

VIDEO AGE

INTERNATIONAL

November, 2003
VOL. 23 NO. 7

Tarak Ben Ammar: The Great Negotiator

by Dom Serafini

If Rupert Murdoch, Silvio Berlusconi, Prince Alwaleed, Leo Kirch and Vincent Bolloré have a common denominator, that could only be Franco-Tunisian financier-producer-broker-financial advisor Tarak Ben Ammar.

But the 54-year old Ben Ammar is more than just that: he's also a shareholder of Lux Vide, Italy's largest TV production house; chairman of Paris-based Quinta Communications; owner of production facilities in his native Tunisia, as well as post-production and special effects houses in France; and now a board member of Mediobanca, Italy's largest investment bank, which also controls Assicurazione Generali, Europe's largest insurance company. Ben Ammar also has a 50.1 percent equity share in Roma Studios through his Promotion e Partecipazione Internazionale.



As *VideoAge Daily* at MIPCOM 2003 wrote: "One doesn't need to qualify Tarak Ben Ammar, only to quantify him."

For this story, *VideoAge* met with Ben Ammar first at the Anti-Defamation League's Award Ceremony honoring Silvio Berlusconi in New York, then at the MIPCOM 2003 "Personality of the Year" Award dinner for News Corp. COO Peter Chernin, and finally on his boat, moored in the port of Cannes' MIPCOM Palais.

Ben Ammar's ascent in the entertainment industry began in the movies: through his studios, Carthago Films, in Hammamet, Tunisia, he has been involved in a total of 60 film productions, including 1977's *Star Wars*, 1981's *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and, most recently, Brian De Palma's *Femme Fatale*. But he did not neglect financing, and today Ben Ammar is working on a venture called Global Partners, a mergers investment bank, in partnership with ABN Ambro, the Netherlands's largest bank.

In the Netherlands, Ben Ammar also owns Holland Coordinator & Services (HC&S), a holding company now involved in brokering the two Italian national TV terrestrial frequencies that Rupert Murdoch's News Corp. inherited (but, by law, has soon to dispose) by acquiring Vivendi-Universal's Telepiù. This pay-TV service was renamed Sky Italia when it was merged with Italian pay-TV service Stream. The two frequencies, called Telepiù Bianco and Telepiù Nero, were first grouped under two companies: Europa TV for the former and Prima TV for the latter. Subsequently, News Corp. sold them to SPAFID, a trust company owned by Mediobanca. Now HC&S is acquiring Europa TV for 70 million euro and Prima TV for 40 million euro. The French TF1 group is to buy up 49 percent of Europa TV for 40 million euro. TF1, through its wholly-owned subsidiary Eurosport, plans to launch Sport Italia, a national, not- soccer-based sports channel covering 83 percent of Italy. If the agreements get

