

PRESS RELEASE

11 Octobre 2018

A career punctuated by distinctions

This has been a special year for Professor Naceur Belgacem, Director of Grenoble INP-Pagora. He has been honoured on both sides of the Mediterranean for his outstanding contribution to research. Appointed last April as a senior member of the Institut Universitaire de France from 1 October 2018, in July he received the National Prize for Scientific and Technological research (in the category of *"Best Tunisian researcher or inventor residing abroad"*) from the hands of Béji Caïd Essebsi, the President of Tunisia.

These distinctions acknowledge his sparkling international career – 32 theses supervised, 250 publications, 8,600 citations, 200 communications, invitations to universities and research units in a dozen countries, etc. – which has been devoted to the valorisation of lignocellulosic biomass.

Naceur Belgacem's international career began in Tunisia with a baccalaureate and a special presidential prize, followed by a stint in Russia, where he studied for an engineering degree at the Saint Petersburg State Forest Technical Academy, which awarded him an honorary doctorate in 2006. Having completed his thesis on bio-based polymers in Grenoble in 1991, he worked in the field of natural fibre composites at the École Polytechnique de Montréal (Canada), focusing primarily on surface, interface and adhesion phenomena. After a short period in industry, he obtained his Research Lead accreditation in 1997 and was appointed as a visiting professor at the University of Beira Interior (Portugal) for three years. In 2000, he returned to Grenoble INP-Pagora, where he was named Professor. A member of the International Academy of Wood Science since 2005 and the Editor in Chief of *Industrial Crops and Products* (Elsevier) since 2007, he became a Knight of the Order of Academic Palms in 2013. He headed the Laboratory of Pulp and Paper Science and Graphic Arts (LGP2) between 2002 and 2010, and has occupied the top position at the Grenoble INP-Pagora engineering school since 2014.

A champion of biomass valorisation, Naceur Belgacem's scientific expertise is resolutely focused on the urgent need to find solutions that reduce the environmental impact of human activity: *"Stimulated*

Grenoble INP-Pagora, the international school of paper, print media and biomaterials. The school is Quality, Safety & Environment certified and part of Grenoble INP, an engineering institute geared towards training *"engineers who are creative, responsible and committed to a sustainable world"*. It trains engineers for the sectors of green chemistry, paper, printing, packaging, biomaterials and printed electronics. It also offers a vocational degree: *Interactive Print and Digital Media*. Its wide range of courses, pedagogical expertise and strong partnerships with industry allow it to continuously tailor its training to the needs of businesses and to the 60 graduates it produces each year, thus enabling them to embark upon stimulating careers in France and abroad. Grenoble INP-Pagora also develops international training in conjunction with several European universities, as well as offering a 2nd year engineering course, a Master *Biorefinery & Biomaterials* and a Post-Master *Biorefinery: bioenergy, bioproducts & biomaterials* dispensed in English. The innovative research performed by its LGP2 laboratory helps to improve processes and create products that meet all the latest requirements, notably those linked to the environment. The Cerig's role is to keep an active eye on technological developments in these industries. These various activities ensure that the training offered is up to date with the latest scientific and technological advances.

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The Laboratory of Pulp and Paper Science and Graphic Arts (LGP2) is a joint research unit (UMR 5518) run by the CNRS, Grenoble INP and the AGEFPI. It conducts its scientific activities in conjunction with the academic community of Grenoble Alpes University. LGP2 comprises three teams: *Biorefinery: chemistry and eco-processes* – *Multiscale biobased materials* – *Surface functionalization through printing processes*. Their research strives to meet society's expectations when it comes to sustainable development (green chemistry, clean processes, recycling, biobased materials, renewable energy) and traceability & safety (functional materials, smart paper and packaging). pagora.grenoble-inp.fr/research/



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by increasingly audible messages sent out to an ever wider audience during primetime slots, collective awareness is now becoming a reality. This is illustrated by the open war that has been declared against plastic-based single-use products". Indeed, for citizens who seek lightweight, energy-efficient, non-toxic, renewable and biodegradable products, "plant biomass is an ideal and rational solution to these new economic and societal issues. This is a highly diverse raw material that is available worldwide, making it perfectly placed to solve many serious geopolitical problems". This is a bona fide (re)discovery. Since the dawn of time, "humans have used this resource empirically to ensure their survival (food, energy, construction materials, tools, etc.). They understood the virtues of the biomass available in nature when used in its pure form, before processing it for more advanced applications, creating various industries including textiles, paper manufacture and the production of cellulose derivatives, such as transparent cellulose acetate films."

Naceur Belgacem believes that it is *"natural for a return to a bio-based model to be a societal objective"* and that *"any opportunity to partially or totally replace oil-derived products with bio-based equivalents should be grasped"*. This is the philosophy that has fuelled his research since he completed his doctorate, when he was a member of the team led by Professor Alessandro Gandini, a pioneer in the field of biopolymers. It remains the central theme of his scientific research both in France and abroad, which he conducts in partnership with industry. It also lies at the core of the training he provides to the young engineers and scientists who are the future architects of a responsible economy.

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Photos

P18_NB Belgacem-PdtRepTunisie.jpg (Naceur Belgacem and the Tunisian Head of State Béji Caïd Essebsi – Ceremony of the Journée du Savoir, 24 July 2018, Carthage Palace)

P18_NB Belgacem.jpg

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