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country report

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Libya

Developments in the Shadow of Corona

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Since May 2020, the Libyan Government of National Accord (GNA), with massive help from Turkey, has succeeded in breaking the siege of Tripoli by Khalifa Haftar and his militias, supported by Russia, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates, and regaining important territories. Both sides are massing troops along the new front line near Sirte. This may either lead to new military escalation of the conflict or split up the country into spheres of interest. In order to mitigate these scenarios, a joint European approach is urgently needed. This should include sanctioning the destructive role of external actors, strengthening the United Nations' negotiating mission, supporting the revival of an internal political process in Libya and providing humanitarian aid to the country.

Changed Military Starting Position

After the failure of various international peace initiatives, the German government launched a political process in autumn 2019, bringing together at the Berlin Libya Conference the international and regional players involved in the conflict in January 2020 and committing them to end their support and comply with the international arms embargo in place since 2011. This was intended to pave the way for inner-Libyan ceasefire negotiations and reorganization of the political system and the country's economic interests based on an action plan that was also presented at the conference.

However, the Berlin agreements were not honored. In particular, Khalifa Haftar and the militias from eastern Libya led by him, operating under the name of "Libyan National Army" (LNA) and/or "Libyan Arab Armed Forces" (LAAF), as well as his international allies Russia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Egypt hoped that continuation of the fighting would help them to reach a decision in their favor in the conflict with the internationally recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) and its allied militias in the west of the country.

In spring 2020, however, the military balance in Libya changed to Haftar's disadvantage. The military offensive by Haftar's troops, which had been underway since April 2019 to capture the capital Tripoli, has failed, and the balance of

power on the battlefield shifted in favor of the GNA and its allied militias one year after the offensive had begun. The massive Turkish support with weapons (especially drones) and Syrian mercenaries played a significant role in this development. Haftar's troops, supported by the UAE, Egypt and Russia with drones, tanks, weapons, foreign mercenaries and fighter planes, have suffered substantial terrain losses since the end of May 2020 and have lost strategically important sites.

The relatively orderly withdrawal of Haftar's troops from the West suggests that certain agreements between Turkey and Russia shaped the process. In mid-August 2020 the front line is close to Sirte, a city of particular strategic and symbolic importance, and al-Jufra, further south, where Russia is said to be seeking a permanent presence at the airbase there. Overall combat operations are currently at a low level, but both sides are strengthening their military capabilities along the new front line.

Inner Libyan Attitudes and Expectations of the Population

After years of different phases of violent conflict, the Libyan population is frustrated, disillusioned and skeptical of the political actors involved - in both Western and Eastern Libya. A large part of the population is angry about the strong interference of external players in Libya and calls

for an inner-Libyan solution to the conflict. Many believe that Libya's fate has long since been out of their hands. Neither the Turkish, nor the Egyptian and Russian interference is seen as something positive. The continuous downward spiral of the economy, accelerated by the COVID pandemic, further worsens the tense mood of the population.

In this context, the increasingly influential tribes and their strong social, economic and legal role in people's everyday lives, which is based on customary law, have become increasingly important since 2011. Many of these patriarchal dependency circles now take on substitute functions on behalf of the state, provide security through local militias and regulate people's everyday lives. Without involving these influential tribal structures and their most important protagonists, an inner-Libyan reconciliation and dialogue process in post-conflict times is unlikely to be successful.

Situation in GNA-controlled areas

While the security situation in the GNA-controlled capital Tripoli in western Libya has been improving since the beginning of 2020, the economic situation is deteriorating dramatically. Although the GNA has less territorial influence than the LNA and controls only one third of the territory, two thirds of the Libyan population live under GNA administration. However, their political support seems to be increasingly dwindling in recent times. At the end of July, there were repeated demonstrations in front of Prime Minister Sarraj's office; people lamented the power cuts of up to 12-hours in the capital, rising food prices and an increasing shortage of banknotes. People deplore the rampant corruption in the country and are increasingly taking their discontent with the government to the streets. The main interest of the population is an improvement of their precarious socio-economic situation, and they reject a return to the rule of the militias.

Sarraj gave in to pressure from the demonstrators at the end of July and replaced the head of the state-owned electricity authority - he also hinted at a government reshuffle. Fathi Bashaga, a respected minister of the interior from Misrata in western Libya, who made a name for himself by his consistent action against militias in the greater Tripoli area, will probably

remain in office. According to various reports, Bashaga categorically refused to become defense minister. As Minister of the Interior he can continue to sharpen his political profile by taking action against militias, fighting corruption and presenting himself as a strong man for law and order. In general, it can be seen that important political actors want to remain in office or position themselves prominently in order to be considered when a government will be formed in potential post-conflict scenarios.

Situation in LNA-Controlled Areas

Haftar is seen as a strong man in Eastern Libya even after the recent military setbacks. However, he is more dependent than ever on external support and cooperation with important tribes. Haftar's success in winning the loyalty and support of Libyan tribes should not be underestimated - he was one of the first to proactively approach the country's tribes, and for many Libyans symbolizes the restoration of the old order. Haftar, like former ruler Gaddafi, knows how to instrumentalize the tribes for his own interests and create dependencies by distributing posts and financial concessions.

In the eastern Libyan capital Tobruk, Haftar's militias ensure security and, compared to Tripoli, probably a more orderly daily life. The duration of daily power cuts is reportedly shorter than in Western Libya, and the pronounced influence of tribal structures with clearly defined hierarchies seems to make political decisions faster and more consistent. Nevertheless, the tribes in Eastern Libya do not represent the majority of the population. Recently, Egypt has also tried to show solidarity with the tribes of Eastern Libya. The majority of the East Libyan population is currently keeping quiet for the most part - also out of fear of possible repression by the military rulers. There are also reports of expropriation.

Although the country is characterized by social rifts and the pronounced spheres of influence of tribal structures, the majority of the population longs for a peaceful settlement of the conflict. The socio-economic problems and the effects of the Corona pandemic are also determining everyday life of the people in Libya and are making the call for new elections and conflict settlement louder.

Blockade of Oil Fields and COVID-19 Aggravate Economic and Humanitarian Situation

The economic and financial starting position in resource-rich Libya is precarious. Oil exports have collapsed due to blockades of the production areas by tribes allied with Haftar. According to the National Oil Corporation, the loss of revenue between January and July 2020 has increased to around seven billion USD.

While initially the south of the country was mainly affected by confirmed COVID-19 infections, the numbers are now also increasing in Tripoli; the health authorities in the country would hardly be prepared for a massive spread of the disease. In mid-March, the GNA declared national emergency, closed numerous facilities and suspended all public meetings and events. The parallel government in eastern Libya announced almost identical prevention measures. The Tunisian-Libyan border, traditionally important for regional trade, is closed until further notice due to the CORONA pandemic.

An accurate assessment of the humanitarian situation of migrants and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the country is difficult in view of the initial security situation. Since the beginning of the fighting in Tripoli in April 2019 alone, 200,000 people have been displaced, and some 100,000 IDPs are living in the immediate vicinity of fighting, including both Libyans and migrants. The UNHCR currently counts about 907,000 "People of Concern" in Libya - including over 402,000 IDPs, nearly 450,000 returned IDPs and almost 50,000 registered refugees (as of 24 July).

Humanitarian organizations state that there are eleven official detention camps controlled by GNA, where more than 2,600 people are kept. It is estimated that another several thousands are living in camps controlled by militias, but reliable figures are not available. Human rights organizations regularly report about torture, ill-treatment and insufficient access to sanitation, food or clean water in the camps.

International Context of the Conflict in Libya

The conflict in Libya is considerably aggravated by the involvement of external players. Egypt, the UAE and Russia support Khalifa Haftar and his allies. Turkey in particular is siding with the GNA and Prime Minister Sarraj. The provision of military equipment and the influx of mercenaries and money violate the international arms embargo in place since 2011.

Egypt has a primary interest in a secure western border and in the fact that Islamist groups cannot use Libya as a place of retreat. If Haftar cannot provide this - because he is too weak to do so - or perhaps because another solution is possible, this will not be ignored in Cairo. In any case, Cairo has no interest in a continuing civil war in its neighborhood. Egypt shares this interest with Libya's other North African and Sahel neighbors. Cairo rejects any Turkish presence in Libya, and a GNA advance across the Sirte/al-Jufra line would lead to a military response by Egypt, but at least for the time being it would probably be a signal rather than a direct confrontation with the GNA or Turkish troops.

It was the military support by **Turkey** what saved the GNA from defeat against Haftar's troops and thus contributed to the military turnaround in spring 2020. In addition, the Turkish government concluded an agreement with GNA at the end of 2019, which defines the maritime borders between the two countries and from which Turkey derives a claim to natural gas-rich areas in the eastern Mediterranean. In the meantime, Egypt and Greece have also concluded a bilateral agreement and agreed to establish a common economic zone in the Eastern Mediterranean. Ankara is also pursuing economic interests in Libya itself and aims at establishing itself as a regional power in the Mediterranean region. At present, the government in Ankara is perceived as the big winner of the conflict in Libya.

The **UAE** it is less interested in Libya per se than in fighting Libyan militias and political actors who are (allegedly) close to the Muslim Brotherhood

and against whom Khalifa Haftar has taken military action. It was mainly the UAE that made Haftar strong by providing financial and military support. The growing Turkish presence means that, from Abu Dhabi's point of view, Libya has also become a scene of a geostrategic conflict with Ankara, which the UAE is also confronting in a number of other Middle Eastern states.

Russia's commitment in Libya - as well as in other conflict areas in the region - is characterized by opportunism: wherever there is an opportunity to expand Russian influence, Moscow takes advantage of it. After Syria, Libya is the second conflict zone in which Russia is becoming a decisive external actor. At the international level, Russia can thus present itself as a key player and a strong partner; in the Mediterranean region, Russia is considerably expanding its presence. Russia is reportedly planning to establish permanent military bases in Sirte and al-Jufra. In doing so, Moscow is also increasing its potential for exerting pressure on Europe's security policy.

The European Context: No Influence Without Inner-European Unity

The European role in Libya is characterized by considerable contrasts. While France, in particular, clearly positioned itself on Haftar's side, Italy supported the GNA and the Libyan coast guard. In the context of the conflict with Turkey over the exploitation of natural gas reserves in the eastern Mediterranean, Greece also took Haftar's side. Hence, the involvement of some EU members aggravated the conflict in Libya and goes against the European interest in stabilizing the European neighborhood.

The basic prerequisite for Europe to be able to play a role in Libya is the development of a unified position based on the principles of the Berlin Libya Conference and a coordinated approach towards external actors and the inner Libyan conflict parties. In creating this consensus, the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, in particular, but also Germany as initiator of the Berlin process, are called upon to play a key role.

The new IRINI monitoring mission established in April 2020 has so far proved to be hardly effective in ensuring compliance with the arms embargo in place since 2011. The limitations are illustrated by the fact that IRINI is not able to monitor land and air routes. Turkish naval vessels also prevented IRINI from inspecting a Tanzanian freighter in June this year. The mission is therefore neither balanced nor assertive. It remains to be seen whether the sanctions announced by Germany, Italy and France at the beginning of August 2020 against a number of companies and individuals who violated the UN arms embargo on Libya will have a greater impact.

Development Scenarios and Recommendations for Action

Two currently looming scenarios for Libya are either a military escalation or splitting up of the country into different spheres of interest. The military situation would escalate, if Egypt were to intervene directly in the war after a further advance of the GNA to the east. As a result, the conflict would probably become more international and could exacerbate its destabilizing effect on the entire region in North Africa and the Mediterranean.

A Turkish-Russian *rapprochement* supported by measures such as the joint working group agreed at the end of July could prevent military escalation and would freeze the conflict, at least temporarily. At first sight, this approach is reminiscent of the Astana process on Syria. However, it would not be accompanied by a political process to resolve the conflict and would encourage the division of Libya into different spheres of interest - Turkish (GNA areas) and Russian or Egyptian (LNA areas) - and a permanent division of the country.

Both scenarios are not in the interest of the Libyan population and also run counter to German and European interests. The aim of German and European policy on Libya should be to put an end to the direct and indirect interference of external actors that exacerbates the conflict. In addition, the resumption of a political dialogue process among Libyan actors is necessary to create a new basis of legitimacy. The reintroduction of a federal state character of Libya, as it existed from 1951 to 1963, could be a

possible option. Thus, the three essential provinces of Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and Fezzan would nevertheless be strengthened in their regional autonomy, while preserving the country's territorial integrity. Ultimately, however, it is up to the Libyans to decide on the political order of their country.

On the basis of the Berlin Process, the following options for action appear appropriate in order to prevent military escalation, to prevent the country from being split up into different spheres of interest and to support an inner-Libyan political process:

Strengthening the UN mission

Timely appointment of a UN Special Representative for Libya with a better resourced and better funded UN Office for Libya, in particular to prepare and monitor an intra-Libyan dialogue process.

Formulation of a uniform European position on Libya

The sometimes divergent interests or conflicting actions of European players are hampering progress towards a peaceful resolution of the conflict, thus enabling Russia and Turkey to create facts in Libya.

Consistent *naming and shaming* of breaches of the arms embargo

The enforcement of the UN arms embargo against Libya, announced by Germany, France and Italy at the beginning of August, which has been in force since 2011, should be pursued consistently, and violations of the embargo should be voiced in a way that is effective in the public eye. Europeans should in particular seek cooperation with the USA, which appears to be striving for a more active role with regard to Libya.

Support for a political restart at national and local level

Germany and Europe should point out the need for holding new elections in Libya soon. This would provide clarity about the political power relations in the country and could contribute to the legitimization of the political actors in the country. At present, primarily local and (tribal) actors are legitimized. This should be continued by involving the local level in establishing a new political system.

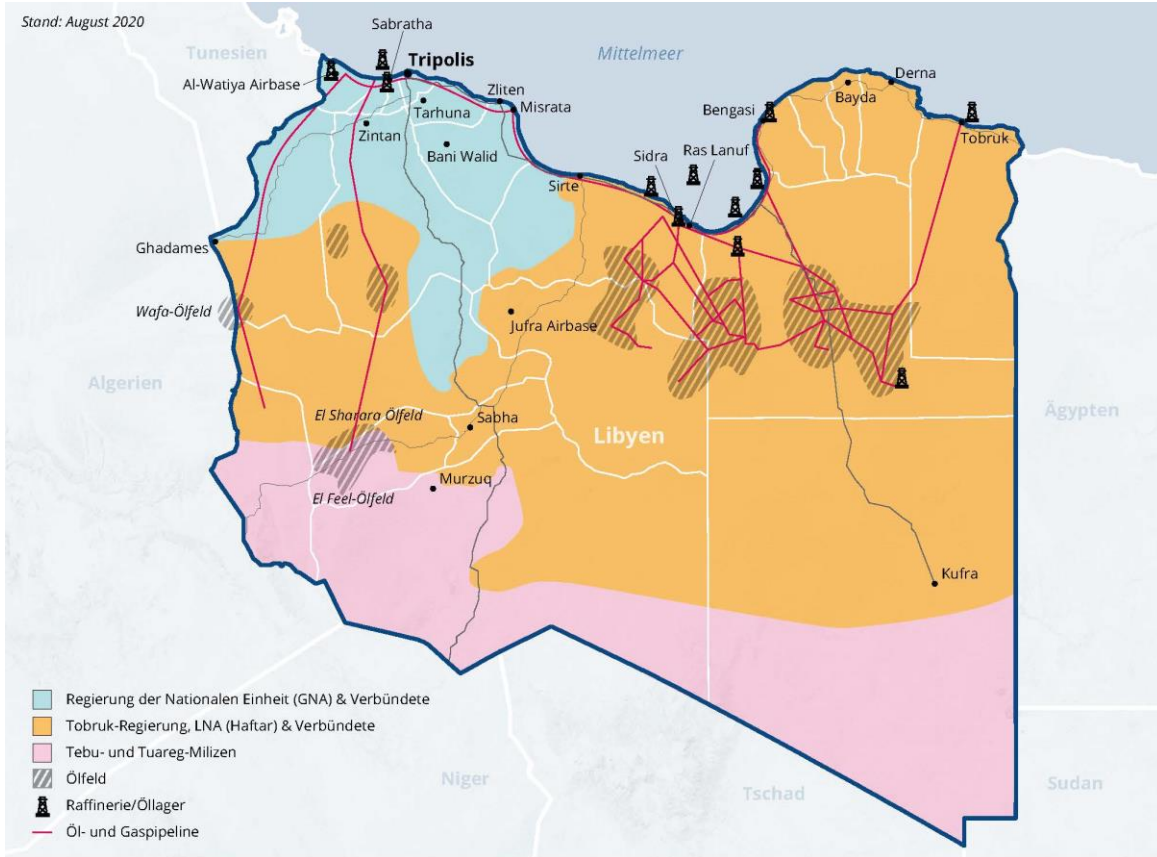
Securing a ceasefire without dividing the country

Armed conflicts along the Sirte/al-Jufra front line are currently occurring at a low level. The EU should give political support to a resumption of ceasefire negotiations in the framework of the 5+5 Committee, including an explanation of how it intends to participate operationally and together with the United Nations and the African Union in securing a ceasefire. The current front line must not, however, lead to the creation of spheres of interest or even encourage the division of the country. The political process described above must be open to all Libyans and must seek to newly establish the political system for the whole country.

Extension of humanitarian aid

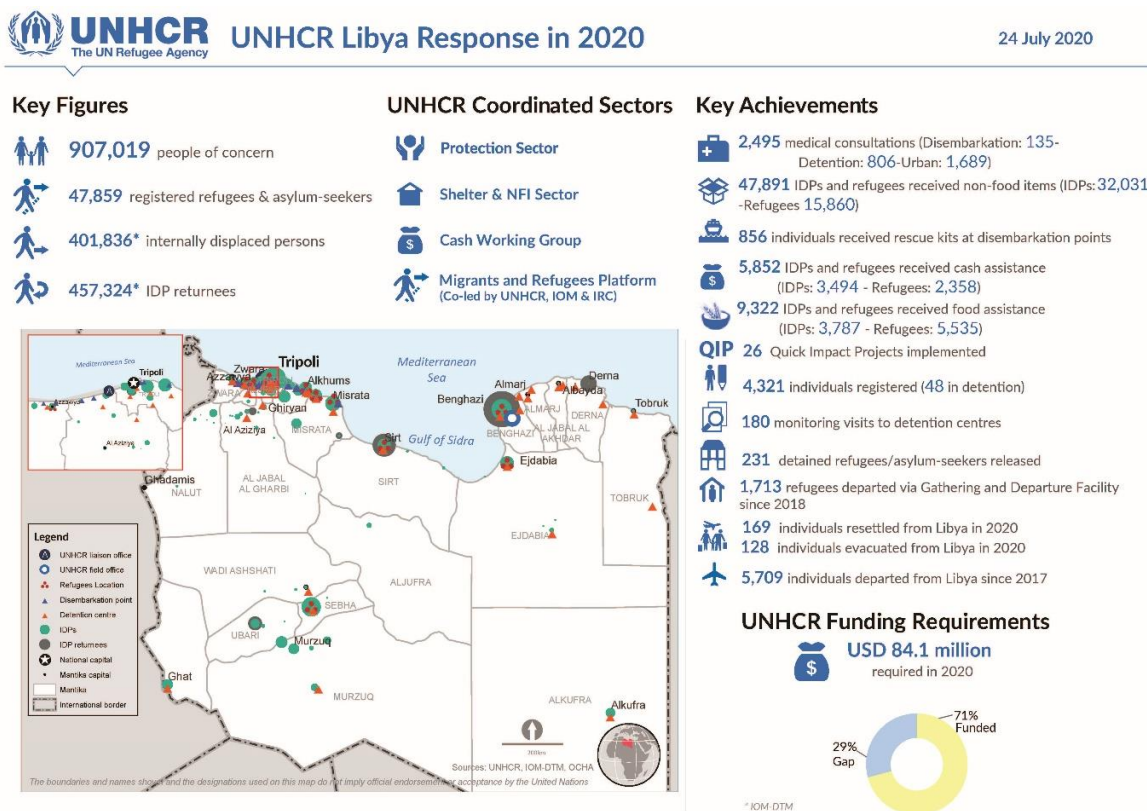
The humanitarian situation in Libya is very tense, especially in the context of the COVID 19 pandemic. Germany and the European Union should continue to coordinate and intensify their humanitarian commitment in Libya and work in particular towards the observance of human rights, the closure of informal detention centers and the fight against human trafficking and smuggling networks.

Figure 1: Conflict dynamics in Libya



Quelle: Liveuamap, Twitter, bpb

Figure 2: Humanitarian situation in Libya



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