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## Tunisia 2020: Great expectations

Posted by [Editor](#) on Sunday, March 5, 2017 · [Leave a Comment](#)



Tunisia has held yearly investment conferences since the revolution to promote its role as regional hub. Source: Magharebia.

By **Christiaan Duinmaijer**, CEO Assarwa – MENA Business Consultants.

Cradle of the Arab Spring, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize and international investment destination. Tunisia was praised for its many successes over the last few years, but the road to success is a difficult one as His Excellency **Elyes Ghariani**, Ambassador of Tunisia in the Netherlands, and **Mokhtar Chouari**, General Delegate of the FIPA for the Benelux, can attest.



His Excellency Elyes Ghariani detects a new dynamic in the relations between Tunisia and the Netherlands and is grateful for its solidarity with Tunisia. Source: Embassy of Tunisia.

It all started with the 2010 Jasmine revolution when Tunisians took to the streets, demanding bread and jobs. Ambassador Ghariani: "It was a unique revolution as it was not driven by politics or ideology, but by social media and calls for dignity." After the revolution new political parties were formed, elections were held and work started on a new constitution. However, the country soon faced a growing security crisis, cumulating in a political crisis in 2013 after the

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assassination of two opposition leaders.

Ambassador Ghariani: *"Terrorism was a new phenomenon in Tunisia. The Tunisian government spent initially more money on education than on security. Now 20% of the government budget goes to security."* Tunisia emerged stronger from this crisis thanks to its strong civil society, resulting in a new constitution and elections in 2014. Ambassador Ghariani: *"The political situation in Tunisia is now excellent. Democracy is not like Nescafé, an instant solution. It needs time to grow."*



New innovative technologies and software are developed in Tunisia by a growing community of young, ambitious Tunisians. Source: FIPA.

However, Tunisia still faced many economic challenges: high unemployment, underdeveloped regions and stagnating growth and investment. In order to tackle these problems the Tunisian government began working on an ambitious development plan, resulting in the National Plan 2016-2020.

The plan focuses on good governance, green economy and economic, human and regional development. Mr. Chouari: *"The most important goal of this plan is job creation. Unemployment for Tunisians with education is 30%."* Ambassador Ghariani adds: *"We want to prevent that unemployed Tunisians join terrorist groups or migrate illegally to Europe. It is better to keep them in Tunisia."* Tunisia also replaced its old investment law with a new one. Mr. Chouari: *"The new investment law gives investors more freedom, opens more sectors to foreign investment and offers investors more incentives. The old investment law gave mostly incentives for exporting companies or companies in less developed areas. The new law adds incentives based on employability and value added."*

According to the IMF, these plans will give the Tunisian economy a boost and its GDP may grow to 4.3% in 2021. Ambassador Ghariani points out that Tunisia has a lot to offer: *"Tunisia is currently negotiating a free trade agreement with the EU for agricultural goods. I was member of the team which negotiated the current Free Trade Agreement for industrial goods with the EU. We create a win-win situation in Tunisia. We offer companies a good production location, while they create jobs and transfer know-how. For this reason, large companies like Airbus and Benetton produce in Tunisia."*



New innovative technologies and software are developed in Tunisia by a growing community of young, ambitious Tunisians. Source: FIPA.

Mr. Chouari adds: *"Tunisia is strategically located close to Europe, and offers as a regional hub access to the African market, especially French speaking Africa."* Already eighty Dutch companies are active in Tunisia along with hundreds of Italian and German companies and

thousands of French companies, but both gentlemen hope that the new laws and incentives will attract more foreign companies.



As traditional manufacturing and assembly hub for the European market, Tunisia seeks to strengthen its high-tech manufacturing industry. Source: FIPA.

In November a large international conference was held to promote Tunisia's new economic agenda. The event was attended by more than sixty countries which pledged fourteen billion dollar to support Tunisia. The Netherlands showed its solidarity with a visit of prime-minister Mark Rutte to Tunisia. Ambassador Ghariani: *"It was an historical visit and we are happy that we are on the radar in the Netherlands."* However, the Ambassador doesn't understand why the Dutch travel advice for Tunisia is still 'only essential travel': *"Why does the Netherlands consider Tunisia more dangerous for its people than France, Belgium or the USA? If there is a country that knows Tunisia, it is France. If the Netherlands wants to help Tunisia, it should let its tourists come."*

Mr. Chouari: *"It is the role of the FIPA to provide information on the*

*investment opportunities in Tunisia to Dutch companies. The Netherlands and Tunisia are natural trading partners and Tunisia offers a lot of opportunities in important sectors, like the mechanical, electric and electronic industries and IT."* In order to enhance the visibility of Tunisia in the Netherlands Fenedex and FIPA Tunisia organize a special Tunisia seminar on April 21<sup>st</sup> in Zoetermeer. Mr. Chouari: *"We expect around 100 participants, including three Tunisian officers from different sectors. The event will help create new partnerships and offers network opportunities for Dutch companies."*

For more information on this event, visit the Fenedex website or send an email to [info@assarwa.nl](mailto:info@assarwa.nl)



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