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Social Dialogue and the implementation of structural economic reforms in Tunisia

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In a country characterized by an incomplete institutional environment and a fragile economy, as is currently the case in Tunisia, the existence of elections is not a guarantee of properly functioning institutions.

On the one hand, the democratic nature of elections is sometimes questionable (the polls may be subject to manipulation, voting is eventually determined by not strictly political loyalties). On the other hand, monitoring of government action, during its mandate, is often non-existent (absence of constitutional control, constitutional separation of powers remains largely fictional, etc.).

Thus, the tripartite social dialogue (government - private sector - unions) appears as the appropriate response: to address the shortcomings of universal suffrage, to lead towards the establishment of an environment highly conducive to business investment initiative and especially to ensure the success of structural reforms.

Before the revolution, the climate of political repression was more favourable to a public - private dialogue, as opposed to social dialogue, in which civil society is well presented. Consequently, a bounty hunter behaviour characterized the conduct of private investors (distribution of rents, lobbying, ..)

After the revolution, social dialogue has emerged as a new form of governance to accompany the democratic transition process. However, success on the institutional level has not translated into economic success. Hence the question about the usefulness of social dialogue that does not guarantee the success of the process of economic reforms.

Thus, for such a success, several conditions are required:

- to broaden the scope of dialogue to include other components of civil society (associations of farmers, environmental associations and consumer's associations, ...).
- to define a clear strategic vision to address the problems of the country.
- to assign responsibilities to all the key players: A strategic and bold government, an innovative private sector and not a bounty hunter mentality, pragmatic labour unions, and a modernist and not populist civil society.

Such a situation (compliance with the reform agenda and political and social stability) could be attractive to foreign donors.

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