
Arabs Are Ready to Deal, But Brazilians Have to Put Some Effort

Contributed by Alexandre Rocha
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Brazil's foreign minister, Celso Amorim, is back in Brazil after a five-day tour of North Africa. He says he is confident in the fact that economic and commercial relations between Brazil and Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia have full potential for advancing.

"There is much potential for strengthening relations in the fields of commerce and investment, real possibilities in the three countries," the minister said yesterday in an interview given by telephone from Tunis.

Amorim cited as an example the exploration of complementary aspects of the two economies. Tunisia, he said, exports large amounts of fertilizers that Brazil needs, and at the same time it imports agricultural products that abound in Brazilian farms.

The foreign minister stated, however, that it takes effort by the businessmen in order to boost trade. "They are located very near to Europe, and if we do not hold an effort they are going to seek the European market," he said.

Amorim also stated that negotiations for a commercial treaty between the Mercosur and Morocco have gained new momentum, and that a similar initiative can be initiated with Algeria. "The negotiations had been progressing slowly, but the advantage of trips by government officials, such as this one, is the fact that they accelerate the pace of events," he said. Read below the main stretches of the interview:

Which were the results of this tour to North Africa?

I believe that there is strong potential for strengthening relations in the areas of trade and investment, which can be done with the three countries. In some places this process is at a more advanced stage, as in Morocco and Algeria. In the case of Tunisia, the volume of trade is still low, but I envision possibilities, because they possess resources that we need, such as phosphate, and by the same token they desire things that we have, such as cooperation in civil construction.

There are investment opportunities available here (to Brazilians) with the objective of reaching the European market. In the agricultural field, they are interested in our know-how in agriculture in the semi-arid, in being able to produce under adverse conditions.

What needs to be done in order to intensify entrepreneurial relations?

Each country has its own reality, but there are good possibilities. However, our businessmen need to visit the Arab countries. The minister (of Development) Miguel Jorge will come to the region accompanied by businessmen, to Algeria and Libya, which should open up new opportunities. I believe that the perspective is for relations to grow a lot, but they are very near Europe, therefore if we do not make an effort, they are going to seek Europe.

What is stopping us?

There is an obstacle which is the lack of a direct flight, but in order for that to exist, a virtuous cycle of demand and incentive. There used to be a flight from Morocco, and of course we wish to have one again, but there is a shortage of aircraft. The ideal scenario would be for all countries to be connected. One option would be a flight to North Africa with Lebanon as its final destination, in order to take advantage of the strong relations we sustain with Beirut (because of the large colony of Lebanese origin that lives in Brazil).

In the institutional realm, what are the perspectives regarding the trade agreement with Morocco, for instance?

Institutionally, there are the negotiations between Mercosur and Morocco. They had been progressing at a slow pace, but the advantage of these trips by government officials is the fact that they speed things up. A round of negotiation was scheduled for November, but we will try to reschedule it for September, to see if it's possible to reach an agreement by the end of the year.

How about Algeria?

There is an intention for negotiation a frame agreement for trade with Algeria, and we are going to work on that.

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