

A conference on point 12 of the presidential programme 2009-2014 : "Tunisia : A pole for banking services and a regional financial center" was organized on Friday 6 November 2009 in Sfax under chairmanship of Mr. Taoufik BACCAR, Governor of the Central Bank of Tunisia (BCT).

Mr. BACCAR indicated that point 12 of the new presidential programme reflects the Head of the State's bet on the banking sector to help it yield higher added value and play, fully, its role notably with respect to boosting capacity of the national economy facing external shocks.

He stated that this point 12 has a strategic dimension in so far as it comes to boost the process of reforms committed in the banking sector, which involves sounder financial bases, better quality of services, restructuring of the sector as well as the project to fully liberalize the dinar.

The Governor of the BCT underlined the importance of setting a dynamic banking system to the service of development and to improve banks capacity to evaluate projects, notably, in growing sectors and improve risk management, the target being to raise contribution of the banking sector to GDP, up to 5% by 2014 compared to 3% currently.

He indicated that in order to improve the quality of banking services, there is a need for adopting a charter of the quality of banking services, making general the use of e-banking services and moving ahead in the area of monetics. These transactions would total some 40 million dinars by end 2009 compared to 4 million dinars in 2004.

Mr. BACCAR noted that in order to implement this approach, efforts must be intensified on the path of reducing the share of non-performing loans in banking commitments to less than 7% in 2014, while seeing to bring banks' minimum capital to 100 million dinars.

The Governor of the BCT indicated that the creation of "Tunisia Holding", a public banking pole in the form of a financial company grouping all public banks aims, notably, at encouraging private banks to adopt this same approach.

In the same way, the creation of a financial pole specialised in financing small and medium-sized businesses in the form of a holding which groups together the Bank to finance small and medium-sized businesses (BFPME) and the Tunisian guarantee Company (SOTUGAR), are all measures that aim at boosting the structure of the Tunisian banking sector.

He added that with a view to giving concrete forms to Tunisia's ambitions in being a regional financial centre, the State has already promulgated a code for offshore financial services further to the creation of Tunis financial port.

Mr. Taoufik BACCAR stressed the strategic dimension for the creation of "Tunisian Foreign Bank", a new banking institution which will start up with a structure located in France UTB (The Tunisian Banking Union) to be restructured on the same occasion. At first, UTB capital will be doubled, then it will be open to a foreign strategic investor and after that a new bank will open-up its subsidiaries in the most important European capitals (Paris, Rome, Berlin, London,...).

He indicated on the other hand that full convertibility of the dinar by 2014 is a new strategic objective of the sector and pointed out that Tunisia has moved ahead on this path. Mr. BACCAR added that all Tunisian corporates' transactions with abroad are liberalised, providing thus the sector with greater capacity of negotiations with abroad.

He went over reforms in the tax system and budget management and underlined the strategic aspects, notably, to lighten the tax burden on businesses and review the procedure for VAT collection.

Mr. BACCAR referred to the creation of "deposit and consignment fund" as per international norms. This institution will manage appropriately the public funds and give them more value through the capital market, the target being to guarantee their yield and boost the capital market.

This involves also implementation of long-term strategic investment in the area of new technologies, infrastructure and major projects, to develop venture capital and favour the creation of the highest number of small and medium-sized businesses.

He added that "Tunisia Treasury Agency", an other new institution to be created will ensure supervision of Treasury issues and dynamic management of debt and public liquidity and will indeed provide the State finance and therefore the Tunisian economy with a certain qualitative dimension.

Beforehand, Mr. BACCAR has inaugurated, in Saktiet Ezzit, a new branch of BNA (National Bank of Agriculture) and, in Sfax city centre, another UIB (International Banking Union) branch.

Creation of these two new bank branches falls in the framework of the strategies undertaken by these two banks in order to bring their services closer to the client and make general the electronic means of payment.

On the way back to Tunis, the Governor of the BCT visited one UIB branch which underwent an upgrading plan.