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EU-Tunisia Entrepreneurship Council gives a voice to businesses

To support businesses and job creation on both sides of the Mediterranean, today a plenary assembly of the EU-Tunisia Council for Entrepreneurship will be held and co-chaired by European Commission Vice President Antonio Tajani, Commissioner for Industry and Entrepreneurship, and Tunisia's Minister of Industry Kamel Ben Naceur. Points to be addressed today include the necessity and importance of supporting SMEs, the need to modernize administration and simplify regulations and the development of an ambitious reform of vocational training. The assembly is particularly timely in the light of both chair's subsequent attendance at this afternoon's ninth ministerial meeting on Euro-Mediterranean industrial cooperation.

The council's members – including European and Tunisian entrepreneurs and business associations - advocate concrete actions to improve the business climate, encourage entrepreneurship in Tunisia and strengthen industrial cooperation between the EU and Tunisia. Today they will present their views on what should be done in order to enhance human resources (training, employment, and the labour market), public-private collaboration, social economy and social dialogue, innovation, internationalization, financing and business support in the Tunisian context.

Origins of EU-Tunisia Entrepreneurship Council

In November 2012 Vice President Tajani led a successful [Mission for Growth to Tunisia](#) and signed five letters of intent with Tunisian authorities on raw materials, satellite navigation, standardisation, SME policy and tourism. Following this business oriented trip, to further develop cooperation, in January 2013 Vice President Tajani and the Head of the Tunisian government agreed to establish a joint EU-Tunisia Council for Entrepreneurship. The council is intended to provide expertise and advice to Tunisian and European policy makers concerning the business environment, investment, innovation, skills, training, and industrial cooperation, with the ultimate goal of solving the problem of unemployment both south and north of the Mediterranean.

Next steps

Lessons from this pilot project will be disseminated at regional level within the Euro-Mediterranean industrial cooperation process; for instance during the 10th anniversary of the EU-Mediterranean Dialogue on textile industry (a conference on design, creativity and innovation in textiles and clothing) which will be held in Florence on 24-25 March 2014.

Contacts :

[Carlo Corazza](#) (+32 2 295 17 52) [@ECspokesCorazza](#)

[Sara Tironi](#) (+32 2 299 04 03)

For the public: **Europe Direct** by phone **00 800 6 7 8 9 10 11** or by [e-mail](#)

Tunisian economic data¹

Surface Area: 163.6 thousand sq km

Population: 10.8 millions of inhabitants - 2012

GDP (nominal) Total: \$45.611 billion (2012 estimate)

GDP (nominal) Per capita: \$4,232 (2012 estimate)

EU goods exports to Tunisia in 2012: € 11.1 billion

EU goods imports from Tunisia in 2012: €9.5 billion

Although economic growth in Tunisia has been slow, its GDP increased by 4.8% in the first quarter of 2012. Increased political stability must be attained to attract and foster the foreign direct investment (FDI) needed to support on-going economic growth.

Picture of Tunisian Trade²

- The EU is Tunisia's first trading partner with a total trade amounting to approximately €20.6 billion in 2012, which accounts for 55.9% of Tunisian trade.
- EU's import from Tunisia are dominated by machinery and transport equipment (33.5%), textile and clothing (25.4%) and fuel and mining products (18%).
- EU's exports to Tunisia are dominated by machinery and transport equipment (36.4%), fuel and mining products (15.1%), textile and clothing (12%) followed by chemicals (11%) and agricultural products (6%).
- Flows of FDI to Tunisia are concentrated on the development of the infrastructure network as well as of the textiles and clothing sectors.

More information:

<http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/international/promoting-neighbourhood/mediterranean/>

¹ Source: World Bank and the European Commission

² Idem