

(EU) EU/TUNISIA: Europe is pleased about Tunisia's promises for greater political openness and good results of cooperation

Brussels, 09/03/2006 (Agence Europe) - Benita Ferrero-Waldner, European External Relations Commissioner, received Tunisia's Foreign Minister, Abdelwahab Abdallah, in Brussels on Wednesday. Mr Abdallah also met the presidents of the two main political groups at the European Parliament, the EPP-ED and the PES (see EUROPE 9146). European sources indicate that the minister brought "*good news*" showing that progress has been made at the political level and also regarding respect of human rights in Tunisia. According to the same sources, the minister pointed out that Tunisia has given its agreement for EU funding of civil society projects (Health-South, AFTURD) and is preparing to do so for further actions that the Commission hopes to promote. In this spirit, the Commission and Tunisia were able to announce finalisation of the support project for the judicial institution, which benefits from Community funding, and Minister Abdallah told Ms Ferrero of the decision of clemency recently taken announcing relaxation of Tunisia's internal policy.

The European side also expressed satisfaction regarding the way the association agreement works and, more generally, the progress made on economic and social matters by Tunisia, which is invited to speed up its reforms to facilitate its integration into the European internal market and to open talks on the liberalisation of services. It is hoped that the decision will be taken before the meeting of trade ministers from the Euromed area, on 24 March in Marrakesh. Tunisia must also give its agreement to open talks for the liberalisation of trade in farm produce and the definition of measures to accompany reciprocal market access.