



INSIDE LIBYA

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FOREWORD

The Regional Program Political Dialogue South Mediterranean (PoDiMed) of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) in cooperation with LIBYA DESK™ is delighted to continue our monthly reports on Libya for 2021. This format examines the most important political, economic and social developments of the previous month, which are of central importance for understanding the situation in Libya. The report is based on reliable Libyan sources and provides a summary and a contextualisation of developments in the wider Libyan context. The report is usually being published every first week of each month.

While much attention has been paid to the external and geopolitical dimensions of the situation in Libya, voices from within Libya are central to understanding local developments and the evolution of the Libyan conflict as well as its impact on the wider Mediterranean region. As an inclusive Libyan-led and Libyan-owned mediation with regards to the political, economic and military tracks are without alternative, these monthly reports emphasise the most important events within Libya and aim to give a better picture of what happens “Inside Libya”.

Based on existing KAS-PoDiMed formats such as the Libya Brief and the Libya Task Force, we consider it necessary to shed light on the dynamics within Libya and to emphasise the importance of continuing and facilitating a national dialogue process in the spirit of the UN-led Berlin process.

We hope that these monthly reports will give our readers a better picture of the dynamics of the ongoing Libyan conflict, its actors and multiple dimensions.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.** On the first anniversary of the Berlin Conference, Libya's peace process makes great strides in January with a political breakthrough and encouraging economic talks.
- 2.** As the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF) approaches a critical vote to select a new government, Libya enters a make-or-break moment where losers could turn into spoilers and endanger the political process.
- 3.** Constitutional arrangements approved by the House of Representatives (HOR) and High Council of State (HCS) are far from being unanimously accepted in Libya.
- 4.** Despite announcements of technical preparedness, there are many issues that need to be dealt with before Libya goes forward with elections at the end of 2021.
- 5.** Economic stakeholders are awaiting the appointment of the new government to put an end to years of harmful institutional split and manage current crises.
- 6.** Government of National Accord (GNA) officials continue to generate more security agencies and initiatives but offer meagre results in reforming the security sector and reining in militias.
- 7.** Between a never-ending security campaign in the east and the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum's protracted process, the Libyan National Army (LNA) is yet to take a clear stance in Libya's political process.
- 8.** Despite the lack of progress in the exit of mercenaries from Libya and low levels of confidence, the ceasefire holds for its third consecutive month.
- 9.** Libya's energy sector can hardly be insulated from political, operational and security risks as the closure of oil facilities by the Petroleum Facilities Guard demonstrates.
- 10.** The cloud of uncertainty that has enveloped Libya since last year will dissipate in February. The stakes are high and the success of UNSMIL's efforts will depend on how divisive the LPDF's result is.

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COMPETITION BETWEEN POLITICIANS IN LIBYA INTENSIFIES

As the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF) approaches a critical vote to select a new government, Libya enters a make-or-break moment where losers could turn into spoilers and endanger the political process.

On 19 January, marking the first anniversary of the Berlin Conference, the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) announced that the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF) members had finally reached an agreement on a selection mechanism to appoint the new transitional government. This step forward, breaking the deadlock that characterised the final months of 2020, was reached after a four-day meeting in Geneva of the Advisory Committee (AC). The latter, made up of 18 LPDF members, was a last-ditch effort by Acting Special Representative of the Secretary General (ASRSG) Stephanie Williams to reach an agreement on how the LPDF would nominate Libya's next government. The mechanism brought forward by the AC received a 73% approval rate by the LPDF when a threshold of only 63% was required to pass the selection mechanism.

This breakthrough was made possible because the selection mechanism introduced by the AC combines two mechanisms supported by opposing camps. The first mechanism, being the idea of an electoral college for Tripolitania, Barqa, and Fezzan, was mainly promoted by House of Representatives' (HOR) Speaker Agila Saleh as it would maximise his chances of being nominated as Presidential Council (PC) head by Barqa's electoral college. The second mechanism, which works as a fall-back option should the regions' electoral colleges fail to agree by 70% on their own candidate, is a list-based system that was favoured by Libya's political Islamists, including members of the High Council of State (HCS). Despite reassurances by Williams that UNSMIL was not supporting any candidate, the complexities of the selection mechanism were perceived by a large number of observers to benefit HOR Speaker Agila Saleh and HCS Chairman Khalid al-Mishri in sharing power within the PC, alongside Fathi Bashagha as Prime Minister.

However, no LPDF outcome is set in stone as the situation is evolving rapidly. Politicians were given a one-week window, ending on 28 January, to submit their candidacies and political dynamics are likely to be in constant flux until the last day of voting on 5 February. On January 30, [UNSMIL published the final list](#) containing 24 candidates for the Presidential Council and 21 candidates for the Prime Ministership. The nomination of Saleh as eastern Libya's preferred candidate is not yet a given as the HOR Speaker

must face several contenders from Barqa, including former General National Congress member Sharif al-Wafi and the current Libyan ambassador to Jordan, Mohammed al-Barghathi. In turn, this leaves more options for Khalifa Haftar, the Libyan National Army's (LNA) Field Marshal, to choose from and throw in his support. Equally, many in western Libya scorn at the idea of sharing power with Saleh, a politician who backed the LNA's recent war on Tripoli. One clear Tripolitanian candidate for a seat at the PC is Major General Osama al-Juwaili, a military officer from Zintan who is known for his hardline positions. Likewise, the position of Prime Minister is not yet reserved for Bashagha, who has been in an alliance of circumstance with the Muslim Brotherhood aligned Justice and Construction Party (JCP). Additionally, a number of non-Tripolitanian candidates have made themselves known over the last few days – something that could upend the informal understanding that Tripolitania would concede the PC's main seat to Barqa in order to retain the premiership.

The ultimate decision that comes out of the voting session held in Geneva between 1-5 February will be a make-or-break moment. The final result could not only be targeted by disgruntled parties, but it could also lead to a botched transitional phase whereby those nominated use their new roles to entrench themselves in power well after the 24 December vote. In fact, there have already been concerns that Prime Minister Fayez al-Sarraj might wield his current prerogatives to stay at the top of the government, but overwhelming criticism from within Libya and UNSMIL convinced him not to go forward with such attempts. A great unknown remains the LNA and how it responds to a scenario whereby no loyalist is present within the new government. So far, the LNA has only expressed general support for the LPDF and has not made its position clear as to which candidate it endorses. Fundamentally, the LPDF would have a higher likelihood of success should technocratic candidates come out on top of the nomination process. Their non-political background would underpin a caretaker government whose priority is the organisation of elections and the unification of state institutions. This way, the showdown between known politicians would be postponed until elections, when the Libyan people could finally be the arbiter of such ambitions.

THE QUESTION OF CONSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

Constitutional arrangements approved by the House of Representatives (HOR) and High Council of State (HCS) are far from being unanimously accepted in Libya.

As explained in the [fourth issue of Inside Libya](#), Libya is nearing the 60-days deadline set by the LPDF's roadmap for the HOR and HCS to agree on constitutional arrangements for upcoming elections and to reach an understanding as to who will unify Libya's main sovereign institutions. Regarding constitutional arrangements, much progress has been made by the two bodies' joint constitutional committee. The latter met in the Egyptian town of Hurghada and agreed to conduct a referendum on the draft constitution after submitting a report to UNSMIL and determining the referendum's date with the High National Elections Commission (HNEC). The committee is set to meet again in Hurghada with the HNEC's head, Emad al-Sayeh, so as to further progress towards the referendum.

Many believe that ratifying Libya's draft constitution through a referendum would fortify the electoral process by guaranteeing the full legitimacy of Libya's future government, which should ideally take office in 2022 and govern with unquestioned authority over the whole country. However, inside Libya this draft constitution is highly controversial considering the three district system and the 50% + 1 vote approval rule it sets for each district. Several voices from within the civil society and tribal structure have made their opposition known, including the Amazigh, Tebu and Tuareg who are not recognised by the draft constitution. Moreover, tying the success of the 24 December elections to the outcome of a constitutional referendum might further complicate Libya's political crisis in that a failed referendum would give credence to those who oppose the holding of elections. The HNEC itself has expressed its desire to adopt an alternative constitutional rule and forego the idea of a referendum in order to focus all resources on organising fair and democratic elections.

Regarding appointments to sovereign institutions, the situation is equally shaky regarding the adoption of the three district system. The HOR and HCS also held preliminary talks regarding such appointments in Bouznika, Morocco. The delegates present there seem to have decided to distribute the main seat of the Administrative Control Authority (ACA) and Central Bank of Libya (CBL) to Barqa, the main seat of the Supreme Judicial Court (SJC) and National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC) to the Fezzan, and the main

seat of the Audit Bureau, Attorney General, and the HNEC to Tripolitania. There again, the decision was not only met with opposition by some of the concerned institutions, such as the SJC, but also by 40 members of the HCS and 26 members of the HOR. For aforementioned institutions, concerns vary between the discriminatory impact of the regional quota and more cynical calculations as most of these institutions have been headed by the same individuals for many years. Dissenting HOR-HCS members have simply been left out of the loop by their leaders and have demanded that agreements reached in Bouznika and Hurghada be discussed in plenary sessions.

Fundamentally, the breakup of personal fiefdoms in sovereign institutions with new appointments could bring a breath of fresh air to Libya and reinforce progress made in the economic track. However, broad opposition to the regional quota rooted in the draft constitution could lead to more fragmentation between supporters of federalism and centralism. Additionally, the opposition of some HOR-HCS members to the agreements reached by Saleh and Mishri highlight the underlying tensions that exist within each institution. In fact, the agreements remain a top-down decision that could falter should the two politicians not get a seat at the PC.

THE PATH TO ELECTIONS IN LIBYA, BETWEEN OPTIMISM AND CONSTRAINTS

Despite announcements of technical preparedness, there are many issues that need to be dealt with before Libya goes forward with elections.

HNEC has declared it is 70% ready to conduct elections in December 2021. However, there remain several obstacles to the timely holding of elections. As outlined above, there are growing fears that constitutional arrangements could stall progress made toward holding elections and that the transitional government could make a soft-coup by simply overstaying in power beyond the elections' deadline. Additionally, municipal elections that took place in January give a good survey of obstacles ahead. This month, the Central Committee for Municipal Council Elections (CCMCE), falling under the Ministry of Local Government's jurisdiction, organised eight elections in Tripolitania. While the head of this committee, Salem bin Tahia, reported that the election process went smoothly, low participation rates, postponed voter registration, alleged interference by militias, and the issue of 316,000 internally displaced persons remain key hurdles.

For instance, a rerun in two polling stations of Swani bin Adam was requested due to “incorrect procedures” being implemented while the North Tripoli Court rejected the election results of Hay al-Andalus. Both cases reflect the presence, and at times interference, of armed groups inside polling stations. For municipalities such as Sabratha and Tajoura, the participation rate did not exceed 30%, which reflects a lack of awareness among voters. As a result, the CCMCE called for more awareness campaigns, particularly amongst women who usually represent just 1/5 of voters. Such campaigns are already planned by a recent agreement between the HNEC and the Libyan Media Institution (LMI), however, this partnership seems to be at risk as several civil society organisations have raised concerns about a potential conflict of interests on the grounds that Mohamed Baio, the director of LMI, also heads a political party. Moreover, funds allocated to the HNEC might not be sufficient anymore to cover its expenses due to the recent devaluation of the Libyan Dinar (LYD). This means that local bodies such as the HNEC and the CCMCE might require more financial and technical support, as well as capacity-building from the international community, so as to optimise the holding of elections. Several initiatives at the municipal level with European bodies are ongoing in that view.

Another key issue is the institutional split of the CCMCE. From 2019, there are two CCMCEs: one based in Tripoli and organising elections for Tripolitania, and one based in Benghazi to hold elections in Barqa. The more established CCMCE in Tripoli refused to assist its counterpart in Barqa, thus leading to the use of different databases and voter registration systems. A key challenge for UNSMIL will be to pressure both sides into unifying the CCMCE so as to ensure that municipal elections are applied to the same standard throughout the country. Of note, the Benghazi-based CCMCE organised three elections in January and participation rates were reportedly higher than in Tripolitania, thus reflecting varying levels of electoral awareness, enthusiasm and trust in the political system throughout Libya.

APPOINTMENT OF NEW GOVERNMENT IS KEY FOR ECONOMIC REFORMS

Economic stakeholders are awaiting the appointment of the new government to put an end to years of harmful institutional split and manage immediate crises.

Last month’s reactivation of the Central Bank of Libya (CBL)’s board of directors, as well as the aforementioned agreement on reshuffling leadership positions amongst key sovereign institutions, reflect a potential wind of

change in Libya's political economy. On 12-13 January, delegations from western and eastern Libya, including CBL board members and officials from the western and eastern Finance Ministries, met in Brega to discuss the activation of the Unified Financial Committee (UFC). Presented in [the second issue of Inside Libya](#) as the Joint Technical Committee, the UFC is a proposal that would accelerate the economic unification of the country ahead of the December 2021 elections. Unifying budgets, ensuring fair revenue distribution between regions, and supervising the CBL's operations would be the UFC's key measures to ensure that political grievances do not encroach on the economy in the future. However, to be authoritative and viable, the UFC requires the nomination of a unity government that avoids creating sore losers and guarantees political stability.

Meanwhile, pressing issues are mounting such as the rising cost of basic commodities, as well as disputes stemming from unpaid salaries and poor access to electricity. All of these files have the potential of ruining the political process by raising tensions between public and private institutions, disrupting access to utilities and provoking public unrest. For instance, the Audit Bureau has recently raised the alarm regarding electricity supply over the summer, which could plummet by 30% and leave a gaping deficit of 3.5GW — despite efforts in the last six months by the General Electric Company of Libya (GECOL) to remedy the country's dilapidated infrastructure. Residents of the southern town of Rebiana made their discontent heard this month with protests against recurrent power cuts. Equally, Libya's overstretched public sector is riddled with unpaid workers who ultimately resort to strikes and closures, as seen this month by the Petroleum Facilities Guard in Tobruk or by electricity workers in Sebha. The Economic Working Group (EWG) sponsored by UNSMIL has therefore made it clear that it would push for critical expenditures to be prioritised soon so as to avert a repetition of last year's summer protests and force majeure on oil facilities. Critical expenditures include salaries, the health sector to fight Covid-19 and other resurgent diseases, maintenance of oil facilities and capital investments for the electricity sector.

Finally, it will be crucial for the new transitional government to foster coordination and cooperation between various public and private institutions so as to avoid the chaotic crisis management lately seen with flour prices. This episode, stemming from last month's unification of the exchange rate, has pitted bakeries, the Government of National Accord (GNA), the CBL and the General Mills Company against one another to find the culprit behind the rise in flour prices with each organisation having its own explanation as to why the price of bread has shot up.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF MULTIPLYING SECURITY CAMPAIGNS IN WESTERN LIBYA

GNA officials continue to generate more security agencies and initiatives but offer meagre results in reforming the security sector and reining in militias.

In the [sixth issue of Inside Libya](#), the constant competition between Prime Minister Fayez al-Sarraj and Interior Minister Fathi Bashagha was made clear. In January, the two continued to contend with each other by multiplying security campaigns and agencies, until al-Sarraj made a faux-pas and renounced his immediate political ambitions linked to the LPDF. The faux-pas in question has been his creation of the Stability Support Apparatus, a security agency that has its own budget and which falls under the jurisdiction of the PC. Its aim is to not only protect government headquarters and official celebrations, but also implement legal decisions and participate in riot control. Ultimately, this initiative was heavily criticised as a power consolidation attempt and even led to the ASRSG to condemn the “multiplication of security agencies [...] eroding state security architecture and undermining Security Sector Reform (SSR) and Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR)” in her final communiqué. To add insult to injury, al-Sarraj appointed the leaders of the Ghnewa brigade and the Tripoli Revolutionaries Brigade (TRB) as head and deputy head of his new security agency to buy the loyalty of these militias. The backlash among Libyans led, in part, to the political forfeit of al-Sarraj.

With the LPDF vote ahead, Bashagha has doubled down on his posturing as the candidate of law and order. On 10 January, he launched “Operation Snake Hunt” to go after “outlaw groups” in Libya — essentially targeting any kind of militia not supportive of the Interior Ministry. The Minister of Defence, Salah al-Din al-Namroush, quickly disparaged the operation by making it clear that Bashagha was on his own. This lack of unity between the two ministries is not surprising as many of the “outlaw groups” Bashagha wants to pursue are closely affiliated with al-Namroush as shown earlier this month with a travel to Turkey in the company of militia leaders, including individuals wanted by the Public Prosecutor. On 17 January, Bashagha also launched the Interior Ministry’s Supreme Security Chamber with the help of the British risk management consultancy Rose Partners so as to facilitate communication within his ministry. The latter also started the first batch of the Combatants Inclusion Committee meant to integrate into its ranks 100 former militiamen.

In turn, the Ministry of Defence, the Chief of Staff and the commanders of the western and central regions decided to sign a code of honour prohibiting brigades from fighting each other. This substitute to discipline among armed groups in western Libya remains elusive as clashes between the General Security Force and Special Deterrence Force (SDF) occurred in late January in Tripoli's Hay al Andalus neighbourhood for lack of coordination between the two bodies. Moreover, despite all these security initiatives, security has not yet been established in Tripolitania as there were complaints of kidnapping and militia harassment in Sabratha, reports of revenge killings in Tarhuna, and the explosion of an ammunition warehouse in Janzur. In this thorny question of SSR/DDR, the role of Turkey will be key. In the current splintering between the MoD and MoI, Ankara is courted by both sides and does not seem to be able to bring unity to GNA ranks. Should it decide in favour of the MoD, Ankara would further entrench itself among hardliners and diminish chances of resolution to the crisis. Alternatively, should it support the MoI, there could be more avenues of cooperation with the international community as Bashagha's security initiatives have managed to garner international support. This approach would make more sense as Turkey currently seeks to renew ties with NATO partners and since it has allegedly sought to contact Agila Saleh to establish communication channels with Barqa.

THE LIBYAN NATIONAL ARMY IN LIMBO

Between a never-ending security campaign in the east and the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum's protracted process, the Libyan National Army (LNA) is yet to take a clear stance in Libya's political process.

The LPDF turned Khalifa Haftar from actor to spectator of Libya's political scene. In fact, the Field Marshal is an outsider to the politicking taking place in and around the forum. This does not mean, however, that he will not weigh on the vote's outcome as the LNA has two key demands. First, the nominees will need to comply with the UFC's raison d'être and fairly distribute oil revenues across Libya's three regions. Second, the PC Head, who will act as Supreme Commander of the unified Libyan Army, will need to use the LNA as a starting point — in accordance to the Cairo Declaration — and keep Khalifa Haftar as a Field Marshal. While the first requirement seems to be on the right path, the second is likely to serve as a breaking point to the LPDF considering that PC candidates al-Namroush, Jeweili and al-Mishri would strongly oppose this should they be nominated. As a result, Khalifa Haftar remains a key spoiler to the political process sponsored by UNSMIL and he could take another shot at influencing Libya's future through a Russian plat-

form. It is believed that Haftar met Saleh in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), while GNA Deputy Prime Minister Ahmed Maiteeq and Interim Government Foreign Minister Abdulhadi al-Hwajj met around the same time in Moscow. All these figures, deemed “patriotic” by the LNA, are people Haftar would feel comfortable with should they govern Libya.

Meanwhile in the east, Haftar’s security campaign has already run for three months with a poor track record and continual rearrangements. Altogether, the situation has been worsening with more and more killings being recorded in eastern Libya, particularly in Benghazi. The prevalence of crime in cities like Benghazi, where security authorities have been on high alert, either signifies these authorities’ growing incapacity in stopping insecurity or their involvement in the disappearance of individuals they deem problematic. [The December issue of Inside Libya](#) has highlighted the LNA’s growing difficulty in asserting its relevance and in responding to growing criticism. In January, the heads of Tobruk, Qubba and Ajdabiya’s Security Directorates as well as the commanders of the military region of Tobruk and Kufra were replaced. It remains to be seen whether these changes are meant to improve the situation by introducing able commanders willing to rein in unruly armed groups or actually the sign of internal divisions. For instance, Major General Mabrouk al Moqrid has replaced Belgasim al-Abaj as commander of Kufra’s military zone. Al-Abaj has been useful to the LNA due to his tribal networks and negotiation skills, but had also been under a probe for allegedly being too close to Gaddafists. That said, ceremonial transfers of command were conducted peacefully for these positions, thus showing officers’ respect for central authority and enduring harmony within the LNA’s security apparatus.

A STAGNANT BUT ROBUST SECURITY TRACK

Despite the lack of progress in the exit of mercenaries from Libya and low levels of confidence, the ceasefire holds for its third consecutive month.

In January, the UN-sponsored Security Working Group met twice to assess the progress made in terms of the implementation of the 23 October ceasefire agreement reached by the Joint Military Commission (JMC). Participants acknowledged that crucial steps had been taken in terms of prisoners’ exchange, travel between eastern and western Libya as well as the proposed unification of the Petroleum Facilities Guard (PFG). However, they also recognised that progress had been slow and that the ceasefire’s implementation should be accelerated, notably by prioritising the full opening of the coastal road. Indeed, while some armed groups like the Hiteen militia affiliated

to the GNA's Central Military Region accepted to withdraw from the road, others like Salah al-Badi's Somoud militia have remained in their positions. This discrepancy reflects divisions within the GNA between those accepting to reopen the road as a confidence-building measure while hardliners insist on having the LNA remove its foreign mercenaries and help in demining the area. All these points are likely to be raised by the next JMC meeting in early February so as to ensure that progress is made in withdrawing forces five kilometers away from the road and in gathering foreign mercenaries in Tripoli and Benghazi for them to be sent back to their countries by plane.

Clearly, much progress needs to be made before the spectre of another war fueled by foreign backers is removed. January was the month in which the departure of foreign mercenaries was scheduled. While the deadline has been postponed, it is now unclear whether the JMC will give itself another 90 days to remove foreign mercenaries and start categorising militias to initiate DDR campaigns, or whether the whole ceasefire process will stall, with the continued presence of foreign fighters and burgeoning of militias. So far, there have been no credible signs that either Russia or Turkey are ready to remove their fighters. There have allegedly been flights repatriating Syrian mercenaries, after a hiatus since November, but these have since been replaced by other soldiers. The continued presence of mercenaries, now without a clear goal and often with grievances related to payment arrears, continues to cause growing concerns in Libya.

LIBYA'S OIL SECTOR REMAINS VULNERABLE TO DISRUPTIONS

Libya's energy sector can hardly be insulated from political, operational and security risks as the closure of oil facilities by the Petroleum Facilities Guard demonstrates.

It is the ambition of Mustafa Sanallah, the chairman of the National Oil Corporation (NOC), to insulate Libya's oil and gas sector from politics, while simultaneously positioning himself as the most effective Libyan official in the face of the country's ongoing political and institutional deficiency. Since lifting force majeure on oil facilities in September 2020, the NOC has not only been eager to rebound output but has also successfully launched a public affairs campaign among foreign governments and companies to invest in Libya's oil sector, support its corporate governance and initiate training programmes. In January, this came in the form of a joint project with the U.S. Department of Energy to study and improve the Strategic Plan of the NOC and support corporate governance in the oil sector. Through the Corporate Social

Responsibility (CSR) funds from the NOC, its national subsidiaries and its international partners, the NOC Chairman has also been able to invest in local communities throughout the country – sometimes doing so in partnership with the United Nations Development Fund (UNDP) and other times going it alone. By taking such an active role in Libya's development and through a recent reshuffling of senior management at key oil and gas companies, Sanallah is sending a clear signal domestically that he is the kingpin of Libya's energy sector and cannot be easily replaced. However, this campaign could be caught short should the LPDF vote fail in forestalling sore losers and bringing progress to the economic track. For instance, one key issue is the allocation of budget which is crucial for maintaining Libya's deteriorating infrastructure. This month's closure of a pipeline belonging to the Waha Oil Company and leading to the temporary loss of 200,000 bpd for about ten days sums up the situation. None of the NOC's foreign partners would be ready to take on maintenance costs for pipelines or power stations should there be no political stability nor security.

Equally, despite its proposed unification and professionalisation announced in September 2020, the PFG continues to be a potential impediment to the free flow of oil, instead of being its guarantee. In early January, the eastern-based PFG prevented the crude oil tanker Olympic Fighter from docking in Tobruk's Marsa al-Hariga before giving authorities a two-week ultimatum to find a solution to their payment arrears of more than a year. The same guards repeated that action when the deadline passed and were given reassurances by UNSMIL and the GNA's Finance Ministry that their salaries would be paid shortly. Subsequently, in western Libya, PFG members of Zawiya jumped on the occasion to ask governmental recognition of their prerogatives and payment of salaries or they would close western Libya's sole refinery within a week. These disputes not only reflect the aforementioned problem of salary disputes but also reflect political undercurrents, especially for the eastern-based PFG. In fact, the LNA might have given its tacit support regarding the closure of the oil crescent's ports as a way to remind political actors that oil remains tightly woven to politics.

CONCLUSION & FORECASTS

Nearly four months after the LPDF's first round in Tunis, a vote will finally be held so as to nominate the four main figures of Libya's transitional government. This government will have until the end of the year to step up progress made on the political, economic and security tracks so as to ensure the timely and secure holding of presidential and parliamentary elections. None of this would have been possible without the short but effective mandate of ASRSG Stephanie Williams, who will leave UNSMIL at the end of the month to be replaced by Jan Kubis. Williams has shown perseverance and determination in this protracted political process. She did not shy away from pressing political elites to change their outlook and sought to include Libya's civil society as far as possible, recently holding a digital dialogue with 1,000 Libyans and planning for another digital dialogue whereby Libyans could send their questions to government candidates.

The succession at the head of UNSMIL could not have come at a more perilous time as the vote stretching from 1-5 February will be a make-or-break moment for the LPDF and Libya's wider political process. The list of 24 PC candidates and 21 Prime Minister candidates holds many influential political figures who could either spoil the process should they be defeated or could seriously anger important personalities outside the LPDF should they win a seat in government. Moreover, the fact that many influential politicians are participating as candidates runs contrary to pledges that UNSMIL claims politicians have made, not to put themselves forward for elections at the end of the preparatory period. To be sure, it is unlikely that such figures would only want to govern Libya during a transitory period of ten months without harbouring the ambition of being re-elected by Libyans come December 2021. Should the vote lead to sore losers, it will now be Jan Kubis' role to avert a complete dissolution of UNSMIL's achievements and to mediate between foreign countries so as to ensure their support for the LPDF's vote. Notwithstanding all of the above, the situation could escalate quickly in February. Albeit another offensive by the LNA is no longer a likelihood, an outcome by the LPDF which is seen as too advantageous to Turkey and the Muslim Brotherhood is likely to lead to retaliatory measures by the LNA, with oil flows being the first victim of such measures. Alternatively, a government that harbours figures supportive of the LNA's Tripoli offensive is likely to see GNA hardliners reject the LPDF in block. With this dilemma ahead, Libya would be better served by non-political candidates who would reject self-serving platforms and adopt a technocratic approach to governing – something that Libya has so far lacked.

Even if the LPDF succeeds in bringing a consensual government for all political factions, there will still be numerous obstacles on the way to the December elections. First and foremost, progress will need to be made regarding the security file with a “Libyan Army” capable of ensuring that militias do not interfere with the electoral process, especially in Libya’s largest cities. Immediate crises on the side of the economy should also be dealt with so as to avert the risk of public unrest as well as the risk of political stakes receding in the background in view of widening economic and social woes. Politically, much assistance should be given to Libya’s electoral bodies so as to organise elections to the best of their abilities, and much attention should be given to the question of constitutional arrangements.

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