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Failing State

Libya as a Supraregional Security Threat

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Ex-U.S. President Barack Obama once described the United States' and its allies' lack of success in ensuring stability in Libya following the fall of the Gaddafi regime as one of the biggest failings of his time in office. Indeed, the country is sinking ever deeper into chaos. Now, the action plan by Ghassan Salamé, the United Nations' new Special Representative for Libya, is expected to revive the peace process. If this does not succeed, the security situation risks escalating further – with far-reaching consequences both for neighbouring countries and Europe.

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Introduction

Six years after the former Libyan ruler Muammar al-Gaddafi was overthrown, hopes of democracy, stability and growth in Libya have not come to fruition. The country is descending into chaos. Politically and territorially fragmented, with a plethora of rival state-run and non-governmental actors and alliances, porous borders and little prospect of imminent stabilisation, Libya represents a security threat for its neighbouring countries, the wider Mediterranean region and Europe.

The UN-led peace process, which resulted in the Government of National Accord (GNA) in December 2015 under Prime Minister Fayez al-Sarraj, has so far been unable either to consolidate its control over Libyan state territory, or to make noticeable improvements to the living conditions of the Libyan people. Furthermore, the government's authority is openly contested by both of the other self-proclaimed parliaments in Libya – the House of Representatives (HoR) in Tobruk in the east of the country and the General National Congress (GNC) in Tripoli – as well as by a number of non-governmental armed factions. De facto, there is no government that controls the whole of the Libyan territory.

In the absence of a united national army, various actors are competing for power and resources. Armed factions are gaining a foothold at the local level. In many cases, this is accompanied by control over illegal economic activities, especially the smuggling of goods and people. This all creates a situation that offers room for manoeuvre for extremist organisations too, such as the group known as Islamic State (IS). These organisations recognise and exploit the national power vacuum as a convenient opportunity to expand their activities and even local territorial control in Libya.

Political and Territorial Fragmentation

Looking Back: Revolution and Civil War

In contrast to the rebellions in the neighbouring countries of Tunisia and Egypt, the 2011 protests in Libya escalated within the space of a few days and developed into an armed conflict between the forces loyal to the regime and those rebelling against it. The overthrow of the Gaddafi regime, which was accelerated by the support of the international powers, gave the loose consortia of rebels no opportunity to develop their organisational structure or a programme for the future of Libya and the transition process. The absence of influential, political and civil society leaders who could have filled the power vacuum after the fall of Gaddafi, contributed to the chaos following the revolution.[1]

The government elected in 2012, the GNC, likewise failed to stabilise the security situation. Instead, the armed groups were integrated into a form of parallel security sector and from that

point on received salaries from the state to prevent an escalation of the security situation. To date, none of the three Libyan governments has succeeded in curbing the influence of these informal armed groups and transferring control to a state-controlled security unit.

Libya does not have a unified, nationally controlled army.

Nonetheless, further escalation of the simmering conflicts was prevented until 2014. The fragile stability ended with the parliamentary elections in June 2014, which, marked by violence and low voter turnout, meant a clear defeat for the Islamist forces and which were subsequently annulled. The elections took place in the context of the simmering conflict between General Khalifa Haftar's groups from the east, consolidated under Operation Dignity, and the Libya Dawn coalition from the west formed as a counter-response. The confrontation culminated in a civil war that claimed thousands of victims, turned almost half a million people into internally displaced persons and brought the country's economy to a virtual standstill. After the defeat of the Operation Dignity coalition around the strategically important airport in Tripoli, the elected parliament, the HoR, moved back to the eastern city of Tobruk. Meanwhile, the GNC reconstituted itself as a rival government in Tripoli.[2]

"Libyan Political Agreement" and Perspectives

The negotiations in favour of a political agreement for the creation of a unity government that would end the conflict between the rival parliaments began in January 2015 under the direction of the UN. This government was set up to guarantee the drafting of a new constitution and the holding of elections; and to act as a trusted partner in the fight against IS. The process resulted in the signing of the "Libyan Political Agreement" (LPA), which envisaged the creation of a Presidential Council that would assume

the formation of a Government of National Accord and, until then, would replace the existing governments. The intention was to involve members of the Tripoli based GNC in a newly created advisory institution: the High Council of State. The HoR in Tobruk was to remain in existence as the single national parliament. A binding Cabinet agreement by a parliamentary vote of confidence was determined in order to secure democratic legitimacy for the new government.[3]

However, some central questions remain unanswered, especially as regards the regional balance of power and the configuration of the security sector. Due to the ongoing deterioration of the economic and security situation, the danger posed by the spread of IS as well as international pressure on account of increased migration flows, a speedy signing was ultimately preferred to further negotiations. In the following months, these unresolved questions led to a loss of legitimacy of the Presidential Council and the newly formed government. To date, the HoR has not given the vote of confidence necessary for legitimising the new government. Both General Haftar and the GNC withdrew their support for the GNA unity government, established themselves as rival governments in Tobruk and Tripoli respectively, and consolidated their respective power bases through military initiatives by loyal, armed groups.

Meanwhile, the new government also lost public support in the face of the worsening living conditions in the country. According to UN estimates, 1.3 million people, a fifth of the Libyan population, are dependent on humanitarian aid, while the number of internally displaced persons is rising.[4] Ongoing displacement, a collapse of the markets, and plummeting production have made the food shortage more acute; and electricity and water are also only available in limited quantities across the country. Additionally, the healthcare system has collapsed: 60 per cent of the infrastructure functions only in part or not at all and there is a lack of medicine and clinical equipment.[5] The public administration has almost completely crumbled and

Under attack: In Libya, numerous groups are struggling for power following the fall of Gaddafi. Source: © Esam Al-Fetor, Reuters.

the banks experience a shortage of cash. Due to the unstable security situation, most humanitarian organisations are forced to operate from the neighbouring country of Tunisia and aid services often do not reach all those affected. These daily challenges fuel the conflict further.

More than one and a half years after the signing of the LPA, the implementation of the "Political Agreement" appears to be infeasible in its current form. Renegotiations of the key elements with the involvement of those actors who have so far been neglected, seem unavoidable in order to overcome the political blockade and prevent further escalation of the conflict. This realisation has sparked a new willingness to negotiate.[6] To the surprise of many international observers, a meeting between the GNA

Prime Minister al-Sarraj and General Haftar on 25 July 2017 brought about an agreement to hold a ceasefire, as well as parliamentary and presidential elections at the start of 2018. It is assumed that a structural change to the Presidential Council underlies the agreement, which would reduce the institution to three members and secure Haftar a central role in Libya's political system along with al-Sarraj and HoR President Agila Saleh.

At the end of September 2017, the new UN Special Representative for Libya, Ghassan Salamé, presented a new action plan for reviving the peace process. The plan envisages a revision of the "Libyan Political Agreement" by a committee, before a national Libyan conference votes on the individuals responsible for the new

Fig. 1: Libya with Areas Held by State and Non-State Actors

Areas shown as of Sep 2017. Source: Own illustration based on Risk Intelligence, World Energy Atlas; cf. Stratfor 2017: The U.N. Hits Reset in Libya, 21 Sep 2017, in: http://bit.ly/2Dc4Hzu [19 Dec 2017]; Natural Earth ©.

executive. The conference under the direction of the UN Secretary-General will aim to bring all previously excluded or under-represented stakeholders to the table. Members of the High State Council and Islamist-spectrum militias allied with the GNA had feared marginalisation within the framework of a renegotiated LPA. It now remains to be seen how successful the renegotiation of the balance of power in Libya will be.

A Country of Regional Contrasts

The country's social divide is crucially important for understanding the political fragmentation in Libya.[7] The east, Cyrenaica, is dominated by tribal groups with links to Egypt and is characterised by a social and religious population that tends to be more conservative. The west, Tripolitania, is more cosmopolitan and oriented towards the Mediterranean. The south, Fessan, is Libya's sparsely populated

hinterland, inhabited by Tuareg and Tubu people who today fight for control of the lucrative border trade, the oil fields and military facilities.[8] Long before the start of the civil war, the depoliticising of public life in Gaddafi's *Jamahiriya* (rule of the masses in the style of Gaddafi) triggered a strengthening of the tribal structures in the regions. The power vacuum after the end of the revolution further encouraged the rise of armed tribal groups and local militias.[9]

In addition to the historical territorial partitioning of Libya, geographical divisions are based in particular on the distribution of national oil reserves. The majority of the oil reserves are located in the "oil crescent", which stretches from Ras Lanuf in the east through the central-northern city of Sirte to Jufra in the south. Irrespective of this, for decades the revenue from the oil sector flowed to Tripoli, thereby giving rise to the sentiment in the east and south of being cheated out of their legitimate income.[10] Since the oil sector makes up around 97 per cent of the Libyan state revenue, control of oil exports represents an important strategic variable for the future of Libya and the influence of various groups.

In the negotiations and implementation of the LPA, it is predominantly the divisions between east and west that play a central role. The rejection of the agreement by important factions and key protagonists from the east can therefore in large parts be attributed to the perception of a power imbalance in the negotiations and the structure of the newly created system in favour of western forces. Because of this, instead of working to establish peace in Libya within the framework of the LPA, General Haftar and his allies tried to cement their position of power in the east and expand their territorial control, in part by co-opting militias and replacing elected communal councils with military governors. The takeover of the strategic oil crescent in autumn 2016 is a clear example of these ambitions, and an important means of political leverage against the GNA.

The Effects of a Lack of State Structures on Regional Security

The context of a lack of state structures offers a fertile breeding ground, especially for the proliferation of extremist groups and, in connection with the country's uncontrolled and porous borders, for increased and irregular migration flows. The consequences of these dynamics in the form of escalating instability therefore constitute a huge challenge for the future of Libya, but also for regional and international stability.

State Without Borders

Libya is traditionally a country of migration and, prior to the revolution, accommodated an estimated two to three million legal immigrant workers from neighbouring countries and the wider continent of Africa.[11] Irregular migration, albeit at a much lower level than at present, was regulated under Gaddafi by a system of selective allocation of unofficial control over border sections and smuggling routes. Following the revolution, these agreements were rendered void and the increasing destabilisation of the country contributed to the rise in the number of irregular migrant flows to and through Libya, as well as to a rapid expansion and professionalisation of smuggling, which had suddenly become deregulated. Accordingly, 95 per cent of the 85,183 people who reached Italy between January and June 2017 via the central Mediterranean route had set out from Libya.[12] In addition to the vacuum of state control in Libya, the aggravated conditions on the eastern and western Mediterranean routes put the country at the centre of migration flows in the Mediterranean area. While UNHCR data speaks of approximately 40,000 people registered in Libya (asylum seekers and refugees), the actual figure is estimated to be considerably higher at between 700,000 and one million people.[13]

In the present situation, neither the GNA nor other state or non-governmental groups have the capacity to effectively put a halt to smuggling activities. Both the 1,770 kilometers long Libyan coast, as well as the 4,348 kilometers

long land borders with neighbouring countries remain porous. A higher concentration of smuggling activities are evident in the south of the country, where there is a lack of state control and alternative economic activities. Therefore, the southern borders and coastal regions in the west of the country form an easy point of departure for smugglers due to the collapse of the former security structures and the GNA's lack of capacities. Since the revolution, this has become a hotbed for smuggling networks to expand, for whom control of this increasingly important economic sector means not only resources, but also securing territorial zones of influence as well as consolidating influence in this volatile power structure.

After the fall of Gaddafi, irregular migration to and through Libya grew enormously.

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At the end of 2016, the EU and UN began to train the Libyan coast guard in carrying out rescue missions, combatting smugglers and upholding human rights; and provided them with the equipment to do so.[14] What is problematic, however, is that the Libyan coast guard has emerged from revolutionary militias from the Libyan civil war and has no professional staff. According to a UN report, in some cases the units themselves are involved in criminal smuggling schemes.[15]

In July 2017, the number of migrants reaching Italy from Libya fell by half to 11,459 people and, in August, this figure fell again by approximately 80 per cent.[16] The causes for this dramatic decline are not clearly identifiable. According to various press reports and expert opinions, the expansion of the activities of the Libyan coast guard and their approach against the search and rescue missions of humanitarian aid organisations might have led to this.[17] The withdrawal of international aid organisations has, however, resulted in the operations in Libyan waters

becoming even less transparent to observers. International observers and experts accuse the Italian government of supporting an agreement between the GNA and militias that allows for some armed groups to be financed so as to avoid further crossings, and to already intervene on the mainland. Therefore, this decrease appears to be merely linked to the interception of migrants. This does not, however, provide a sustainable solution; and may have the opposite effect with the emergence of alternative migration routes. A challenge of particular urgency is the precarious legal and humanitarian situation of migrants in Libya, which has been documented and criticised time and again by reports from international organisations.

Breeding Ground of Extremist Groups

In conjunction with uncontrolled migration towards Europe, permeable borders and the availability of weapons in the post-revolutionary disorder make Libya a fertile breeding ground for extremism and terrorism. During the revolution, established jihadist factions were already fighting alongside the rebels and, following the overthrow of the regime, took on posts in Libya's political system next to moderate Islamists.[18] However, the continuing state disintegration opened the doors to another actor: the so-called Islamic State. As in other territories, IS turned the undefined power situation in Libya to its advantage and established a territorial presence. Returning fighters from Syria formed the first Libyan IS offshoot and were later supported by IS representatives dispatched from Syria and Iraq in the creation of three provinces (*wilāyāt*) in the east, west and south of the country.[19] IS initially settled in the eastern city of Derna, but was driven out by other jihadist groups. It then moved westwards along the coast and installed itself in the coastal city of Sirte, which became the first region outside of the Levant to fall under the territorial control of IS.[20] Sirte was considered its most crucial base and was retaken following months of fighting by militias and U.S. air strikes.

With regard to the total number of IS fighters in Libya, the estimates fluctuated between 6,000 and 12,000. What is interesting here is that the majority of IS fighters in Libya – up to 70 per cent in Sirte – were made up of foreign fighters, primarily Tunisians. While being displaced from Sirte constituted a heavy territorial defeat for IS, it would be inaccurate to speak of an ultimate victory over the group in Libya. Moreover, the victory over IS provides scope for other Islamist factions to proliferate, which – unless the country is stabilised and gains political peace – presents an ongoing terrorist risk.[21]

Libya's neighbours face cross-border security challenges as terrorist factions spread, especially through the recruitment and training of fighters by groups in Libya and their return to their home countries after the military defeats of IS. Attacks by terrorists trained in Libya, for example in Tunisia in 2015 and Algeria in 2013, also show the increased risk of attacks emanating from Libya as a retreat for these groups. For Europe, too, there is an increased risk of terrorism due to the strengthened international jihadist networks. The Tunisian Anis Amri, who perpetrated the attack on a Christmas market in Berlin at the end of 2016, was in contact with IS in Libya.[22] The Manchester attacker had connections to Libyan IS networks as well. Salman Abedi is thus the latest link in the chain between the situation in Libya and the threat to Europe posed by international terrorism.

> **The continuing state disintegration facilitates the spread of extremist groups in Libya.**
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Furthermore, Libya's instability is one of the main reasons behind the internationalisation and growing autonomy of armed factions in the Sahel region. In Mali, the epicentre of Islamist violence in Sahel, in Niger and in Chad, the dissemination of weapons from Libyan

holdings fuelled the equipment of insurgencies, which were dominated by Islamists and tribal groups.[23] The tribal areas along the Libyan borders in the south are, moreover, key to regional security.[24] The conflict in Libya has underpinned the crises in Sahel, a region with historically weak governments and widespread zones where the state has little authority.

The lack of state structures in Libya turns the country into a magnet and transfer route for foreign fighters, as well as the logical junction for jihadism in North Africa, given its use as a place for training and retreat for extremists. Unless the situation were to change by means of a political peace process and the construction of a legitimate government with an effective monopoly on power, the activities of terrorist factions will remain a security risk for the region and for Europe. At the same time, however, it must be determined that IS in Libya has no far-reaching control over territories and populations; local support for IS is relatively low. Experts believe that the strong clan and tribal structures are proving to be an important counterbalance to radicalism. The Libyan localism seems to not only be hindering a democratic process, but also a jihadist expansion.

From Fortune to Bankruptcy

Once the country with the highest per capita income in Africa, Libya is now on the brink of national bankruptcy. The country's oil reserves are estimated at 48 billion barrels, making them the largest reserves on the continent and the ninth largest worldwide.[25] In 2012, production of crude oil amounted to 70 per cent of Libya's gross domestic product (GDP), 99 per cent of the nation's exports and 97 per cent of state revenue. As a result of the escalating violence, however, the oil production declined sharply in the subsequent years and is far from being a stable supply since the oil industry in Libya has become part of a pronounced wartime economy.[26] In addition to this, there is the dramatic decrease in the global market price of oil. The banking system has likewise

almost completely crumbled due to the liquidity crisis. The state budget has been put under considerable strain by the appeasement policy of unproductive salary and pension payments. 40 per cent of budgetary expenditure flows into salaries and subsidies respectively and less than half is currently covered by revenue while the remainder comes from depleting currency reserves.[27]

Meanwhile, illegal economic activities, especially the smuggling of people and goods, have developed into a profitable industry. The shadow economy has also been able to greatly expand its capacity by linking criminal networks with territorial access for militias.[28] The war in Libya has led to a reorganisation of the smuggling cartels and turned the country into the regional hub for illegal trade in drugs, medicine, vehicles and people.[29]

The economic collapse of Libya has drastic consequences for neighbouring countries, too.

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The economic collapse of Libya has drastic consequences for neighbouring countries, too. Tunisia and Egypt are most seriously affected by the developments. The dramatic economic weakness in Tunisia is therefore ascribed in large part to the crisis in Libya. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) estimates that the chaos in Libya cost Tunisia at least 4.3 billion euros by the end of 2015 alone.[30] After the collapse of the Libyan economy, Tunisia's GDP sank by 3.7 per cent and 3.8 per cent in 2013 and 2014.[31] Furthermore, Tunisia traditionally satisfied 25 per cent of its oil demand with Libyan oil bought at preferential prices. However, this supply was difficult to sustain following the collapse of Libya's oil sector. In the tourism sector, Tunisia saw a slump of 30 per cent in the numbers of Libyan tourists (around 1.8 million annually prior to 2011).[32] A further problem is the return of

around 60,000 to 90,000 Tunisian migrant workers.[33] Money transfers from Libya have sunk by one third since 2011.[34] The return of tens of thousands of workers is an additional burden for the country which already has a high unemployment rate.[35]

At the same time, informal trade flows between Tunisia and Libya make up almost half of the trade between the two countries.[36] Almost 40 per cent of the Tunisian economy is informal. Smuggling, as well as other illegal activities often represent the only source of income for people in marginalised border areas. With a revenue of 850 million euros, border trade provides a living for approximately ten per cent of the Tunisian population.[37]

Egypt is similarly affected. The loss of economic advantages for Cairo from its neighbour has further exacerbated the country's economic plight. At 770 million euros at the end of 2014, bilateral trade therefore represented only a fraction of the 2.1 billion euros revenue prior to the Libyan revolution. In 2015, there was an estimated decline in Egyptian exports to Libya of 75 per cent.[38]

Furthermore, the situation for Egyptian migrant workers in Libya is uncertain. Repeated kidnappings of Egyptians and the execution of Coptic Christians by IS have forced many to flee. Before 2011, 1.5 to 2 million Egyptian migrant workers in Libya sent around 28 million euros back to their homeland each year.[39] In 2015, there were only 750,000 migrant workers remaining.[40] A drop in these return remittances harbours the potential for social unrest and further destabilisation in Egypt.[41]

The Role of Regional and International Actors

In addition to the wide-ranging challenges that Libya is facing through political and economic collapse, regional and international actors have also taken on an increasingly active role in the conflict in terms of mediation talks about a peace process, but also through military and
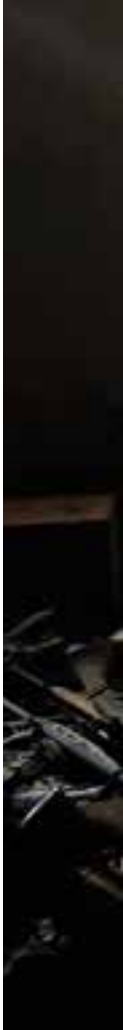
Weapon arsenal: In 2011, the despoliation of Gaddafi's inventory led to the circulation of large amounts of weapons.
Source: © Goran Tomasevic, Reuters.

political support to the individual warring factions. Although almost all states involved have pledged themselves rhetorically to the "Libyan Political Agreement" and the unity government, in many cases it is evident that they are promoting their own interests, thereby impeding the peace process.

Just as in other countries in the region, the U.S. policy of the Trump administration is still unclear with regard to Libya. Based on the statements made by the President and his advisors, U.S. commitment is expected to be restricted to supporting the fight against terrorism and, concomitant with this, a convergence with Haftar, who presents himself as the leader of the war against Islamist and terrorist

factions. The recent meeting between Haftar, the US ambassador and the US-AFRICOM commander in July 2017, appears to confirm these expectations and takes place only one day after the announcement that a new diplomatic and military US strategy for Libya is due to be finalised before long. Meanwhile, in the absence of a clear U.S. policy, other international actors have established themselves as major players and, in doing so, have had a decisive influence on the political and military power relations.

With their support for Haftar, Russia, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates have facilitated his military successes and territorial expansion. For Egypt and the Emirates in particular, the

ideological component plays a central role here: the two governments see the GNA as linked with Islamist-motivated groups and have grave concerns about this playing a stronger role in Libya's future political system. Haftar's decision to reject and fight against Islamist-motivated factions is thus an appropriate fit with both countries' priorities. In the case of Egypt, its geographical proximity and shared border also play a key role, since Egypt sees itself as having a central part in the shaping of Libya's future due to its security concerns and close economic ties. From the perspective of el-Sisi, too, it is important to prevent a government coming to power that is affiliated with Islamist factions.

Russia has established itself as a further actor in Libya filling the vacuum left by the U.S.; its role has grown in particular over the course of the last year. While Russia nominally supports the internationally recognised unity government, deepened contacts with Haftar and the HoR in the east have become increasingly evident. Haftar has visited Moscow a number of times to campaign for the weapons embargo on Libya to be lifted and to solicit support in the fight against Islamist factions in the east of the country. A UN weapons embargo, in place since 2011, prohibits the export of weapons to Libya, with the exception of the channels controlled by the GNA. However, the visit by Haftar at the start of the year to the Russian aircraft carrier Admiral Kuznetsov, fuelled rumours of arms treaties being transacted and plans for the establishment of a Russian marine base near Benghazi. According to international media reports, Russian military advisors and technical personnel are located in Libya. For many observers there is no mistaking that Haftar could secure not only the backing of Egypt but also of Russia. Without this, shifting the balance of power in Libya in his favour would be out of the question.

In this conflict situation, the EU has limited room for manoeuvre in Libya. The EU is in fact the greatest advocate of the LPA, yet its activities are focused for the most part on regulating the flow of refugees in the Central Mediterranean. This prioritisation by the EU is evident not only through its allocation of significant financial resources to migrant-related projects in Libya via the EU Emergency Trust Fund, but especially through the EU NAVFOR MED Operation Sophia, which began in June 2015. The goal of the operation is to disrupt the business model of trafficking networks and people smuggling rings in the Central Mediterranean area and, in doing so, to reduce the migration flows heading towards Europe. After the second extension until the end of 2018 and a renewal of its mandate, the operation now also includes training the Libyan coast guard, monitoring the waters to suppress illegal oil exports from the country, as well as helping to implement the UN weapons embargo in the waters off the coast of Libya.[42]

While positive results were reported pertaining to saving human lives and capturing smugglers, one current study shows that the aspired destruction of the smuggler networks' business model has not yet been achieved. Thus, in 2016, there was again a surge of 18 per cent recorded in irregular migration to Europe via the Central Mediterranean route compared to the previous year's figure; and the first six months of 2017 saw another rise of 19 per cent.[43] The second EU mission in Libya, the EU Border Assistance Mission in Libya (EUBAM), provides training and advice with the aim of increasing the capacity of the Libyan authorities to secure the borders, and developing and implementing a strategy for integrated border management in the longer term.[44] The mission is, however, severely restricted by the security situation and the limited room for manoeuvre of the GNA. With regard to migration, the southern member states, Italy in particular, feel abandoned by the rest of the EU countries. In reaction to repeated warnings of overload, in early July the EU Commission adopted an action plan to support Italy for greater solidarity in handling the refugee problem in the Central Mediterranean.[45]

Furthermore, a stronger role for the EU seems to be obstructed by discrepancies between its member countries and partially unclear strategies for supporting the peace process. Due to

Italy's key role in the migration issue, but also to the historical and commercial links between the two countries, the former colonial power is the leading actor of European diplomacy in Libya. Efforts to curtail migration flows by means of agreements with Libyan stakeholders have proven to be problematic, however. For instance, an agreement made in February 2017 between Italy and the GNA was annulled by a Libyan court. In parallel to this, Italy is conducting talks with tribes from the south of the country to try to find allies for better control of the southern border regions. The most recent meeting of al-Sarraj and Haftar under the direction of Emmanuel Macron was accordingly met with disapproval in Italy, since the country feels that its diplomatic role is at risk.[46]

> **So far, the EU has not been successful in positioning itself as a strong geopolitical actor in Libya.**
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The EU has so far been unsuccessful in positioning itself as a strong geopolitical actor in Libya. In fact, some European countries are following different goals because of their disparate priorities. This is most evident in the dealings with General Haftar. Since the start of 2016, France has supported Haftar's LNA by passing on intelligence information in the fight against Islamist factions in Benghazi.[47] Other countries, too, increasingly see Haftar as a strategic component of a political solution. This dynamic ultimately culminated in a meeting between al-Sarraj and Haftar in July 2017, initiated by Macron. The resulting agreement implies the admission that the GNA has failed and that Libya's political future is only conceivable with Haftar in a key role.

Outlook

What does Libya's future look like in the face of these manifold political, economic and social challenges as well as the latest political developments?

Despite international support, the Government of National Accord under al-Sarraj has not been able either to guarantee the country security or to build up support within the population. Instead, Haftar has consolidated his territorial control and ensured security for the people, brought oil fields under his control and consolidated his demands for legitimacy. Initially anxious to marginalise Haftar, the international community increasingly finds itself in a situation that makes his inclusion in the political process unavoidable. Haftar has won acceptance in Europe with his credo of "Stability instead of chaos" and his fight against IS.

If the plan that al-Sarraj and Haftar agreed on in July in Paris can actually be implemented in this form, the de facto failed unity government – and the two other rival governments – would be superseded by elections at the start of 2018. The demobilisation of the numerous armed factions would be carried out based on the agreed ceasefire. However, the chances of success of this agreement remain low – the potential losses for diverse groups are too great, who, in the absence of strong national structures, have appropriated territorial, economic and political control and are prepared to defend this. In addition, an agreement between the two largest warring factions, the GNA and Haftar, does not appear to be inclusive enough to serve as a point of departure for a comprehensive peace and transition process, and would once again mean the exclusion of a broad spectrum of relevant actors.

An alternative to this is a more in-depth and inclusive renegotiation of the LPA that, alongside the political process, also involves key questions surrounding the organisation of the security sector and the allocation of financial resources; and which includes all the important actors. In the context of the weakness of the UN mission in Libya, there ensues a key role for regional actors such as Tunisia and Algeria to lead such negotiations. The risk of a renewed escalation of the conflicts in Libya and the serious consequences of instability on these countries, also provide a clear incentive to take on such a role.

Dangerous passage: Currently, the instable Libya is considered to be the main transit country for refugees attempting to reach Europe via the Mediterranean. Source: © Darrin Zammit Lupi, Reuters.

At the same time, the involvement of regional and international actors in the context of political and territorial fragmentation in Libya is associated with numerous risks. In the absence of a strong central government, their support of various groups and warring factions led to significant power shifts that have contributed to further conflicts and fractionalisation, impeding the peace process as a result. Any strategy for Libya by external actors should take these risks into account if a further escalation is to be prevented and the stabilisation of Libya is to be made possible.

What Libya needs is a solution for the fragile to non-existent state monopoly on the legitimate use of force that, through the continuing instability, enables the spread of extremist factions and trafficking and smuggling networks, which destabilise the Mediterranean region beyond the borders of Libya itself. A solution of this kind can only be created through an inclusive transition process that establishes a viable power balance between Libyan actors. In order to facilitate effective support for this type of process, the approaches of international actors must be broadened beyond the current focus on migration and terrorism, and enable the construction of stronger state structures.

While Russia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt have contributed significantly to shifting

the balance of power in the favour of Haftar, the EU and its member states – too preoccupied with controlling migration flows – appear to be left without a long-term strategy regarding Libya's future. The fact is, however, that short-term policies fail to go beyond treating the symptoms. This is also true in terms of the uncontrolled migration from the Sahel to Libya. Libya must become a nation-state again. It is therefore imperative that the European states come to a consensus on the priorities, goals and partners in Libya and show greater engagement.

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