

Trans-Mediterranean Cooperation for Natural Raw Materials

Highlights from the 2nd International Congress of Aromatic & Medicinal Plants

Jean-J. Etienne; photographs by Patrick Pellerin

The 2nd International Congress of Aromatic & Medicinal Plants, held last November in Hammamet, Tunisia, marked the formalization of cooperation between the France-based competitive cluster Perfumes, Aromas, Fragrances and Savors (PASS) and the Tunisian Association of Medicinal Plants (Association Tunisienne des Plantes Médicinales; ATPM). The move followed a similar signing between PASS and the Association for the Development of Aromatic and Medicinal Plants (Association pour le Développement des Plantes Aromatiques et Médicinales; ADEPAM) in Morocco in 2009. According to PASS, "The medium term goal is to step up cooperation to foster the emergence of a Mediterranean Federation of Aromatic and Medicinal Plants that will bring together all the stakeholders in the industrial basin," serving the flavor, fragrance and cosmetic sectors. Here, Jean-J. Etienne provides a report from the region. -Editor

The combined efforts of Rachid Chemli (chairman of ATPM) and Patrick Pellerin resulted in a successful congress that brought together the resources of ATPM, UTICA (Essential Oils Producers Chamber), the Tunisian Office of Thermalism and the investment of PASS Pôle. The event hosted more than 300 attendees from Tunisia, France, Egypt, Morocco, Lebanon, Italy and beyond, and featured three days of presentations devoted to aromatic and medicinal plants, "Practical Clinical Phytotherapy in Tunisia," workshops, and private business-to-business meetings (arranged by Ghita Benkirane of Art & Management). The gathering also included more than 70 poster presentations. M. Boussaïd (INSA Tunis) and M. Touayi (Tunisian Ministry of Agriculture) discussed current and future trends in the development of aromatic and medicinal plants in Tunisia, providing a global overview on an updated inventory of cultivated and wild species. S. Maamer (Bio Control & Certification) discussed organic cultivation. N. Bouzouaïa addressed the launch of Sidi-Thabet Bio-Technopole. C. Belkhoja (UTICA) outlined the major Tunisian natural products in a general

overview, while F. Durand (LMR/IFF) focused on neroli, consultant M. Derbesy discussed floral waters, consultant P. Pellerin and C. Monin (Acphytaroma) presented on rosemary and carnosic acid, and L. Zourgui (ASSA) discussed cactus and its properties.

K. Allaf (LEPTIAB) and X. Fernandez (Unice) discussed technological and analytical breakthroughs with instantaneous controlled pressure drop (DIC) and recent advances in analytical chemistry, respectively, while U. Solimene (World Federation of Thermalism) and E. Minelli (OMS Italy) discussed essential oils used in thalassotherapy. Regulatory constraints were the subject of a round table discussion introduced by H.P. Bodifée (Prodarom), led by J.J. Etienne (ATN Conseil), and featuring X. Fernandez, L. Fahrât (Les Vergers de Tunisie) and K. Allaf (LEPTIAB). The talk provided information and data, and presented Tunisian producers an opportunity to get clarification on European requirements, particularly REACH registrations, for their exported products.

A second roundtable considered the need for trans-Mediterranean cooperation to build value for the region's aromatic and medicinal plants industry. A significant agreement for this goal emerged from the various visions expressed during the discussion. Despite inherent difficulties, all parties



Congress chairman Rachid Chemli.



H.P. Bodifée and R. Chemli signed the convention between the Tunisian Association of Medicinal Plants (Association Tunisienne des Plantes Médicinales; ATPM) and Perfumes, Aromas, Fragrances and Savors (PASS Pôle).



From L: M. Kallel, C. Belkhaia, A. Naceur, A. Elaissi, I. Belhaj Ali and J.J. Etienne during the poster awards.



A round table discussion of regulatory constraints included H.P. Bodifée, X. Fernandez, J-J. Etienne, L. Fahrat and K. Allaf.



From left: H.P. Bodifée; R. Chaabouni, secretary of state to the minister of higher education and scientific research; and R. Chemli.

agreed that the time has come to identify and define needs, since all partners feel this cooperation is absolutely necessary to face present commercial conditions and the constant increase of complex regulatory requirements. And so, Bodifée, on behalf of PASS Pôle, and R. Chemli, on behalf of ATPM, jointly signed an agreement “to develop a strategy of excellence in the [area of] aromatic and medicinal plants with a world vision.” The agreement was consistent with the goals stated by officials including A. Rassa, state secretary of the Ministry of Industry and Technology, and R. Chabouni, state secretary of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. The final day of the event featured workshops on regulatory affairs surrounding essential oils and vegetal extracts, including REACH, which were presented by consultant P. Racine and S. Ben Djenana (UTICA). Bodifée, A. Mekky (INNPI Tunisia) and standardization expert G. Marchisio presented a workshop on the standardization of essential oils and floral waters. Experts on phyto- and aromatherapy were also invited to present their expertise during a session titled “Clinical Phytotherapy Practice in Tunisia.”

Finally, the juried poster presentations were awarded by chairman C. Belkhaia. First prize was given to Ayed Naceur (INSAT Tunis); second prize went to Intimen Belhaj Ali (INSAT Tunis) and Ameer Elaissi (Monastir). This event provided attendees with fruitful exchanges and high quality information, and stands for a very important step on the road toward trans-Mediterranean cooperation, or as the French call it, UPM—Union pour la Méditerranée. This is a true moment of optimism in a context so frequently altered by many adverse difficulties.

The next congress, PAM 2011, held jointly with “Trentiemes Journées Internationales Huiles Essentielles et Extraits,” will take place September 6–8 in Digne Alpes de Haute Provence, France; www.pole-pass.fr.

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