

Carthage Investment Forum

Speech of Professor **Lazhar BOUOUNY**

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to be the guest of honour of this workshop organized under the theme of "**Tunisia, a regional center of high added value services**" within the tenth Carthage Investment Forum. To enrich the dialogue, I wish to refer to some useful indicators and data according to our Tunisian strategic goals.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The electoral program of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali for "Tomorrow's Tunisia" is continuously building the modern infrastructure and knowledge-based society. Through this program, the Chief of the State fixed an ambitious goal for our country to catch up with developed countries. He stressed, during the fiftieth Independence Anniversary that Tunisia is apt to join developed countries by 2016.

The presidential program fixed a strategic objective that considers building the knowledge-based economy a pillar to reach higher added value, better competitiveness, higher employability and more advanced services. For this reason this program aspires to create a generation of innovating enterprises capable of utilizing innovating specialties, involving Tunisia in the world map of intelligence and drawing direct foreign investments in order to make of Tunisia a regional pole in these fields through encouraging innovating sectors. The aim is to raise their share from the present rate of 20% of GDP to 35% by 2016.

In this framework, President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali made of Higher Education, scientific research and technological innovation a basic choice to realize the shift to the new economy and overcome the future challenges. As a result, the Higher Education budget for this year is 5.52% of the State Budget and 1.8% of the GDP.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In reality, many achievements are made to promote the national system of scientific research and technological innovation after rising its financial funding from 1% of the GDP in 2004 to 1.25 by 2009.

The number of university graduates is growing year after year. Last year, they counted 59.000 graduates and will count about 100.000 by 2014. In

fact, this is the wealth of our country as we don't aim at meeting the national employment market demands only, but also the international ones.

In this process, we have started adapting our higher education national system with international standards through the implementation of the LMD Reform within the Bologna Process (which is the equivalent of *Bachelor, master and PHD* in the Anglo-Saxon system).

We have also encouraged cooperation between Tunisian universities and foreign ones especially with regard to joint-diplomas and joint-supervision of theses. These mechanisms allow us to reach international indicators related to academic training and enhance the readability of our diplomas at the international levels.

It is worth mentioning that we have acclimated the LMD system to our national specificities which consider employability as the first priority. Consequently, we targeted to rise the rate of applied licenses which are now chosen by two third of our students.

We have also involved the industrial sector represented in the UTICA (The Tunisian Union for Industry, Trade and Handicrafts) and professionals in the process of joint-curricula including teaching and supervising contracts, and students training sessions.

To open our universities to the professional environment, we have created business incubators within Higher Education institutions and enhanced the Professional Master Degree as well as the entrepreneurship training.

Specialized observatories have been created to follow-up the integration of university graduates in employment markets.

We are eager to provide more and more employment opportunities since we have opted for the diversification of academic specialties particularly the most innovating ones such as: biotechnology, fine arts, applied languages, computer sciences, communication, energy studies, nanosciences, medical studies, as so on.

What reassures us in Tunisia is that we do not fear, as in many developed countries, youths' disaffection from scientific studies. In our country, these studies have preserved their credibility and relevance in youths' minds, which is an important national achievement. When we witness the amplitude of activities within our research units and laboratories in life sciences, biotechnology, as well as in fundamental, engineering and technological sciences, making up more than 80% of all our research structures, we realize the importance the Tunisian youth gives to scientific disciplines.

36% of our students are in engineering sciences, most of them are in informatics and telecommunications (46.300 students are in computer science). Every year we have about 3400 new engineering graduates most of them are in informatics, engineering and agronomy. Our strategy consists in raising these numbers continuously.

The Tunisian rate of sciences and engineering university graduates is 10.4 per thousand while that of European countries is about 11 per thousand, which is the number to be reached by 2009.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Presidential Program fixed the goal of implementing at least one scientific park or a business incubator in each governorate by 2009 in order to enhance partnership between the Higher Education and scientific research system, and the industrial one and allow the creation of more innovating economic enterprises.

In addition to the Communication Technologies Park of El Ghazela, founded in 1999 and considered as an excellence center, six other sectorial technology parks and three regional ones are being planned within the 11th Development Plan accordingly:

The sectorial technology parks include:

1. Energy, water and environment in Borj Cedria
2. Pharmaceutical and biotechnological industries in Sidi Thabet
3. Mechanic and electronic industries in Sousse
4. Informatics, multimedia and communication in Sfax
5. Textile and clothing in Mounastir
6. Food industries in Bizerte
7. Cinematographic industry in Gammarth

The regional technology parks are distributed:

1. In Jendouba, for the northwest region
2. In Gafsa, for the southwest region

3. In Medenine for the south region to valorize and use Saharan resources

Furthermore, our scientific research and technological national system consists in 33 public research institutions covering the different sectors of economic and social activities.

During the period of 1987-2007, the creation of research centers focused on innovating fields such as nuclear sciences and technologies, water and energy technologies, biotechnology, telecommunication and remote-sensing and, recently, material sciences.

All these mechanisms and programs aim at making our country an international center of trade and services in promising economic fields such as trade services, tourism marketing, health services, Higher Education, as well as financial, banking, engineering, information and communication services, naval transport, intelligence industry and attracting large international companies in these sectors.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Tunisia counts so much on its human potential. 36.2% of our youths are university students. 59.1% of them are female and 41% of our researchers-teachers are female. Our Higher Education institutions are distributed all over the country to bring the same education chances to all.

Our human potential in scientific research and innovation is important. Tunisia has today about 16.000 researchers in Full Time Equivalent.

We also count on out Tunisian researchers living abroad who are highly qualified and succeeded in getting involved in the most advanced international scientific networks.

Our Ministry is developing cooperative programs involving all our human potential and international partners. We rely on all of them to overcome the challenges and achieve future major projects.

Thank you very much