

Organized by Tyre Foundation, the 1st Forum of the "League of Canaanite, Phoenician and Punic Cities" held on March 30th at the UNESCO Headquarters in Paris was a great success. Placed under the joint auspices of the Minister of Foreign and European Affairs, Mr. Bernard Kouchner, and the Director General of UNESCO, Mr. Koïchiro Matsuura, it gathered the support of Mrs. Fadéla Amara, Secretary of State responsible for the Policy of the City. Over 200 people attended this high-level meeting which brought together scientists, archaeologists, historians and the mayors of Mediterranean cities. The occasion was an opportunity to recall that the flourishing periods of the Mediterranean were those predominated by the spirit of exchange.

The inaugural session was attended by Mr. Ahmed Sayyad, Assistant Director-General of UNESCO, representing the Director-General, H.E. Mrs. Sylvie Fadlallah, Permanent Ambassador of Lebanon to UNESCO and Minister Pierre-Christian Taittinger, President of the French Committee to Save Tyre, replacing AIST's President, Mr. Jean Leclant, who regrettably couldn't attend. Mrs. Georgia Makhoul, journalist and writer, was the coordinator of the Forum.

The various speakers welcomed the initiatives and efforts exerted by Tyre Foundation which, while highlighting the constructive role of the Phoenicians, submitted concrete and feasible projects to strengthen the cooperation between the cities of the Mediterranean basin. Such projects will be implemented in the fields of culture, education, heritage, cultural tourism, crafts and other fields, namely environment. All these fundamental topics were tabled and discussed in length during the successive roundtables.

Professor Paolo Matthiae, professor of archeology and art history of the Middle East at the University of Rome, "La Sapienza", was the moderator of the first two Round Tables. Dr. Mhamad Hassine Fantar, President of the Ben Ali Chair for Dialogue among Civilizations and Religions, the main speaker, developed with eloquence and passion the Phoenician and Punic sources in mythology; Professor Jean-Paul Morel, professor emeritus of archeology and history of Roman art at the University of Provence, talked about ceramics, food and commercial graffiti and presented some slides; Professor André Lemaire, Director of Studies at the Practical School of Higher Education, discussed the then numismatic trade, a subject that was further discussed in the intervention of Dr. Françoise Briquel-Chatonnet, Director of Research at CNRS, Laboratory of ancient Semitic studies. While illustrating her presentation with pictures, she said that the discovered inscriptions constitute indisputable evidence of trade in the Phoenician-Punic Mediterranean.

This first session was concluded with a brilliant presentation by Dr. Hisham El-Sherif, CEO of IT Ventures, Egypt, who brought us back to the current world, stating that this return to a common history forges bonds of solidarity between the various cities, liable to break barriers and allow some countries to breach their isolation.

The second Round Table was more technical and witnessed the contribution of Prof. Pierre Zalloua, professor of Genetics at LAU, who is supervising a project aimed at determining the Phoenician genetic link between the peoples of the Mediterranean shores. His speech gave a new scope to the Forum and to the League a scientific dimension. His presentation was followed by that of the two architects and

professors at the Lebanese University, Prof. Samar Haidar-Makki and Prof. Nina Zeidan, who highlighted the architectural aspects of the ancient Phoenician cities and the design of urban planning of that time, developing the economic and social analyses that justify them. It was a very interesting presentation about the traces of the Phoenician city planning in ancient cities such as Tyre, which is a little-known aspect of history. In turn, Prof. Jean-François Pernot, Senior Lecturer at the College de France, made a fascinating and lively presentation on the Mediterranean cities affected by the Phoenician, Canaanite or Punic civilization, which have kept the remains of Urban Development until today. Prof. Julien Rochette, an expert in the coastal environment at the Institute of sustainable development and international relations (IDDRI), brought the audience back to a less optimistic reality of threats facing the marine and coastal biodiversity in the Mediterranean. He stressed that the situation will lead to serious consequences if the international community does not react immediately and with determination despite the huge cost of funding for the redevelopment and the establishment of strict rules to avoid the worst to come.

In the afternoon, the work was resumed with a film on Tyre: history, sites and modern city. Mr. Jacques Gautrand, economic journalist and consultant, was the moderator of the Third Round Table. He introduced the themes of Cultural Tourism, Handicrafts and Small-Medium Enterprises. The well-determined Dr. Maha El-Khalil Chalabi, President of Tyre Foundation, who is placing great hopes on the League's action plan that she initiated, listed the various stages of the project. She emphasized the benefits of cultural exchanges between cities, the implementation of joint projects, the creation of workshops for local craft and the economic trickledown effect that may result. She outlined the objectives of the "League of Canaanite, Phoenician and Punic Cities".

For her part, H.E. Rodi Kratsa, Vice-President of the European Parliament, intervened to stress the importance of this Forum

on both the European and international levels. She underlined the vital role of the League in the framework of the European North-South cooperation, as well as peace and security in the Mediterranean, adding that the implementation of projects such as the "Road of the Phoenicians" stimulates creativity and stirs economic activity. She concluded by saying: "This project reminds us that the historical momentum can be an asset for the present and the future."

The intervention of Mr. Paul Tholly, Secretary General of the Association Euromed Capital, focused on the financing of Small-Medium Enterprises. He put forth a plan and set the League's objectives that cannot be achieved without the help of state and private financial institutions. His rational presentation provided a solid framework for the establishment of sustainable development.

The fourth Round Table, the cornerstone of this event, brought together the Mayors of the Mediterranean cities or their representatives. Speeches were made by Mr. Imad Beydoun, representing the Beirut Municipal Council, who unveiled the historical foundations of Beirut. Mr. Sami Tarzi, Mayor of Carthage, stressed the important role of Carthage in the League and expressed his readiness to host a future event of the League. Senator Maria Téofilia Martínez, Mayor of Cadiz, captivated the attention of the whole audience by her enthusiasm and vivacity. Then, the very interesting and encouraging presentation of Mr. Alexios Michaelides, Deputy Mayor of Larnaca, was followed by that of Mr. Enrico Caruso, President of the Center of Phoenician, Punic and Roman Studies representing the Mayor of Marsala in Sicily. Mr. Tonino

Falconi, Mayor of Oristano in Sardinia, expressed great enthusiasm to join the League and Dr. Joseph Chami, Head of the Municipality of Jbeil / Byblos, concluded by talking about the history and features of the ancient city of Jbeil / Byblos, whose beauty continues to amaze us.

The highlight of the Forum was the solemn reading of the Charter by H.E. Ambassador Bernard Dorin, written on the guestbook. The signature of the Charter by the present mayors was very moving and received a standing ovation. A great moment indeed!

By ratifying the Charter, the municipalities of Cadiz, Larnaca, Marsala, Oristano, Carthage, Beirut and Byblos have pledged to share experiences, build new solidarities and adopt an action plan structured around four themes: Culture and Education, Cultural Tourism, Development of Traditional Crafts and Small-medium Enterprises, and Environment. Other cities that were not present, later expressed their readiness to join the League at the next event, namely Athens, Almunecar, Malaga, Province of Trapani, Palermo, Rhodes, Tunis, Tripoli, El Mina, Tartous, Ugarit and Bizerte. 18 cities are already members of the League. Symbol of friendship between peoples, the League is a hyphen between cities heirs of the same history, with a common culture and set of values.

A musical background created specially for the occasion and the screening of inserts on the participating cities accompanied these moments.

This exceptional day ended with two major interventions. The first was made by Mrs. Michèle Gendreau-Massalou, State Councilor in charge of higher education, vocational training and research in the project of Union for the Mediterranean (UPM). She wished to express not only the support of President Sarkozy to such an initiative, which is fully in line with the objectives of the UPM, but also his enthusiasm and admiration for the work that has been performed. She stated: "Establishing the League is a concrete step made by the actors on the ground and thus constitutes a tremendous message of hope for the future".

Finally, H.E. Mr. Hervé de Charette closed the Forum and explained how Tyrians paved the way: they played a pioneering role in the past and again today, they are the first in line to bring out the constructive relationships between the two shores of the Mediterranean. With its deep knowledge of the Mediterranean and its great culture, Mr. de Charette praised Mrs. Chalabi's many initiatives: "In fact, it's from Tyre that this initiative of bringing us together was launched. The Phoenicians were the first to link the East and West of the Mediterranean; they have done it in a spirit of peace, not conquest, paving the way for other people." He continued: "It's amazing how today, again, the Phoenicians of our time are taking the initiative of this meeting, trying hard to gather the cities they founded three thousand years ago; this is the spirit of the Union for the Mediterranean".

Minister Hervé de Charette expressed his wish that Mrs. Chalabi's new initiative echoes in the Mediterranean.

The meeting was closed at 6 pm. and was followed by a cocktail with the press. In the evening, Tyre Foundation hosted a gala dinner in the rooms of the Quai d'Orsay to celebrate the event.