding Tunisia and the US, which he described as "historical."

"As a Senator, I am ready, together with my colleagues from both the Democratic and Republican parties, to back up all initiatives that aim to assist Tunisia," he added during the talk, stressing will to encourage American investments in Tunisia, notably in sustainable energies, trade as well as high-employability sectors.

The US Senator said he was impressed by the Tunisian people's Freedom and Dignity Revolution, pointing out that "the wind of liberty and democracy that blew across Tunisia is likely to generate a favourable climate for strengthening co-operation and partnership relations between the two countries, and in all fields."

He also pointed up Tunisia's pioneering role in ushering in the Arab Spring which, he said, has come to confirm the universal nature of the values of Liberty and Democracy.

For his part, Mr. Jhinaoui expressed satisfaction at the Tunisian-American friendship relations, praising President Barack Obama's support, as well as the American people's and government's, to the Tunisian people's aspirations to liberty and democracy, voicing hope to see this attitude materialise through co-operation programmes that would help the country face up to the challenges of the present stage.

The meeting was attended by the US Ambassador in Tunis and the delegation members accompanying the US Senator.

Prime Minister Beji Caïd Essebsi receives Belgian Foreign Minister

September 13, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - Interim Prime Minister Beji Caïd Essebsi received, on Tuesday in Tunis, Belgian Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Steven Vanackere, who is paying his second visit in Tunisia since last March.

Following the talk, Mr. Vanackere said that the aim of his visit was to gather the Belgian diplomats and ambassadors in the Arab countries to think, during two days, on the positive role that the Belgian diplomacy could play in relation to the marking events of the "Arab Spring" ushered in by Tunisia.

These events, he added, "deeply and fundamentally belong to the Arab peoples first, but also to the international community and all peoples of the planet who have an interest to see and understand developments in the Arab world."

The Belgian FM said that Tunisia's choice to host the conference, which will gather some 40 Belgian diplomats, is also a choice motivated by the Tunisian exemplary hospitality and the friendship relations that have always tied the two countries.

Foreign Minister Mouldi Kéfi receives Italian Interior Minister

September 12, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - "Italy and Tunisia agreed to act together with the European Union to lay down the foundations of a safer and more stable Mediterranean region," Italian Interior Minister Roberto Maroni said.

At the end of a meeting he had, on Monday in Tunis, with Foreign Minister Mohamed Mouldi Kéfi, Mr. Maroni voiced satisfaction at the development of the Italian-Tunisian co-operation which have recorded "excellent results in all fields," he said.

Accompanied by an Italian delegation made up of Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Stefania Craxi and Secretary of State for Interior Affairs Sonia Viale, Mr. Maroni said that he had discussed with the Foreign Minister the issue of migration, reasserting, in this regard, Italy's attachment to legal migration.

"Italy is expected to start consultations with Tunisia on this issue, in light of the new measures to be taken by the Italian government next October," he said.

During the talk, Mr. Mohamed Mouldi Kéfi voiced satisfaction at the development of political and co-operation relations binding Tunisia and Italy, which he described as "excellent."

He also expressed satisfaction at the regular political consultations between the two governments and their good handling of several issues, including assistance to development in Tunisia and migration.

G8 boosts aid to aspiring Arab democracies

2011-09-12 - Members of the Group of Eight (G8) industrialised nations on September 10th, 2011, promised to provide billions of dollars worth of additional aid to Arab states transitioning to democracy.

G8 finance ministers meeting in Marseille agreed to provide additional assistance worth of \$38 billion to Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco and Jordan between 2011 and 2013.

The World Bank (\$10.7 billion), African Development Bank (\$7.6 billion), Islamic Development Bank (\$5 billion) and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (more than \$5 billion) are contributing to the financial support pledged by the G8.

Foreign Minister takes part in 66th session of UN General Assembly

As part of his participation in works of the 66th session of the United Nations General Assembly, Foreign Minister Mohamed Mouldi Kéfi took part, on Monday in New York, in the meeting gathering members of the Ad-Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLC) on Palestine, at the invitation of the Norwegian Foreign Minister in his quality as Chairman of AHLC.

Mr. Kéfi reiterated Tunisia's continuous support to the Palestinian cause, underscoring that post-January 14 Revolution Tunisia is entirely ready to lend support to the Palestinian Authority's laudable efforts to build its independent and sovereign state, adding that all Tunisians back up this approach.

On this occasion, Mr. Mohamed Mouldi Kéfi spoke of the key gains of the Tunisian Revolution, stressing the Interim Government's commitment to establish real democracy in Tunisia, as well as the role of the international community in the success of the democratisation process in the country.

Taking part in the symposium on the "International Co-operation in Fight Against Terrorism," organised at the initiative of the UN Secretariat General, the Minister reasserted Tunisia's firm condemnation of all forms of terrorism.

He pointed to the persistence of the terrorist threat and the danger it represents to security and peace in the world. He stressed the importance of a collective international approach, one that rests on dialogue and efficient solutions to the socio-economic issues upon which terrorism feeds, to curb this phenomenon.

In this connection, he reminded of Tunisia's efforts in favour of boosting dialogue, rapprochement and understanding between peoples, ethnic groups and nations. He deemed as unjustifiable and dangerous to associate terrorism with any religion, culture or race.

On this occasion, Mr. Kéfi conferred with the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of several friend countries and discussed with them different issues of mutual interest on the agenda of the UN General Assembly's 66th session, as well as on prospects for boosting bilateral relations with these countries.

"Turkey is always ready to support Tunisia and its people " Erdogan says

September 16, 2011 CARTHAGE (TAP) - Caretaker President Foued Mebazaa received here on Thursday Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who is paying an official two-day-visit in Tunisia.

The Turkish premier was escorted by a large delegation including the Minister of State, Deputy Prime Minister and the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Defence, Economy, Energy and Natural Resources and Transport.

Mebazaa highlighted the steps made in matters of transition to democracy since the January 14 Revolution, saying that the elections of the Constituent Assembly next October 23, represent a crucial stage in building up a radiant future for new Tunisia.

In a statement he made at the end of the meeting, Erdogan outpointed that the Tunisian Revolution had set off the "Arab Spring" the region is now living through and that the election of a Constituent Assembly is an important step towards actual democracy, wishing full success to the election process.

The head of the Turkish government also said he was optimistic about a promising future for bilateral relations, affirming that Tunisia and Turkey can look at new fields for co-operation.

"Turkey is always ready to support Tunisia and its people on the way of progress and development " he added.

Bilateral trade exchanges stand now at about 1 billion dollars and can be raised to 4 or 5 billion dollars," reckoned Erdogan, affirming that bilateral co-operation can be further boosted in the fields of tourism, education and infrastructure.

"My talks with President Mebazaa allowed to speak of the close historic ties between our two countries and discuss prospects for bilateral cooperation, notably in the military, economic, social and cultural fields," he declared.

"We have also discussed the latest developments in the region and the Palestinian cause," Erdogan added, expressing satisfaction at the convergent views of Turkey and Tunisia in this regard.

TUNIS (TAP) - Turkey will work to increase the volume of its trade with Tunisia, said Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan at a news briefing after his meeting, on Thursday, with Caretaker Prime Minister Beji Caïd Essebsi.

The Turkish PM stressed that his government will encourage Turkish investors to come to Tunisia and seek to boost bilateral co-operation in different fields, including military industry.

He described as "insufficient" the volume of trade exchanges between the two countries, which is about one billion dollars, expressing astonishment at the absence of a direct maritime line linking the two Mediterranean countries.

Mr. Erdogan voiced Turkey's readiness to make its tourist experience available to Tunisia, reminding that the chairman of the Turkish Tourism Union had visited Tunisia just after the Revolution to discuss ways to boost the Tunisia destination among Turkish tourists.

He said that Turkey "respects the Tunisian people's choice and will seek to establish excellent relations with Tunisia, whatever the outcome of the next elections will be."

"The Tunisian people, who made a revolution without bloodshed, is called upon to show to the world that democracy and Islam could go hand in hand, as it is the case in Turkey," underlined Mr. Erdogan.

In an answer to a question on relations between Turkey and Israel, Mr. Erdogan specified that these relations would not return to normal, as long as Israel did not offer apologies and pay compensations to the families of the Marmara ship's martyrs.

He recalled the arrangements that Turkey had made in this regard, laying emphasis on the fact that Turkey would ensure the protection of its flotilla and that Israel would not act as it pleases in the Middle East.

For his part, Mr. Beji Caïd Essebsi said that the co-operation relations binding Tunisia and Turkey would be boosted in political, economic and tourist fields.

He pointed out that he had discussed with the Turkish PM the theme of relation between State and religion, specifying that the two sides had insisted on the fact that "there is no contradiction between Islam and democracy."

He underscored concordance of views between the two countries regarding fight against extremism whatever its origin, considering that "the state of justice is the one that guarantees freedom of thought to all."

He also emphasised Tunisia's unwavering support to the Palestinian cause and to the Palestine Liberation Organisation, recalling that "Tunisia had been one of the first countries to support the Palestinian people's legitimate rights, since the adoption of Resolution 181 of United Nations General Assembly, in 1947."

'Council of Europe to send 30 observers to Tunisia' (Andreas Gross)

TUNIS (TAP) - "A delegation of thirty observers will be sent by the Council of Europe to Tunisia, on the occasion of the National Constituent Assembly (NCA) elections, due next October 23," announced, on Thursday, Mr. Andreas Gross, head of the delegation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, who is on a two-day working visit to Tunisia.

After his talk, on Thursday afternoon, with Foreign Affairs Minister Mouldi Kefi, Mr. Gross said his visit seeks to strengthen dialogue with the different parties and components of civil society to identify difficulties and put forward proposals that would contribute to the success of the upcoming elections in Tunisia.

He said that the results of this mission will be submitted to the national parliaments of 47 countries members of the Council of Europe.

He said that MPs members of this delegation will be able to put forward proposals on concrete actions at the level of their national parliaments to further support the democratic transition process in Tunisia.

He praised the new dynamics marking co-operation with Tunisia and expressed hope that the relations between the parliamentary assembly of the Council of Europe and the next legislative institution in Tunisia will be strengthened.

During this meeting, Mr. Kefi gave an overview of the current preparations to combine the necessary conditions for the holding of transparent and free elections.

BUSINESS & ECONOMY

Round table in Tunis focuses on situation and prospects of businesses after Revolution

August 17, 2011

TUNIS (TAP) - A round table on the "situation and prospects of businesses after Revolution" was held on Wednesday in Tunis.

Tunisian businessmen taking part in this event believed that the current situation in the country requires quick response to ensure sustainability of businesses.

In addition to the unstable economic and social context prevailing in the country, economic indicators are worrying: negative growth (-3%), rise in unemployment (700 thousand jobless), fall in local and foreign investment, hyper inflation, decline in foreign currency reserves and chaotic situation of tourism.

Facing this situation, businessmen emphasised the need to address urgently problems related to parallel trade which presents a risk for the security and survival of businesses.

They called for restructuring small and medium enterprises and carrying out a tax and financial reform.

The problem of damaged businesses from January 14 to our days, which number 300, was once again raised especially as only 22 companies received indemnification.

Speaking at this round table, Finance Minister Jalloul Ayed reminded of the measures taken by his department to boost private investment, including particularly the creation of two investment structures.

The Deposit and Consignment Office whose creation was decided by the Cabinet meeting last August 2 will finance infrastructure projects and ensure development and support for SME/SMI in disadvantaged inland regions. It will also contribute to mop up unemployment.

As for the second structure, it is the "Generational Fund" designed to support private investment.

Mr. Ayed said this file will be submitted to the government in three weeks.

Minus 3 % growth in first half of 2011

TUNIS (TAP) - The Finance Ministry announced a negative growth of minus 3% (-3%) for the first half of 2011 because of the regression of tourism receipts and industrial production. During the regular meeting with the press, Mr. Jamel Belhaj official in the Finance Ministry explained that this negative rate is the result of 50% regression of tourism receipts, first foreign currency source of the country.

In turn, the production of the industrial enterprises registered a drop because of the sit-ins and the continuous strikes. The strikes in the mining basin region cost the national economy about one million dinars a day, he specified.

The official said that the difficult economic juncture pushed the Standard and Poor's (SP) agency to decrease Tunisia's debt repayment outlook from 'BBB-/Stable' to 'BBB-/negative.'

This decline, he specified, will make the cost of borrowing higher for the international markets and will end up having recourse to bilateral financial resources.

In this same connection, he reminded the setting up shortly of a Deposit and Consignment Office (DCO), with amounts of more than 3 billion dinars, devoted to financing infrastructure in the inland regions. He went on saying that the financial resources of this fund will be constituted, notably, from the postal saving. This structure will help create jobs and achieve economic and social programme adopted by the interim government.

He specified that the DCO will have three agencies in the northwest, the midwest and the south. This structure will be endowed with a local premises in Tunis to be submitted to supervision to reclaim the amounts paid.

The Tunisian National Saving Fund will guarantee investors all their rights.

Positive indicators of industrial activity

August 19, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - Exports of the manufactured industries posted a growth of 10.4% in the seven months of 2011, compared to the same period of 2010, said Director General of the Manufactured Industries Kamel Oueslati.

He said at the periodic meeting with the press held on Friday in Kasbah that investment intentions valued at 2,000 million dinars (MTD) increased by 22% in 2011.

Fifty-six percent of these investments are for regional development areas with a value of 1,100 MTD.

The official at the Industry Ministry said investment in these regions posted a growth of 38% in addition to the development noted in the creation of industrial companies (+13%).

Regarding industrial upgrading, positive results were recorded with a rising number of companies joining the National Upgrading Programme.

The director general underlined that the establishment of an online platform to join the programme allowed 70 companies to adhere to this programme in two months.

Regarding upgrading bonuses, they reached 25 MTD in the first seven months of 2011, out of a total of 40 MTD allocated to the upgrading programme for 2011.

He outlined difficulties faced by the industrial sector in the post-Revolution period, particularly sit-ins and social claims that have damaged several industrial activities, despite the wage increases decided.

The number of files of damaged businesses submitted to the Ministry reached 270, he said.

These businesses suffered direct damage (vandalism, arson and looting) or indirect one (sit-ins and strikes).

The committee in charge of this file in the ministry has found solution to 32 files which received compensation of 17 MTD, likely to allow those businesses to resume their activities.

Regarding the indirect effects, 133 companies were affected by the sit-ins. They were unable to be supplied in raw materials and could not meet their commitments to their clients (local and exports markets) which will lead to a loss of opportunities.

Thus, companies working under sub-contracting risk to see their contracts with their mother companies terminated.

Files of these companies are treated at the level of the Ministry of Industry and Technology and as part of the decree on temporary measures.

So far, 30 files have been treated by the committee created within the Ministry to this effect. The state paid 500 thousand dinars to allow these companies resume their activities.

Mr. Oueslati cited in this context the example of the Enfidha Cements Company (SCE) whose production stopped because of sit-ins that have been held for fifty days at the Ain Mdhekra quarry while the company honored its commitments (granting of 250-dinar bonuses for over 600 families, in addition to the fitting out of a primary school in the region).

He reminded of the closing of the "Afripaper" plant in Kairouan since last March because of the sit-in that pushed the Tunisian investor to transfer his equipment to the mother company in the Governorate of Sousse, causing the loss of 415 jobs in the region, he added.

FDI drop by 26.3% in first 7 months of 2011

August 25, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - The foreign direct investments (FDI) reached at the end of the first seven months of 2011, 868.4 million Tunisian dinars (MTD), compared with 1178.9 MTD during the same period last

year, thus recording a decline estimated at 26.3% by the Foreign Investment Promotion Agency (FIPA).

These investments are shared out by means of 820.8 MTD in FDI and 47.6 MTD in portfolio, compared with 992.5 MTD and 186.4 MTD, respectively, during the first seven months of 2010, i.e. a drop by 17.3% and 74.4%.

According to FIPA, in the first seven months of the current year, 98 new enterprises of foreign participation started production, 12 of which are planted in interior regions.

During the same period, 136 extension operations were achieved by foreign enterprises already set up in Tunisia, as part of developing their activities.

As regards employment, 6,720 new jobs were created during the same period, 5,928 of which are in manufacturing industries, whereas, 5,900 jobs were lost as 82 foreign enterprises stopped their activities.

Tunisian economy able to achieve 1% growth rate in 2011 (Minister)

August 25, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - The Tunisian economy is able to achieve this year a growth rate that could reach from 0.2% to 1%, said Minister of Planning and International Co-operation Abdelhamid Triki.

To achieve such growth rate (1%), the Minister said it is necessary to resume the pace of activities of three sectors in difficulty, namely oil and derivatives, phosphates and cement. It is also necessary to improve the pace of domestic and foreign investment, he also said.

Speaking to journalists at a news briefing held Thursday in Tunis, Mr. Triki said the State had allocated 1,600 million dinars of the total mobilised external funding resources estimated at about 1,851 million dinars and this to assist economic recovery and improve the growth rate.

With regard to investment in general, Mr. Triki showed "optimism" given the industrial investment intentions which reached 22.2% and the increase in the latter's pace in development regions to 38.4%.

The Minister, however, expects a 5% decrease in investment for the whole year 2011, saying, in this connection that the volume of foreign investment could be reduced to 2,000 million dinars compared to 3,000 million dinars expected for this year.

Regarding the public sector, Mr. Triki pointed to the amelioration in the pace of achievement of projects and improvement in the deadlines of implementation in the first months of 2011.

On employment, the Minister said that 16,000 permanent jobs in the public sector will be created this year.

Despite this, the unemployment rate will rise to 16.3% compared to 13.3% in 2010 and the number of the unemployed could reach 650,000 persons by the end of 2011, the Minister said.

On another level, Mr. Triki noted that with the 5.7% deficit of the external payment balance expected in late 2011 and the State budget deficit estimated at 5.1%, additional needs in external funding sources will amount to 3,500 million dinars.

Returning to sectors facing difficulty, the Minister reminded of the decline in oil production (14.4%), that of

phosphates (54%) and cement (6.4%), in addition to the 47% drop in the number of overnight stays.

In contrast, positive results were recorded by other sectors. Thus, power production increased by 1.9% and a good cereal harvest estimated at 23 million quintals was recorded, in addition to good indicators in the areas of telecommunications, trade and transport.

These indicators will help reduce to 1.6% the fall in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the second half of 2011.

Tunisia ranks 40th in Global Competitiveness Report

September 05, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - Post-Revolution Tunisia ranks 40th at world level, according to the Global Competitiveness Report 2011-2012 published on Wednesday by the Davos World Economic Forum (WEF).

Tunisia is down by 8 ranks compared with last year in this new report which involves 142 countries. Besides, Egypt ranks 94th, dropping by 13 places at world level.

Compared with the 2010/2011 rankings, Tunisia has kept its leadership in Africa, and is down by three places at the Arab level, ranking 7th, with Oman, Bahrain and Kuwait ahead.

The drop in the Global Competitive Index (GCI) rankings reflects "an increased uncertainty regarding the future direction of economic policy as well as higher public awareness of the countries' structural weaknesses resulting mainly in poorer assessments of different aspects of public and private institutions whose ranking dropped from the 23rd place to 41st this year."

"The institutional framework is perceived as more prone to corruption and government favouritism, and the judiciary as less independent than in previous years."

"Not surprisingly, the security situation -one of the country's main competitive advantages in the past- takes a much higher toll on business activity in this year's GCI."

The latter is based on 12 pillars for Tunisia. At the exception of the "market size" pillar, which advanced by four ranks, all the other pillars recorded drops. The "labour market efficiency" fell by 27 places, ranking 106th. In matters of infrastructure, Tunisia lost 6 places, thus, ranking 52nd at world level.

As regards the "Institutions", the country dropped to the 41st rank (18 places) at world level and to the 29th regarding "public trust of politicians," to the 35th rank for "favouritism in decision of government officials," and to the 39th position as regards "transparency of government policymaking."

However, the report specifies that "the events have not affected two of the country's core competitive strengths."

"First, Tunisia continues to display solid educational outcomes, which remains significantly above the North African average not only in terms of quality (33rd), but also for participation at the primary and secondary levels."

And second, a healthy macro-economic environment was maintained, with a manageable level of public debt and a low budget deficit.

It is worth pointing out that "Switzerland tops the overall rankings for the third consecutive year, in the Global Competitiveness Report 2011-2012," whereas, "the

United States continues its decline for the third year in a row, falling one more place to fifth position."

Four new emerging economies were integrated in the report, namely Suriname, Belize, Yemen and Haiti. Nevertheless, the Libyan economy left the rankings this year.

The Global Competitiveness Report 2011-2012 is based on the Davos World Economic Forum's annual executive opinion survey conducted among 14,000 economic decision-makers in 142 countries.

Development of foreign trade in first eight months of 2011

September 07, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - The volume of Tunisian exports reached in the first eight months of 2011, 16,862.9 million Tunisian dinars (MTD) compared with 15,423.4 MTD in the same period last year, which stands at 9.3% rise.

The volume of imports reached 21,787.8 MTD, i.e. a rise of 4.0% compared with the same period in 2010 (20,957.0 MTD).

Therefore, the imports' coverage rate by exports is estimated at 77.4%, that is a progress by 3.8 points compared with last year.

According to the trade department, this development is due to the increase in the exportation of farming produce and processed-food industries (35.7%), and to the rise in the exportations of electrical industries, (29.1%) textile-clothing and leather (9.0%).

As regards imports, the rise in their volume in the past eight months is due to the increase recorded in the importation of basic farming and food products,(38.9%) energy (21.8%) and semi-industrialised imports (7.9%).

The downward trend in exports regarded the phosphate and by-products (Under 33.1%), and in imports, it was recorded in equipment products (10.7%).

Central Bank of Tunisia decides to cut again its main interest rate to boost economic activity

TUNIS (TAP)- The Board of Directors of the Central Bank of Tunisia (BCT), which met on September 5, 2011 in Tunis, decided to cut, again, the main interest rate of the BCT by half a percentage point to bring it to 3.5%, while ensuring consolidation of the banking system resources through the preservation of the deposit rates on savings accounts.

This decision aims, according to a statement of the Central Bank, to stimulate economic activity and contribute to the realisation of investment plans by limiting the financial burden on businesses.

During its Monday meeting, the Board voiced concern about the continued negative growth caused by the decline of activity in some key sectors (non-manufacturing industries, services...) and the drop of both domestic and foreign private investment.

This negative growth results in stepping up pressure on the balance of payments and therefore contracting the currency reserves which fell, according to the Board of Directors of the BCT, to 11.067 MTD or the equivalent of

123 days of imports by the end of August 2011 against 147 days at the end of 2010.

The Board also noted the persistence of economic problems despite efforts made at the level of the monetary policy by the decline of the reserve requirement to its minimum level and the reduction of the main interest rate of the Central Bank.

This situation is the result of continuing social and security instability and the lack of visibility for operators and the difference in the rate of growth compared to the hoped-for opportunities in a global economic environment that does not prompt the mobilisation of external resources.

Regarding the activity of the banking sector, the tightening of liquidity continued in August, which required increased intervention of the Central Bank to inject 3,148 MTD against 2,953 MTD in July.

This intervention resulted, in parallel, in reducing the main interest rate of the BCT and lowering the average money market rate to 3.76% against 4.25% a month earlier.

The Board recommended, in light of these developments, further strengthening the pace of financing the economy via an active monetary policy, while ensuring the implementation of fiscal policies that promote greater speed in carrying out projects and financing public enterprises.

UTICA to open office in Tripoli

September 09, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - The Tunisian Union of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts (UTICA) will open an office representing it in Tripoli, Libya, to strengthen the economic relations between the two countries.

In a statement released on Friday, Mrs. Wided Bouchamaoui, chairwoman of the employers' organisation, said this office will establish necessary mechanisms to help and encourage Tunisian and Libyan companies to boost their investment in both countries.

She said that this office will adopt a new approach that will lay down the foundations of a strong partnership between Tunisian and Libyan companies, relying on economic complementarity, promotion of joint investment and development of bilateral trade exchanges.

It should be noted that the UTICA chairwoman had conferred, on Thursday in Tunis, with Mr. Mohamed Montassar, member of the Libyan National Transition Council on preparations for the opening of the office.

During the talk, both sides had agreed to organise a mission of Tunisian businessmen in Libya in the course of this month.

The Libyan official emphasised the need to strengthen partnership between Tunisian and Libyan companies, particularly in this critical period both countries are living through.

Exports up by 9.8% thanks to food industry and EMIs

September 15, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - The industrial sector's exports, driven by the food industries and electrical and mechanical industries (EMIs), went up by 9.8%, during the first eight months of 2011, reaching 13,753.4 million dinars (MTD).

According to figures released by the Industry and Innovation Promotion Agency (APII), the exports of the food industries increased by 41.1%, boosted as they were by sales on the Libyan market, which reached 1,119.5 MTD. The EMIs sector's exports rose by 19.8%, standing at 6,172.3 MTD.

The EMIs had a share of 44.9% of the industrial sector's exports, followed by the textile-clothing industries (26.8%) whose exports amounted to 3,679.5 MTD, recording thus a 9-per-cent rise.

The industrial sector's imports reached 17,224.6 MTD, from January to August this year, recording a slight drop of 0.3%. However, the balance of trade of the industrial sector remains negative (-3,471.2 MTD) in 2011, even if this represents an improvement when compared with last year (-4,745.9 MTD).

Government introduces "Jasmine Economic and Social Plan"

September 19, 2011

TUNIS (TAP) - Finance Minister Jalloul Ayed presented, on Monday in Tunis, the government's "Jasmine Economic and Social Plan."

Chairing the Finance Day, organised as part of the employment and regional development month (September 12-30, 2011), the Minister specified that this new five-year programme materialises Tunisia's new development vision.

Mr. Ayed also reminded that the country had received promises from several parties, during the G8 summit, to finance this programme.

The cost of the programme, he added, is estimated at 125 billion dinars, 70% of which would come from national savings and 30% from foreign credits, asserting that about one million jobs would be created, including 500,000 direct ones.

The Minister explained that this programme aims to reduce unemployment and boost regional development, especially that the number of the jobless youths in Tunisia stands presently at about 700,000, including 170,000 university graduates.

The short-range and mid-term aims consist in creating jobs, while the ultimate long-term target is to restructure the national economy, in such a way that it rests on the new technologies, which are the only means that would help absorb larger numbers of higher-education graduates, the Minister pointed out.

The programme is also meant to direct the State's role towards accompanying the private sector in funding investment programmes and supporting private investments, while seeing to it to safeguard the attributes of transparency and good governance.

Mr. Ayed argued that the role of the private sector in Tunisia will be pivotal in the success of the Jasmine Economic and Social Plan. Its success depends on the elaboration of some measures, among which reform of the compensation fund and the financial sector to ensure the needed funding of projects.

He underlined that a working team had been created within the ministry to study means likely to launch the

assistance fund to provide new opportunities to young promoters to have easy access to sources of funding.

SOCIETY

Emergency employment plan revolving around 4 axes

September 07, 2011 TUNIS (TAP - By Wafa Attyaoui) - After the January 14, 2011 Revolution, the unemployment situation in Tunisia has worsened. The joblessness rate stands at 19%, against 14% in 2010.

This rise, at the present juncture, is due, according to a source from the Vocational Training and Employment Ministry, to the arrival on the labour market of new higher-education graduates in July 2011 (80,000), the return of Tunisian guest workers from Libya (between 30,000 and 35,000), the loss of 10,000 jobs since January 2011, and an estimated 2011 growth rate of no more than 1%.

In the face of this situation, an emergency employment plan has been devised by the Ministry. It revolves around four general axes: the creation of new wage-earning jobs in all sectors, the development of entrepreneurship and creation of micro-enterprises with promoters' guidance to ensure sustainability of the jobs created, support to ailing companies and preservation of existing jobs, as well as an active accompaniment of job applicants and development of their employability.

The Ministry's programme of activities on the short term centres on the creation of wage-earning jobs in all sectors. It was decided to create 20,000 wage-earning jobs in the public sector and 20,000 others in the private sector.

The development of entrepreneurship and creation of micro-enterprises with an accompaniment of promoters to guarantee the lasting of jobs created is put into effect through the training and initiation to the creation of enterprises, as well as the guidance and follow-up at all stages of the project.

The Ministry is presently striving to find urgent support solutions to the university graduates who have no self-funding means to start up their own projects.

It also strives to provide young graduates with an upgrading in new fields of activity, to boost guidance of promoters and co-ordinate activity of the different players in matters of promotion of enterprises to speed up the rate of firms creation in regions.

Measures were taken to support the ailing enterprises and to preserve the existing jobs, including a pilot action for the benefit of wage-earners of the large-distribution sector, by making the most of their technical unemployment period to organise further training to preserve their professional skills and speed up the return of activity of their enterprises.

This pilot action touches on more than 2,000 wage-earners whose technical unemployment period exceeds six months.

In a first stage, 15,000 persons in technical unemployment from 300 firms will make the most of the back-up measures to the ailing enterprises.

A second phase will concern assessment of the losses incurred by tourism and other fields of activity.

Besides, an active escorting of job seekers has been worked out, to be based on training, retraining for crafts of difficult integration into the labour market and practical training periods.

The Amal project is one of the key axes of the active accompaniment programme. Each job applicant will be offered the opportunity to fix a personalised professional career which increases his chances of employability and integration into the labour market.

To ensure optimum management of job programmes and the implementation of the principles of good governance, with the break-off with the old methods and adoption of the principle of transparency and equality of chances, on all levels and at all stages, the Ministry established a ministerial committee, a piloting committee and regional committee of employment.

Follow-up of these projects is carried out in partnership with the components of civil society, including the jobless associations.

According to the recent data provided by the Ministry, i.e., of September 2011, the total number of integrated trainees is about 13,189, including 4,063 as part of the initiation training to professional life (SIVP), 599 through integration contracts of graduates (CIDES), 7,914 contracts of adaptation and professional integration (CAIP) and 294 contracts of re-integration in active life (CRVA), as well as 80 trainees integrated as part of the programme of voluntary civil service (SCV) and 223 in programme of active job-seeking.

As regards the number of contracts underway, it is estimated at 206,514, including 146,334 as part of the Amal programme, 26,371 SIVP contracts and 26,348 CAIP contracts.

Employment and Regional Development Month launched: mobilising all energies to serve employment

September 12, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - The Employment and Regional Development Month opened on Monday at the premises of the Tunisian Union of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts (UTICA) in Tunis, under the sign of "Investment and Governance."

Held from September 12 to 30, under the motto of "Action, Employment from the North to the South," the Employment and Regional Development Month is held by the Vocational Training and Employment and the Regional Development Ministries, in association with several stakeholders from the employment sector.

The event is part of a communication campaign designed essentially to bring closer the views of different stakeholders in the area of employment and regional development and co-ordinate their energies.

Administrations, public and private companies, associations, academics and researchers, donors, international partners, journalists, bloggers, civil society and the media are called to support State's efforts in matters of employment and publicise exceptional programmes and measures set up by the Interim Government to develop solutions likely to boost

employment, investment, self-employment and regional development.

It also seeks to better inform the public opinion of the situation of the job market and the relationship between employment and regional development and encourage Tunisian and foreign investors to create projects, as well as informing them of the Tunisian business environment and the potentials of Tunisian skills.

This initiative is an opportunity to revive the economy and encourage investment which remains the best guarantor to boost employability and development in regions, said UTICA Chairwoman Wided Bouchamaoui at the opening of this event.

"How to make of democratic transition a mechanism to boost development and employment?" wondered Mr. Mustapha Kamel Nabli, Governor of the Central Bank of Tunisia, in a paper presented on the problem of employment and development in Tunisia.

He said that improving employability requires setting up an institutional, political and financial system providing a climate conducive to investment.

Several innovating initiatives are taken to resolve the problem of employment, according to Mr. Jalloul Ayed, who spoke, in particular, of the need to introduce reforms on the financial system, the functioning of the State and the education and justice sectors.

He presented, in this regard, initiatives taken by the Interim Government in matters of employment, reform of the regulatory framework of micro-financing and that of risk capital and preparation of a public-private regulatory framework.

Besides, an emergency plan was set up to stabilise the situation in the employment sector, he reminded.

Regional Development Minister Abderrazek Zouari proposed to make of the Employment Month a tradition, stressing the importance of this initiative in assessing economic policies and boosting regional development.

Resolving the problem of employment should rest on narrowing gaps between different regions in matters of development, he added.

Focusing on the social aspect, Social Affairs Minister Mohamed Ennaceur called for establishing a national dialogue on the problem of employment and the development model.

He also reviewed problems of poverty, lack of infrastructure and unequal distribution of development opportunities.

Political parties, civil society and governmental structures are called upon to step up efforts to determine the causes of unemployment, emphasised Mr. Ennaceur, particularly the issue of imbalance between education and the labour market needs.

This month will provide the opportunity to work to ease self-financing of projects for promoters who already received an agreement in principle.

It will also witness the signing of work contracts in private companies, the announcement of results of contests organised as part of the exceptional recruitment campaign in the public service (24,000 new jobs) and the inauguration of high-employability establishments.

Partnership agreements between the vocational training sector and private companies will be signed to improve the employability of vocational training graduates.

During the Employment and Regional Development Month, debates, open-door days, meetings, news conferences and back-up and guidance operations will be organised with different stakeholders at the national and regional levels.

The agenda also includes seminars on such themes as employability, support of job-seekers, training, guidance and regional development, as well as sectoral conferences in the areas of finance, communication technologies, health, agriculture, industry, tourism and trade.

The Month of Employment will be organised on the national and regional scale.

TOURISM & CULTURE

Tourist entries slope down by 39%

August 6, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - A noteworthy improvement of hotel occupancy rate was recorded during the last ten days of July, while tourist trade has been marked, since January 2011, by a general decline of entries, overnight stays and receipts.

A survey by the Trade and Tourism Ministry shows that the occupancy rate reached 47.2 % in some tourist zones, during the last 10 days of July, with the peak in the zones of Mahdia (81.2%), Yasmine-Hammamet (77.7%), Nabeul-Hammamet (69.9%) and Djerba-Zarzis (55.8%).

However, given the slow-down of the tourist trade, during the first seven months of 2011, the revenues fell by -47%, at 952.5 million dinars (MTD).

Tourist entries registered, according to the Ministry, a drop of 39% from January to July 2011, some 2,422,364 tourists, against 3,972,009 during the same period of 2010.

The European entries (1,070,208 tourists) went down by 49%. As regards Tunisia's first tourist market, the entries of the French tourists numbering 437,586 visitors, went down by -46.5%.

German tourists who visited Tunisia (106,645) also fell by 53.3%, while the number of the English tourists (116,100) registered a drop of -38.8%.

As to Maghrebi tourists, the ministry's statistics show a remarkable decline of the Algerians (-43.9%), from 621,155, in 2010, to 348,645 in 2011.

The number of Libyan tourists reached 764,639, down by 32.5% (this figure refers only to Libyans who stayed in hotels).

The total overnight stays (9,071,644) also decreased by -43.1%, from January to July 2011.

The sharpest falls were recorded in the zones of Sousse (-64.5%), Djerba-Zarziz (-43.2%), Monastir-Skanès (-42.9%), Mahdia (-36.9%) and Yasmine-Hammamet (-30.9%).

Developing Kef tourist circuit

August 6, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - Some 600,000 dinars have just been released kick-start the development of a cultural and tourist circuit in El-Kef ancient Medina, out of the planned total investment of 9 million dinars (MTD).

This project, co-funded by both the Tourism and Culture Ministries, was greenlighted on Tuesday in a joint working session.

Tourism Minister Mehdi Houas and Culture Minister Ezzedine Bachaouch voiced will to give cultural tourism in El Kef region a concrete shape, in such a way as to promote it as part of an effective and sustainable development dynamic.

Beyond valorising a heritage which has so long been marginalised, carrying out of this project, which is to generate hundreds of jobs, will result in a new vitality in the development of tourism, particularly through increasing the hosting capacity, catering and leisure activities.

The concerned zones are the localities of Sidi Hassine, Dar El Kahia, El Kasbah, the Temple of Waters, the Sidi Boumaklouf historical complex, the Basilica, the main thermal baths, the synagogue and the Medina Souks.

Tourist season: lack of visibility for next quarter

August 26, 2011 TUNIS (TAP)- Director General of the Tunisian National Tourism Board (ONTT) Habib Ammar reported a lack of visibility for the next period of the tourist season, blaming this "vagueness" on the lack of accurate information about the reactions of tourists.

The official, who was speaking on Friday at the regular press briefing of the Prime Ministry's Communication Cell, said "last minute" bookings will be crucial to revive the Tunisian tourism, particularly after the relatively positive turning point experienced by the situation in Libya.

Mr. Ammar said operations to promote the Tunisia destination will focus in the next period on new promising products and sectors, such as cultural tourism, thalassotherapy and Saharan tourism.

He also announced that talks are under way for the amicable termination of promotion contracts signed between the ONTT and foreign companies, saying that priority will be given, in this regard, to specialised Tunisian companies.

ONTT Director General then reviewed the fall in indicators recorded by the tourism sector up to August 20, 2011.

Tourist arrivals reached 2.771 million tourists compared with 4.539 million in the same period of 2010, i.e. down 38.9%, he said.

As for total overnight stays, hotel occupancy fell by 46.3% from January 1 to August 20. They reached 1,210.3 million dinars, compared with 2,155 million dinars in 2010, representing a loss of nearly 928.1 millions dinars.

Twenty four hotels with an accommodation capacity of 7,544 beds have been closed since January 14, causing the loss of 3,019 jobs.

The decline in tourism also resulted in the elimination of season jobs, particularly in tourist regions most hit by the crisis, knowing that seasonal employment accounts for 20% of all direct jobs. Indeed, about 22,319 direct jobs were lost.

Three working teams for valorising Tunisian museums

July 09, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - Several curators of Tunisian museums, international experts and consultants focused on "Publics, Services and Economy of Museums in Tunisia: New Prospects."

Initiated by the Culture Ministry and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), in association with the Islamic Scientific, Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (ISESCO), the six-day event ended up with the creation of three working groups to highlight Tunisian museums.

Made up of Tunisian professionals from the National Heritage Institute and the Heritage Valorisation and Cultural Development Agency, the first group will be tasked with examining scientific and cultural projects, establishing diagnosis of museums and devising development and promotion programmes of these establishments.

The second working team will be entrusted with partnering museums and schools, while the third will focus on partnership between museums and cultural tourism to develop hosting services and sales of by-products.

Taking the floor at the closing session on Saturday, Culture Minister Ezzeddine Beschouch stressed the importance of this event which, he said, provides a propitious occasion for further training of museum curators to endow them with all the necessary tools that would help them renovate Tunisian museums.

Mrs. Mounira Baccar, specialist of museum section programme at UNESCO, underlined the importance the United Nations Organisation attaches to cultural life in post-Revolutionary Tunisia, announcing in this respect, UNESCO's decision to allocate a budget to Tunisia to contribute to the implementation of the Culture Ministry's priority programmes, particularly those related to the achievement of museum projects and the organisation of cultural events.

Tunisian Amazigh Culture Association born

July 30, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - The birth of The Tunisian Amazigh Culture Association, "a vanguard social-cultural event," according to observers, was announced at a news conference held on Saturday in Tunis.

The latter was conducted by association Chairwoman Khadija Ben Saidane, World Amazigh Congress President Lounis Belgacem and two representatives of the Congress Abderrazek Amadi from Libya and Khaled Zerari from Morocco.

Mrs. Ben Saidane said in her address, that the association was founded last April during the National Amazigh Congress held in Matmata, adding that getting the legal authorisation is one of the Tunisian Revolution gains.

She reminded of the restrictions and problems caused by the former regime which had used all means to impede the development of the Amazigh culture, which is the most ancient in the country.

Angouleme French Film Festival: Homage to Tunisian cinema

August 15, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - The Tunisian cinema will be honoured during the Angouleme French Film Festival to be held next August 24-28 in the south of France.

The festival invited movie director Nouri Bouzid as a member of the jury.

Film makers Rachid Ferchou, Jilani Saâdi, Mourad Bencheikh and Raja Laâmari will also be present on the occasion of screening their respective films "Checkmate," "Wolves' Tenderness," "No More Fear" and "Red Satin."

Ridha Behi's 'Always Brando' selected to premiere at Toronto Film Festival

TUNIS (TAP)- "Always Brando," the feature film written and directed by Tunisian filmmaker Ridha Behi, has been selected to premiere at the 36th Toronto International Film Festival.

This film, bearing the name of American famous actor Marlon Brando, will be screened in three theatre halls, as part of the "World Contemporary Film" section, thus marking the presence of Tunisia in this festival ranked among the top five in the world.

"Always Brando" tells about the serenity of a remote Tunisian village which is soon corrupted when an American film crew invades neighbourhoods, bringing greed and betrayal that devastates the innocent inhabitants. Anis, a young Tunisian villager with an uncanny resemblance to Marlon Brando, was seduced by false promises of stardom, wealth and fame and the impossible dream of making it big in Hollywood.

The selection of this film by the Festival's organising committee is a tribute to this work and a consecration of his director who has striven, for several years, to finish off his project, despite difficulties, including lack of sufficient funding on the Tunisian side, followed by the death of Marlon Brando who was expected to play in this film.

Ridha Behi has directed 7 feature films, only three of them benefited from a subsidy from the Culture Ministry.

Several international film stars including Brad Pitt, Nicole Kidman, Robert de Niro, George Clooney and Selma Hayek will attend the Toronto Film Festival.

The festival will be held from September 8 to 18.

Tunisian Revolution as main theme of Rotterdam Arab Film Festival

September 02, 2011 TUNIS (TAP) - The Tunisian Revolution will be honoured, this year, at the 11th Arab Film Festival of Rotterdam, to be held next September 7-11 in Holland.

The festival, whose bill displays the portrait of late Mohamed Bouazizi, will screen recent films dealing with the Arab revolutions.

The opening will include the screening of Tunisian and Egyptian films, "Al-Charara" (52 mn) of Tunisian filmmaker Mongi Farhani and "Forbidden" (67 mn) of Egyptian Amel Ramsis, to pay tribute to the Tunisian and Egyptian peoples' efforts to free themselves from the yoke of the Ben Ali and Mubarak dictatorships.

Tunisia will take part in the festival's official contest with "Al-Charara" and "Il était une fois l'aube," a 23-mn short feature of Mohamed Ali Nahdi.

A homage to Tunisian actor Hichem Rostom and Egyptian Amr Ouaked is on the agenda of this year's edition.

Forty films from twenty Arab and European countries of various genres will take part in the festival.

The Rotterdam Arab Film Festival has been a cultural event since 2001 organised by the Arab Forum Foundation in the Netherlands, which is a cultural organisation that aims to defend the Arab community's interests in this European country.

Caretaker President receives group of Tunisian film makers

September 08, 2011

CARTHAGE (TAP) - Interim President Foued Mebazaa received, on Thursday at the Carthage Palace, a group of Tunisian film makers representing the different components of the movie industry, as part of trade unions or associations of the sector, with attendance of Culture Minister Ezzeddine Bach Chaouch.

The meeting comes after the decree-law providing for the creation of a National Cinema and Photography Centre.

On this occasion, emphasis was placed on the importance of this cultural gain which the Tunisian film makers have long aspired to.

The meeting provided the opportunity to discuss the future of the Tunisian film-making, its creations and the industry, as well as means to develop the sector. The proposal aimed to create a cinematographic promotion fund held the attention of the interim President, who stressed the need to strive to materialise this idea.

Mr. Foued Mebazaa emphasised the important role devolved on the cinematographic sector in supporting Tunisia's radiant image after the Dignity and Freedom Revolution.