



Austrian National Defence Academy
Vienna

LIBYA - INTERNAL FRAGMENTATION AND THE DRAGGING DIALOGUE

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In 2017 Libya found itself at the centre of great attention within European governments. A plethora of issues have plagued the country: the civil war has flared up again in parts of the country; the UN-negotiated Government of National Accord is still far from being acknowledged; and the divisions between the power blocs in the east and west have widened, especially due to the fighting in the centre and south of Libya. Furthermore, nearly 90% of all migrants have reached Europe through the central Mediterranean route in the first six months of this year.

The Government of National Accord is struggling for its recognition

The deal for the formation of a *Government of National Accord* (GNA), which was agreed on in December 2015 under the auspices of the UN (in the *Libyan Political Agreement*, LPA) offered the hope for stability for the first time since the renewed flare-up of the civil war in 2014. However, even one and a half years later, the negotiations on the recognition of the GNA, as well as the confirmation of the minister's and other key positions are advancing slowly. A *Presidential Council* (PC) under Fayiz al-Sarraj was created under the LPA, which was designated to appoint the GNA and restore unified institutions until the new elections take place in March 2018. The recognition of the GNA is hampered in particular by the external support for its opponents. Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and Russia support the anti-Islamist-oriented HoR (*House of Representatives*) in Tobruk politically and militarily. On the other side, the *General National Congress* (GNC) in Tripoli is supported by Muslim Brotherhood related-governments, such as Qatar, Sudan and Tur-

key. The arms embargo imposed by the UN is still valid yet evidently ignored.

The *Presidential Council* has major problems to consolidate its position in the capital Tripoli, because some militias continue to cooperate with the opposition government - the *Government of National Salvation* (GNS) led by Khali-fa Ghweil. Ghweil is very close to the influential Grand Mufti of Tripoli, Imam Ghariani, and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, and is backed by Islamic conservative circles. The vast majority of the members of the *General National Congress* (GNC) found new positions in the *State Council*, an advisory body according to LPA. However, Ghweil and the former speaker of the GNC Abusahmain even refused to recognise the Unity Government and since then are subject to EU sanctions. Even if their support base is limited, their stance continues to hinder the facilitation of integration efforts of the Unity Government.

The LPA further exacerbated internal division. Before December 2015, rival parliaments and their governments fought for influence,



while today the supporters of the Unity Government argue with their opponents. Both blocs are legitimately protected by well equipped militias. Indeed, the last fighting between GNA- and GNS-supporters took place as recent as the 9th July in the area between Misrata and Tripoli. It can also be reiterated that the international supporters of the agreement keep losing credibility as they are unable to halt the support of the GNA-opponents from various regional states and Russia.

Obstacles of the national dialogue

The *Presidential Council* is facing tough challenges, such as the disarmament of the various militias and their future integration into a unified security apparatus. The strengthening of General Khalifa Haftar's self-proclaimed *Libyan National Army* (LNA) in the east of the country further complicates the integration process. Haftar was a Libyan officer under Gaddafi, who later emigrated to the US, returned after Gaddafi's death and with his militia LNA brought whole eastern Libya, except the city of Derna, and large parts of the south under his control. He enjoys close ties with the President of the HoR, Aguila Saleh, as well as the government in Bayda. Moreover, he established a solid name with the publicised fight against Islamists, whereby he does not distinguish between jihadists and Islamists as he classifies them all as "radical islamists". In the last few months Haftar managed to consolidate his power by weakening his political opponents. This was achieved through targeted measures, such as the cooperation with specific salafist groups, the renewed appointment of former officials of the intelligence agency from the Gaddafi era, as well as the introduction of military governors to replace elected local councils.

General Haftar's intransigence

General Haftar was against the implementation of the LPA, as, according to § 8 of the LPA, the future command of the Libyan armed forces and the appointment of any position in the security and military sector is

decided by the PC, and this may undermine his position as the Chief of the army. Haftar's intransigence refers to his leadership as leader of the army without any civilian command above him, as well as the fight against religious actors. Furthermore, the establishment of the UN-backed *Presidential Guard*, which is to protect the institutions of the Unity Government, is lagging behind. It consists of various militias, whose existence is, though, threatened by more technically-advanced militias in Tripoli. Haftar's statements about an impending "liberation" of Tripoli caused a great uproar. However, this threat seems unrealistic, given that Haftar has few allies in the capital. His strategy to extend his power to Tripoli seems to be to instigate tensions, capitalise on possible chaos in the capital and position himself as the sole guarantor for stability. The full "liberation" of Benghazi from Islamist militias in early July this year strengthened Haftar's position and his LNA enormously and provided him with greater legitimacy. Nonetheless, the *Libyan National Army* is neither national, nor is it a regular army. The vast majority consists of fighters from different militias in the east and tribal fighters in the west and south respectively.

The end of ISIS in Libya?

By the end of 2014 the leader of the Islamic State Group declared three provinces in Libya as part of the Caliphate. When in December 2016 a militia alliance from Misrata expelled ISIS from its last urban stronghold, Sirte, Gaddafi's hometown, there seemed to be broad consensus among Libyan politicians and militia leaders. The fight against ISIS was of common interest to all concerned. However, the power blocs did not unite further. Disparate militias fought their own campaigns against ISIS without a unified authority. Needless to say, the expulsion of ISIS from Sirte does not constitute the end of the group in Libya. Sleeper cells still exist, especially in the western and southern parts of the country. At its peak, ISIS counted 5.000 to 10.000 fighters in Libya. Today, the city of Sabratha close to Tunisia and the central liby-

an area near Sirte and Misrata are the main refugiums for ISIS militias. A further indication for the ongoing retreat of jihadist groups in Libya was the declaration of dissolution of *Ansar al-Sharia* in May 2017.

The jihadist ideology has a difficult time to establish itself permanently in Libya, due to the strong tribal social structure. As a consequence, ISIS had its main strongholds in large cities where the tribal structures are broadly dissolved. ISIS, as other jihadist groups, are the product of the crisis in Libya, not its origin. Provided that Libya remains unstable on an economic and security level, the country remains a foundation for more terrorism and organized criminality to blossom.

The Libyan Oil Crescent

The central Libyan ports between Sirte and Benghazi, to which a large part of the oil pipelines lead, carry the name "Oil Crescent". After the conquest of the entire Oil Crescent by Haftar's LNA in September 2016 the oil export from Libya increased emphatically. By the end of June 2017, the export rose to over 1 million barrels per day. Although the fighting is still ongoing in some parts of the country, this rise in productivity is caused by the reopening of the southern Sharara and El-Fil oil fields. Since the *Benghazi Defence Brigades* (BDB) took over some of the central oil ports from the LNA in March for a few days, the latter concentrate their military efforts not only on the remaining urban strongholds of Islamist groups, but also on Libya's isolated areas where the BDB and ISIS have retreated.

However, the conflict surrounding oil or natural gas is not only concerning infrastructure, but also the influence at the administrative level. It relates to the appointment of influential positions in the state administration and the *National Oil Cooperation* (NOC). The strategic importance of the Oil Crescent as well as the migration and smuggling routes, placed pressure on the the militias in the north to focus their military efforts on the central and southern parts of Libya. A "proxy war" bet-

ween Haftar's LNA and militias from western Libya broke out, whereby the strength of the militias in the more remote areas of the country is strongly determined by their alliances with local tribes.

Focusing on the South

The south of Libya is of enormous geostrategic importance, not only for the Sahel region, but in particular for Europe. Firstly, a large part of natural resources destined for Europe come from the southern areas. Secondly, a great number of migrants arriving in Europe pass through southern Libya. Thirdly, smuggling and organized criminality is increasing since the fall of the Gaddafi regime. These three factors cause the destabilization of the entire region and also beyond Libya. Therefore, the international community is concentrating more on local actors for the establishment of a second barrier in the Sahara desert. Since 2014, French Special Forces are stationed in the North of Niger to monitor the Libyan border and curtail smuggling activities. The security situation in the south of Libya is essential for the stabilization of the whole country, as the vast sparsely populated desert areas will remain a refugium for opposition militias.

Migration on the central Mediterranean Route

According to the UNHCR, in the first six months of 2017 around 83 000 migrants reached Italy, of which 2 000 died attempting to cross the sea. The closure of the central mediterranean route and the containment of migration flows from the main transit countries Libya and Niger towards Europe raises a number of questions.

Due to the hybrid libyan security sector, the training program of the libyan coastguard and the cooperation with libyan authorities concerning migration management proved to be somewhat effective. Some of the militias are involved in the smuggling business and a solid central command structure uniting all the different armed groups is lacking.

Imprint:

Copyright, Production,

Publisher:

Republic of Austria / Federal
Ministry of Defence and Sports
Roßauer Lände 1
1090 Vienna

Edited by:

National Defence Academy
Vienna
Institute for Peace Support and
Conflict Management
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Periodikum der

Landesverteidigungsakademie

August 2017

Printing:

ReproZ W xxxx/17
Stiftgasse 2a
1070 Wien



www.facebook.com/lvak.ifk

IFK Monitor
International
July 2017

Without European staff in Libya, the EU is heavily restrained when pursuing its interests. Due to its fragmentation, Libya can merely be seen as *one* partner yet having evident limitations. Migration represents a notoriously flourishing economic sector in Libya from which a great number of Libyans are benefiting as smugglers and human traffickers. The plummeting economy is deteriorating the living conditions in Libya, which has become one of the catalysts for increased emigration. To curb the influx of illegal migration, a functioning overall strategy is required by the EU, which offers a sustainable perspective not only in Libya but also in the main countries of origin in the sub-Saharan region from which migrants are travelling from.

Findings and Recommendations

Common EU position and strong US Policy

It is paramount that the EU agrees on a common position in relation to stabilizing Libya. Furthermore, the negotiations should be backed by the political superpower US in order to shape the impact of local actors and the regional powers supporting them. The half-hearted US engagement in Libya has triggered the opportunity for Russia to offer greater support to General Haftar.

Strengthening the Unity Government

It is essential that the international community promotes the dialogue between GNA supporters and their opponents. Moreover, attempts should be made to increase the pressure on the supporters of General Haftar - most importantly Egypt and the UAE - possibly against the backdrop of the threat of sanctions and suspension of support payments.

Involvement of General Haftar

Haftar has thus far not made strong efforts to accept the establishment of the Unity Government, as he still seems to prefer a military victory to a political settlement. Nevertheless, the involvement of Haftar in the poli-

tical process is imperative for the stabilization of Libya. It is necessary to grant Haftar a leading position within the national army and simultaneously to ensure a civilian control over the armed forces.

Focus on Economic Measures

A sustainable economic alternative to organized criminality needs to be provided to the people of Libya. For this purpose, the abundant resources provide the ideal conditions. Europe could serve as a stable partner for economic cooperations.

EU Stabilization Mission

The main interest of the EU in Libya is the stabilization of the country and the containment of refugee flows. An important approach is to tackle the deficits in the Libyan security sector through international measures. The often-requested Libya mission by Italy and Germany could achieve a sustainable stabilization, accelerate the political process in the right direction and enable the development of a unified Libyan security sector. However, such a mission could be realized only on request by the GNA and in coordination with the UN and the neighboring countries.

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