

Tunisia's National Dialogue

By

UTICA - Tunisian Confederation of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts

*Presented at the Public-Private Dialogue 2015 Workshop
(Copenhagen, March 10-13, 2015)*

1- Background and Context

Tunisia has achieved a remarkable democratic transition since the revolution in 2011, making it unequivocally the leading democracy in the Arab world today. However, the transition lasted four years and passed by various periods of extreme uncertainty. The fact that we can talk today about “the democratic transition” in the past tense, is, to no little extent, due to the historic role played by the UTICA and its three partners of the “quartet” in mediating a peaceful and constructive exit out of the crises in which that “transition” found itself only one year ago.

Indeed, soon after the revolution, a National Constituent Assembly (ANC) was elected in Tunisia (October 23, 2011) in order to draft a new constitution and propose a transitional government. Three parties eventually formed a majority coalition and constituted that transitional government : Ennahda (moderate Islamic party), CPR and Ettakatol (center-left secular parties). However, the drafting process proved to be lengthy and the transitional ANC and government lasted more than the originally foreseen one-year period. Further, two assassinations of opposition leaders Chokri Belaid (February 2013) and Mohamed Brahmi (July 2014) deeply shook the country, creating a deep crisis of trust and freezing political exchanges between the governing parties and the opposition. In August 2013 the tension had reached a peak and the entire democratic transition was at serious risk of being derailed (similarly to what had happened in Egypt around the same period).

The National Dialogue that was launched and led by the UTICA and its partners in the “Quartet” aimed, and eventually succeeded, at defusing this tension, building national unity, and facilitating a way out of the crises. This four-pager aims at explaining the case.

The Arab Spring started in Tunisia, the country is in a transition while also discovering the limits of its economic model. There is a sense of urgency to create the needed jobs that led to the Tunisian revolution. If there is a consensus on today's priorities (jobs, jobs, jobs), the main problems seem to lie in the lack of common views and will among the key actors. It is in this context that was born the Tunisian PPD also called “National Dialogue”.

2- Partnership, Structure and Processes

The objective of the “National Dialogue” was to facilitate a peaceful and constructive agreement on a stable transitional government (between the ruling “Troika”, on one hand, and the opposition on the other hand) as an exit to the political crisis that was threatening to derail the democratic transition.

It was officially launched, in September 2013 and was jointly initiated, managed and led by the four national organizations that composed the “QUARTET”: Tunisian Confederation of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts (UTICA); Tunisian General Labor Union (UGTT); Tunisian Human Rights League (LTHD) and the National Association of Tunisian Lawyers. The UGTT had in fact launched a 1st "round" of such talks one year earlier, but these were boycotted by Ennahda at the time. This National Dialogue was in fact initiated in September 2013, and had been prepared this time by the above mentioned Quartet.

The Dialogue brought to the negotiation table two opposite groups: The “Troika”, which is the governing alliance of three parties at the time, including “ ENNAHDHA », CPR and Ettakatol; and the various opposition parties represented in the ANC (Parliament), including Nidaa Tounes, Aljomhoury, Almassar, Afek Tounes, Aljabha chaabia, etc.

The Mediation effort involved the many leaders of the various parties, officials in the government of the time, but also the “three Presidents” (the President of the country, the Head of Government, and the Speaker of the House/ANC).

The facilitation delivered an agreement in the form of a ‘road map’ on October 2013, and included the resignation of the current “Troika” government, creation of a new “technocratic and independent government ” as a first step, the finalization and adoption of the new Constitution, and finally the organization of elections.

Further, the Quartet’s role was not only limited to the launch and management of the dialogue, but was also expanded to include the follow-up of the implementation of the agreed upon “roadmap”.

The initiative was comprehensive, and it was coherent with the UTICA’s self-imposed slogan: “social stability to re-boost the economy” (a goal it shares with the UGTT). This consensus around the "social" dimension of the dialogue (growth and shared prosperity) was in fact the foundation of the political "national dialogue" that was initiated in 2013, conducted and achieved in 2014.

For UTICA, today, the priority has become to take this consensus further towards the adoption of structural reforms needed to re-launch the economy (growth and shared prosperity), through a "Tunisia 2020" program that will restore the competitiveness of Tunisian companies and create fast and sustainable growth.

3- Results so far

Two main results were reached by the National Dialogue so far: The roadmap and the designation of a technocratic and independent Government.

1/ Road map: as a conclusion of the different rounds of meetings, the quartet drafted a “road map” that got the approval of all the participants in the National Dialogue. The road map included several actions, starting with the commitment by President Moncef Marzouki and Prime Minister Ali Laarayedh to solemnly announce that the Government led by the Islamists will resign and would be replaced within three weeks by an independent government (composed of technocrats) as decided by the National Dialogue. Further steps included:

- The finalization of the drafting of the constitution and its adoption by the ANC
- The creation of the ISIE, Tunisia’s independent commission to organize and monitor the elections
- The organization and implementation of parliamentary and presidential elections.

2/ The road map was followed by all parties and the new technocratic government was indeed put in place. This government insured stability, organized elections in October (parliamentary) and December (presidential) 2014, and insured a productive working environment for the economy until February 2015 when it handed over the reins of power to the democratically elected government of Tunisia. With a new voted constitution, a new elected President, a new elected parliament, a new built and approved government based on this new constitution and results of parliament elections, democratic institutions are now finally in place in Tunisia.

It must be noted that the achievements of the National Dialogue were not only perceived at the political level, but also on the socio-economic one : the success of the policy of "social dialogue" had an impact on the number of strikes, which steadily decreased due to this dialogue: 426 strikes in 2011, 391 in 2012, 310 in 2013 in the first three quarters.

It is important to notice that the Tunisian revolution is considered as the only case of success of “Arab spring” revolutions. It is today recognized, inside Tunisia but also all over the world, that the process of “National Dialogue”, unique and not experienced before in the world, initiated and managed by UTICA and its partners of QUARTET, has been the main cause of this success : a civil and peaceful transition of Tunisia to a real Democracy.

Biographies of Authors:

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- President of UTICA (Tunisian National Employer Organization) since May 2011
- Vice-president of the Tunisian Foundation of Control and Governance since 2009
- Administrator in HBG (Hedi Bouchamaoui Holding)
- Manager of ANSAM, international trading company
- Administrator of the Company SOLARTECH-SUD, ecological village of Zarzis (the south of Tunisia)
- Member of the Board of Directors of HBS OIL Company (Hédi Bouchamaoui and Sons Oil), family company of oil exploitation in Tunisia, Egypt and Syria
- Vice-president of UTICA from 2006 till 2011
- Treasurer of the Tunisian British Chamber of commerce since 2010
- Member of the Executive Board of the regional Union of UTICA in Ariana
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Kais Sellami is Member of the Executive Board of UTICA, and President of the National ICT Federation of UTICA.

Professionally he is CEO of Discovery Group, a leader group operating in integration of management solutions (ERP), health solutions and Offshore development and covering Maghreb, Europe and sub-Saharan Africa.

He is qualified engineer of the Ecole Centrale de Paris/France and Executive MBA of Mediterranean School of Business.

Kais Sellami is Charter member of TACT, Tunisian Association for Communication and Technology, and of Get'IT : Tunisian consortium of IT companies. He was elected in 2005 as best young manager.

In 2011, Kais Sellami was also member of the High Instance for realization of revolution objectives and for democratic transition.

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Since 1989 till today : in charge of international relations in UTICA

1988 Diploma 3rd cycle of the European Institute of International Studies in Nice.
Graduation thesis: "Tunisian cooperation in Western Mediterranean".

1986 Master languages (Arabic, English, Russian) of the Bourguiba Institute of Modern Languages.



As you decide how to best write your 4-page note, you might want to consider some of these ideas:

- *Country, Name of initiative, Year established.*
- *Areas in which the initiative is designed to have an impact on.*
- *Main government and private sector sponsors.*
- *Development Partner sponsor.*
- *Program management/Coordinator/facilitation main people and facilities.*
- *Background and context information (explain the background of the partnership and list the major milestones. Indicate budget, funding sources and relationships with government, private sector, other donors and others in the World Bank Group. Indicate your sense of ownership of this initiative, if you feel it is sustainable, if its vocation is to become an institution or remain a temporary initiative).*
- *Enacted reforms processed through this public-private initiative (list each reform separately and indicate the specific reference for each law, code, act, etc.). Estimated impact of reforms listed above, if ever estimated.*
- *What material or guidance have you been using to help you in the implementation of this initiative?*
- *What are some of the biggest challenges you have encountered in the establishment of the PPD?*
- *What are some of the risks you have encountered and how have you mitigated these?*
- *What would you identify as some of the main factors of success while establishing dialogue?*
- *Status and progress of the partnership in the following 12 areas. Give as much detail as you see fit. Feel free to refer to the PPD handbook for a better understanding of these process areas):*

1. *Mandate and Institutional Alignment (what is the mandate of the initiative, where is it anchored, what role for different actors, how is the secretariat funded, etc.).*
2. *Structure and Participation (how many working groups and on what, working group membership and base, respective roles, etc.).*
3. *Champions (what political will, reservoir of experience and initiative in the private sector, who are the main champions, etc.).*
4. *Facilitator (who is facilitating, how is the secretariat organized, what are the different roles, etc.).*
5. *Outputs (what are the desired outputs of the initiative, what are the main targets, and what is the selection process for reform proposals, etc.).*
6. *Outreach and communications (is there a communication strategy, stakeholder plan, what has been its outputs and results so far, is there a website, etc.).*
7. *Monitoring and evaluation (is the initiative being evaluated periodically, what method or process is used for doing so, what indicators have been adopted, and what corrective measures have been adopted when issues were identified, are there planning tools, are results reported publicly, etc.).*
8. *Sub-national (is there a sub-national component to this initiative, etc.).*
9. *Sector-Specific (how does the initiative addresses sector, clusters, or industrial strategies, etc.).*
10. *International Role (has the initiative a role in international negotiations regarding trade, commercial treaties, promoting regional trade etc.).*
11. *Crisis-mitigation (has the initiative a role in re-building trust between conflicted parties – post-conflict economies, or has it had a role in addressing critical needs after a crisis – financial crisis , natural disasters, etc.).*
12. *Development partners (what is the role of donors, how are donors coordinating their activities around the initiative or not, how is the agenda of the initiative independent or not for these this of donors, how financially dependent the PPD is from donors etc.).*