



# 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. Libya being united under a single government for the first time since 2014 is a milestone raising hopes that the country could finally have a peaceful political transition after a decade of instability.
2. In March, Libya officially united under the Government of National Unity (GNU) following strong international and domestic momentum to go forward with Libya's transitional process, despite bribery allegations and spoilers' attempts.
3. The GNU's cabinet serves various interest groups but PM Abdulhamid Dabaiba avoided picking controversial figures and secured several trusted personalities to bolster his position.
4. On paper, the GNU now rules across Libya. In reality, the extent of its authority is a work-in-progress that is likely to hit stonewalls due to power dynamics on the ground.
5. There is growing concern that the political process could veer off course from the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF) roadmap and that elections scheduled for 24 December 2021 could be postponed.
6. Over the past month, armed forces throughout Libya have used the current transition as an opportunity to restructure and bolster their position.
7. The Joint Military Commission (JMC), Presidential Council, and the international community are stepping up pressure to ensure the removal of foreign troops and demilitarise the country.
8. The GNU seeks to pass a large unified budget to tackle long-lasting economic shortcomings. However, its short-term mandate raises the question of whether such ambitious policy objectives are premature.
9. Political stability is bringing back business interest for Libya, with regional and Libyan businesspeople being the first to entertain new opportunities. However, it is still too early to be optimistic.
10. In March, the rails were set for the GNU to carry out its mission successfully. However, the current show of unity in Libya is poised to be temporary and the resurgence of public spats could take stakeholders by surprise.

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## The Government of National Unity takes office

***In March, Libya officially united under the Government of National Unity (GNU) following strong international and domestic momentum to go forward with Libya's transitional process, despite bribery allegations and spoilers' attempts.***

The month of February ended on a cliffhanger with the House of Representatives (HOR) unable to give confidence to the Government of National Unity (GNU) due to internal disagreements. Eventually, a parliamentary session with a full quorum was organised from 8-10 March in Sirte, where a majority of 132 MPs gave legislative backing to the GNU. Acting Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dabaiba and his cabinet were later sworn-in on 15 March in Tobruk and a day later, in Tripoli, the Government of National Accord (GNA) handed over power to the GNU. Political unification was further cemented on 23 March in Benghazi, where the eastern-based Interim Government relayed its functions to Libya's now only government.

This series of peaceful power transitions by both western and eastern authorities is an encouraging sign for Libya, especially considering the many obstacles that could have derailed the whole process. One such obstacle was the resurfacing of vote-buying allegations against PM Abdulhamid Dabaiba in late February, which raised many questions regarding the legitimacy and transparency of the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum's (LPDF) nomination process. This situation put the international backers of the LPDF in an awkward position and represented the first major challenge for the new team at the United Nations Special Mission in Libya (UNSMIL). Considering international consultations and strong public demand for a unified government, the various UN bodies gathered that favouring expediency was better than letting bribery allegations simmer and be politicised by factions interested in remaining in power. On 16 March, the United Nations Security Council's Panel of Experts' (PoE) published its final report to counteract voices calling upon the HOR to postpone its quorum and concluded that LPDF members categorically rejected bribes. However, the details of an investigation into bribery attempts outlined in a special annex to the PoE's report were kept confidential in a clear sign that the international community does not want to risk the fragile nature of political transitions in post-2011 Libya.

There were also clear signs that status-quo politicians, prime of which GNA Prime Minister Fayez al-Sarraj, did not share popular and international excitement for the unified government and were gauging

ways to hamper the transitional process. Since the end of the Libyan National Army's (LNA) offensive on Tripoli last summer, al-Sarraj had wanted to reposition himself at the apex of Libyan politics and saw in the GNU's procedural challenges a way to continue in his position. In this view, he ordered various GNA state bodies to cease communication with the GNU until its legitimacy was indisputable, which negatively impacted coordination in a crucial transitional phase. Overall, 36 MPs refused to join the confidence vote in Sirte, including several pro-Sarraj parliamentarians, but their absence did not affect the vote's result. Instead, the kingmaker was HOR Speaker Agila Saleh, and there was a lot of effort made to ensure that he would take ownership of the vote and not act as a spoiler. For this to happen, several adjustments were made to incentivise Saleh's full backing to the GNU. For instance, Dabaiba picked Hussein al-Qatrani for the position of eastern deputy PM as he is a more balanced figure between Saleh and LNA Commander Khalifa Haftar, compared to the initial nomination of Benghazi Mayor Saqr Boujwari, who falls within Haftar's sphere of influence.

## **Libya's new cabinet enters the fold**

***The GNU's cabinet serves various interest groups but PM Abdulhamid Dabaiba avoided picking controversial figures and secured several trusted personalities to bolster his position.***

Government formation in post-conflict environments is often an arduous process that does not come to fruition on the first attempt as consensus-building is defeated by conflicting interests. Thankfully, this scenario has not happened with Libya's new cabinet as PM Abdulhamid Dabaiba did not give key ministries to figures that are from the extreme ends of the country's political spectrum. For instance, only the Health Ministry went to a personality recommended by Khalifa Haftar while the Defence Minister was kept under the PC's purview to, at least on paper, have personalities nominated by the LPDF act as the sole guardian of security in Libya and avoid controversy by legitimising a particular faction's firepower. Equally, the Justice and Construction Party (JCP), a Muslim Brotherhood associated party that had a large presence within the GNA and backed former Interior Minister Fathi Bashagha's bid in the LPDF, did not manage to secure key ministries in the GNU. This policy of excluding powerful but problematic factions has not only allowed the GNU to appear as consensual and escape political labels, but has also reinforced Dabaiba's position as it is highly unlikely that a GNU minister

will act as the mouthpiece of a powerful faction or challenge Dabaiba's authority to bolster his or her own profile. In fact, many of the new ministers are rather unknown figures with no political or social base of their own, and their appointment was made to avoid raising eyebrows amongst powerful stakeholders.

However, this does not mean that the cabinet is politically neutral. On the contrary, it was crucial for Dabaiba to appease as many MPs as possible to secure the HOR's vote of confidence and, if possible, create a transactional relationship whereby government policy could easily be ratified by the parliament. As a result, the Prime Minister had to change his government lineup twice and some of his picks ended up being his least favourite. Nonetheless, Dabaiba also managed to fortify links with long-term allies and bring along trustworthy civil servants to bolster his position and ensure a degree of efficiency for his cabinet. For instance, while he could not appoint Lamia Abu-Sidri as Foreign Minister, Dabaiba managed to get Walid al-Lafi as Minister of State for Policy and Communication. Both Abu-Sidri and al-Lafi are part of the al-Watan party and close to Islamic scholar Ali al-Sallabi, who is a long-term ally of the Dabaiba family. The PM also made sure to bring Gaddafi-era civil servants, many of whom have continued to work in public service post-2011 and could be a means of securing better governance. For instance, Minister of Economy Mohamed al-Hawajj worked as Secretary of the People's General Finance Committee as well as Executive Director of the Libyan Investment and Development Company (LIDCO) prior to the revolution and later became Sarraj's economic advisor. The Minister of Transport, Mohamed al-Shehubi, is another former colleague of Dabaiba and has taken a larger than usual role by coordinating economic affairs between ministries.

Another result of the political wrangling before the cabinet approval is its sheer size of 35 members. This not only shows that the PM has sought to onboard the support of as many factions as possible for the GNU but also that a key feature of this cabinet is regional representation. In fact, this is one of Libya's most geographically balanced cabinets with key ministries such as foreign affairs, interior, planning and finance allocated to eastern and southern Libya. While this is a positive development, the accent given to regional representation also shows that the PM is tip-toeing on a fragile balance between Libya's regions. Unfortunately, the importance given to decentralisation and local governance was not matched by that given to female representation. The latter falls short of the 30% quota present in Article 5 of the political roadmap, as the current female share in government hovers around 15% with three ministers and two ministers of state. However, Dabaiba and his aides might increase women's participation through appointing female deputy ministers in the near future.

The overall picture of this cabinet remains inconclusive. It is as much a result of power wranglings as it is a product of the PM's will. However, Dabaiba wishes to be a strong figure and might reshuffle the cabinet to reassert his position and take back the concessions he gave to get to power. The cabinet has already been given until the end of May to kick off crucial initiatives and bring tangible results on the ground. What is certain is that the PM does not have a smooth ride ahead and will need to put a lot of effort to coordinate the work of his large cabinet and dodge attempts by various stakeholders to veer the government's work toward their own interests.

## **A united government without overarching authority**

***On paper, the GNU now rules across Libya. In reality, the extent of its authority is a work in progress and is set to hit stonewalls due to power dynamics on the ground.***

Prior to this month, there were serious concerns that the GNU would not be able to replace the GNA and the eastern-based Interim Government, thus prompting Dabaiba's decree 2/2021 instructing ministers from Libya's two separate authorities to solely take on a caretaker role until the handover of power. Now that this has been accomplished, there remains a lot of uncertainty as to whether the GNU will actually be able to govern and fulfil its mission. In less than ten months, the PM will have to meet expectations in the field of improving services, unifying institutions, and dealing with the multiple crises linked to Covid-19, the banking sector and energy (fuel and electricity shortage as well as the repair of oil facilities). Equally, the Presidential Council will need to oversee the file of national reconciliation, matters of foreign policy such as bilateral agreements and the withdrawal of foreign mercenaries while strengthening its position as Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces.

Each of these objectives are extremely ambitious on their own and the experience of previous Libyan governments has shown that there is no straight path to policy. This is particularly true of the relationship between the government and other state institutions, whereby the two are locked in competition rather than cooperation. This could be interpreted as balance of power but in the Libyan case it is often a matter of state institutions being personal fiefdoms or factional strongholds. Most of the heads of such institutions know that they are on their way out and will seek to interfere in the political process to prevent this or at least minimise costs. This has already been visible in



March with the HOR stalling the approval of the 2021 budget, in part because Agila Saleh wants to counter continuing attempts by MPs to unseat him. Such a development does not bode well for the GNU's chance of governing and has already created issues between the HOR and the PM, who expected parliamentarians to unconditionally support his policy proposals and not use them as bargaining chips in their internal disputes. It also casts a shadow on the chances of the HOR, and other institutions, to fully unify. Many of these institutions have operated independently for years and developed their own systems, making it hard to consolidate them under one entity.

Even if the various institutions of the Libyan state get to work together, the PM will also have to contend with the more informal poles of power responsible for day-to-day security or lack thereof. This might still be early to assess any GNU initiative to reform military or security institutions, but the reality is that militias continue to entrench themselves with impunity in western Libya and are in some instances part of the state apparatus without any accountability. The east continues to be at the hands of the LNA which is set to maintain its own policies such as curfews or opaque investigations to tackle worsening insecurity. In a way, the accent given to decentralisation could cynically help the GNU in delegating local governance to de facto powers on the ground. This would be a dangerous development as it would impact the ability of potential candidates to freely campaign across the country before elections or genuine attempts at national reconciliation. How the GNU manages to exert its authority on non-state actors should already be measurable in April, when the Minister of Justice will unveil her committee to release prisoners detained by armed groups outside of the state's purview. It will also be important to see whether the Interior Ministry will do more than train current police and security forces under its authority to secure the elections' environment. Turning a blind eye on free-roaming militias is likely to have a negative impact on elections.

## Is Libya on the right path to elections?

***There is growing concern that the political process could veer off course from the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF) roadmap and elections scheduled for 24 December 2021 be postponed.***

The many challenges on the way of the roadmap's timely implementation have ushered in a dilemma and created a debate around the validity of objectives agreed upon by the LPDF. Of course, the majority of stakeholders are still pushing for general elections by the end of the year as they are necessary to reset Libyan politics and bring much needed legitimacy through popular will. However, stakeholders are also cognizant of the fact that the GNU's mission is over-ambitious and could fail to install a sound environment for elections on time. As a result, there are concerns that elections might be postponed or only held for the parliament, thus prolonging the GNU's mandate by up to four years. In fact, the new executive authority does not look like a transitional government considering its sheer size, the medium to long-term span of its programme, and Dabaiba himself who has already given national and international interlocutors reason to believe that the PM does not see himself as a temporary leader. This is why civil society campaigns such as the "24th December Movement" have been launched in Libya to maintain public pressure on the government while the international community increases financial and technical assistance to maintain the momentum for elections.

Concerns about the roadmap's implementation have been particularly challenging for UNSMIL as it finetunes its balancing act between the GNU, national institutions like the HOR and High Council of State (HCS), and the LPDF. Initially, the new team at UNSMIL decided to adopt a hands-off approach to allow national institutions to take care of the political process, which left LPDF members with the feeling that they were being sidelined and that their constitutional or legal committees would soon be replaced by parliamentary committees. The strategy of entrusting the political process onto national institutions has also raised questions as it would mean that this process is dependent on those who have the most to lose from it. This concern has been shared by the former Secretary General Special Representative, Ghassan Salamé, who warned that some politicians currently in office do not want to see elections through since they would lose power and patronage networks. To review this strategy, UN Envoy Jan Kubiš accepted to hold a virtual session with the LPDF on 26 March, in which he reiterated the relevance of its members and their custodianship of the political process' achievements.

Coordination between UNSMIL and the LPDF is therefore likely to recover as Kubiš encouraged the LPDF's Legal Committee to continue its work on proposals for the elections' constitutional basis. However, it is clear that article 4 paragraph 3 of the roadmap has been reinterpreted since the UN Envoy expects the HOR to have an electoral law and constitutional basis for elections ready before the 31 July deadline set by the High National Electoral Commission (HNEC). Originally, the roadmap entrusted the LPDF to take care of the issue as the HOR and HCS had already failed at this task.

## **Brewing insecurity from Tripoli to Benghazi**

***Armed forces throughout Libya see the current transition as an opportunity to clean their house and bolster their position.***

Despite the unification of state media under the Libyan News Agency (LANA), reports over the country's security situation are often mixed with disinformation campaigns peddled by private outlets. This makes it difficult to differentiate the truth from speculation as some actors seek to paint insecurity in a way that fits their own agenda. Nonetheless, there have been clear signs that clashes between armed groups are on the rise, particularly in eastern Libya, as a result of the shifting dynamics stemming from the GNU's establishment. In western Libya for instance, militias remain unhampered and have supported the GNU to accelerate the demise of their nemesis Fathi Bashagha. However, they know that the new government's pledge to rein them in will lead to intra-militia competition over who gets to be incorporated into the state and who gets to be disarmed to join civilian life. The Stability Support Apparatus recently formed by Sarraj under the Presidential Council's authority has already been the target of other militias with the kidnapping of its main commander's brother being kidnapped. In late March, a high-ranking militiaman from Misrata was killed in Tripoli in a clear sign that militias within the capital are fearing the return of Misratan armed groups following the GNU's establishment. On a more granular level, clashes between local militias have continued, with the example of Tajoura in early March, while kidnappings or mistreatment of civilians continue. The case of Abdulali al-Habouni has been particularly striking, as the young man had embarked on a journey for peace from eastern Libya before being arrested by gunmen from Zawiya who slaughtered his camel. Al-Habouni had brought together a large social media following and was accompanied by mayors of each town he passed by, but this did not prevent him from falling into the wrong hands.

In March, Benghazi became the centre of media attention and social discontent after bullet-riddled corpses were found and PM Dabaiba called on his Interior Minister Khaled Mazen to conduct an investigation. It remains to be seen whether he will manage to do so in LNA territory but the precarious situation has led the Benghazi Joint Security Room to adopt stricter security rules and some LNA commanders are hoping to turn the city's growing insecurity into an opportunity to purge their problematic affiliates. This is what might have happened to Special Saiqa Forces' Commander Mahmoud al-Wirfali, who was assassinated in broad daylight on 24 March. Albeit loyal to Haftar and a crucial actor in the 2014 Dignity Operation against extremists, al-Wirfali was known to have clashed with LNA officers and had become a henchman for the city's unscrupulous elite. His assassination was blamed on an unspecified "enemy" by the LNA, which sent de-escalatory statements in conjunction with Saiqa leadership and arrested unlikely culprits, including the daughter of Hanan al-Barassi since her tribe criticised al-Wirfali's actions. Hanan al-Barassi, a lawyer and activist who spoke out against corruption in the LNA and affiliated groups, had also been assassinated in Benghazi in late 2020 by unidentified gunmen. What might have been a cover-up did not prevent Saiqa fighters from killing a member of the LNA's Internal Security Apparatus. Importantly, growing insecurity in eastern Libya begs the question of whether it is time for Khalifa Haftar to exit the scene. However, the March meeting between him and the UN Envoy demonstrates the dilemma the international community is facing as there are signs that removing Haftar could do more harm than good to the security situation in the region. Overall, developments in the east can be read as a mixture of outrage against growing insecurity, internal purges, as well as political opportunism with some factions seeking to sideline the LNA to become the GNU's prime interlocutor. It is likely that the LNA Commander will seek to regain the security credentials upon which his domestic legitimacy rests by pushing through a reset in his ranks. This would not be surprising as different groups are seeking to restructure and bolster their position throughout Libya during this transitional period.

## **The Joint Military Commission pushes for roadmap implementation**

***The Joint Military Commission (JMC), Presidential Council, and the international community are stepping up pressure to ensure the removal of foreign troops and demilitarise the country.***

This month has seen positive developments in the military field, particularly by the Joint Military Commission's (JMC) subcommittee for demining the military zone around Sirte. From late February to mid-March, about five tonnes of war remnants were exploded. Although the process took much longer than expected, the coastal road linking western and eastern Libya should be open very soon. The JMC is also set to send a request for the UN Security Council to adopt a resolution on the removal of mercenaries, while members of the Security Council such as France are looking to adopt a resolution to deploy an effective and reliable mechanism for the monitoring of the ceasefire's implementation in Libya. There is already an advance team from the UN since early March and it has participated in the eighth meeting of the JMC alongside the Libyan PM and the three members of the Presidential Council. Countries such as France, Italy, Germany and the United States have raised their voice on the need for foreign mercenaries to leave the country, and the European Union (EU) has extended the mandate of its arms blockade monitoring mission called IRINI until March 2023.

There remains however a lot of uncertainty as to whether foreign mercenaries will leave despite the current window of opportunity. The case of Turkey has lately been more promising considering its diplomatic outreach to countries like Egypt. Ankara wants to be a step ahead and secure an agreement with the new Libyan executive authority to maintain an official military presence while removing the bulk of its Syrian mercenaries from Libya. Recent actions such as the LNA publicly allowing Turkish ships to dock in eastern Libya and Mohamed al-Menfi's request for Turkey to remove troops are meant to secure enough Turkish goodwill but it remains to be seen whether Ankara deems the situation stable enough to take the first step. When it comes to Russia, there still seems to be a debate as to whether the Kremlin should show goodwill or maintain its covert presence for good measure. The majority of foreign fighters backing the LNA do not have

a direct link to their home state, and the latter are likely to use this excuse as a way to prolong their presence in Libya or evade responsibility. For now, just a few Darfuri fighters seem to have gone back to Sudan while the rest of pro LNA foreign fighters have shown no sign of movement, except that a few exited Sirte prior to the HOR's confidence vote, before returning to their earlier positions a few days after it.

## Developing Libya with a unified budget

***The GNU seeks to pass a large unified budget to tackle long-lasting economic shortcomings. However, its short-term mandate raises the question of whether this is premature.***

Cognizant of its predecessors' shortcomings, the GNU has been quick to present policy proposals in a bid to appear efficient and willing to tackle people's problems. The government's top priority is accelerating the delivery of vaccines, repairing as much electricity infrastructure before the summer, and supporting Libyans' livelihoods to counter the inflationary pressures of the Libyan Dinar's (LYD) devaluation. The PM has on many occasions criticised the GNA's management of the pandemic and closed all the Covid-19 committees created by al-Sarraj, before pledging to bring vaccines as soon as possible. The General Electricity Company of Libya (GECOL) has warned the GNU that a failure to regain 1.5GW could still lead to 5 hours of rolling shortages this summer, thus prompting the government to allocate the largest share of its budget's development portfolio to repairing electricity infrastructure. The GNU has also pledged to increase salaries and pensions, reinstate the family allowance, as well as consider reforming the fuel subsidy scheme to tackle smuggling and save money for more cash grants. The Economy Ministry is also considering ways of ensuring the availability of basic goods at affordable cost, including with wheat subsidies.

These ambitious goals are reflected in the 2021 draft budget submitted by the PM to the HOR. Valued at 96bn LYD (€18bn), this is Libya's largest budget in recent years, with a little less than one fourth of it (€4.1bn) dedicated to development projects — including the repair of oil and electricity infrastructure. In fact, the government expects (€16.7bn) of oil revenues this year and the National Oil Corporation has already transferred about (€3.2bn) from its Libyan Foreign Bank's account. However, the sheer size of the budget has also raised questions whether the GNU was focused enough on its short-term mission or already embarked

itself on medium to long-term projects that it is not likely to see through and will not be continued by Libya's next government. In fact, recent statements about the need to rehabilitate all of Libya's airports or restart stalled projects raise concerns that the GNU will disperse itself with too many priorities. The large budget, which still needs approval from the HOR where Agila Saleh stalls the process and first wants the heads of seven state institutions like the Central Bank replaced, also raises questions as to whether more available funds will not engender more corruption without transparent procurement channels. The Audit Bureau's recently published 2019 report has shown the many irregularities present in the ever growing GNA budget.

## **Promising signs for Libya's business environment**

***Political stability is bringing back business interest for Libya, with regional and Libyan businesspeople being the first to entertain new opportunities. However, it is still too early to be optimistic.***

The political progress and stability of the last few months has given a sense to the business community that Libya's risk ratings are poised to drop and that they should position themselves quickly in the market to reap the benefits of Libya's economic recovery and reconstruction contracts. The Libyan business diaspora is now more regularly in Tripoli and the new Economy Minister has made sure to stress that Public-Private Partnerships will be actively chased to fulfil his government's economic objectives. Neighbours such as Tunisia and Egypt have also inked Memoranda of Understanding to activate joint investments and trade with Libya, while other countries like Germany and the United States are showing greater investment appetite and hope to strengthen the political process through economic engagement. Others like Malta and France have spearheaded their comeback to Libya by reopening their embassies in Tripoli, after several years of absence due to insecurity.

As much as there are opportunities ahead, foreign stakeholders also rush to Libya to build a rapport with the new executive authority. Many of the former contracts with the GNA have been put on hold and will need to be renegotiated, while some groups such as the National Human Rights Commission are pushing the government to scrap bilateral agreements such as the MoUs on illegal migration with Italy and Malta. This means that the situation is still in flux and that even if the GNU has an undeniably pro-business stance, it is still early to say that the country is stable enough for long-term business plans. In fact, political stability should not be by spoilers.

## CONCLUSION & FORECASTS

In spite of many challenges and doubt, the UNSMIL-backed and Libyan-led political process has ushered in Libya having one single executive authority after six years of division. This transition has been made possible by a rare show of international unity stemming from the Berlin Process as well as popular will for change in Libya. There is now a clear path for the GNU to cross in order to close this transitional chapter and hold the end of year general elections which could upend the political realities that Libya has faced since 2012. However, this does not mean that the country has stabilised, nor that spoilers have all been sidelined. The GNU is only starting its journey, and there are already signs such as the stalling of the budget approval that show it can hardly count on Libya's many formal and informal poles of power to support its mission, let alone unify to create a strong state with overarching authority.

Whether the international community and local stakeholders will act to support the GNU through its mission and hold it accountable will be crucial for the success of the political process. The strategy to do so is not yet clear and much coordination at the international level still needs to be done so as to create a united front and constructively engage with the states backing foreign mercenaries in Libya. The visit on 25 March by the German, French and Italian foreign ministers to Tripoli is a positive development toward creating such a front, but it will require further effort, principally from Germany, to safeguard intra-EU unity and coordinate policy with the United States. How UNSMIL and the LPDF members can work together to manage the GNU's relation with national institutions is also still a work in progress, but it has become clear that a more hands-on approach will be necessary to nudge national institutions to fulfil their duties instead of pursuing their own self-interest. This is why we might see some course-correction over the next few weeks and months, as there is little time for Libya to accomplish the necessary steps leading to the general elections.

Caution should also be exercised as insecurity is still brewing across the country and the GNU has little tools at its hands to deal with such a situation. Militias in western Libya might have tacitly welcomed the change in government but they adopt a step-by-step approach and might soon oppose the new executive authority. In eastern Libya, where the GNU's reach is still uncertain, insecurity is at such a high level that many within the LNA General Command are pushing for a hard reset that could lead to even more chaos before the situation is stabilised. The GNU's approach to government should also be scrutinised as there are some signs that its



programme is that of a full-blown government rather than a temporary one. The Prime Minister, Abdulhamid Dabaiba, has already shown that he is an adept navigator of Libya's political culture and that he draws from decades of experience from both the Gaddafi-era and the post-revolutionary period where personal relationships and populist rhetoric have been the preferred governance tools. Policies such as the gifting of 100m LYD (€18m) to 200,000 families for Ramadan are likely to increase his popularity over time and be followed by other political and social manoeuvres to bolster his position. As a result of Dabaiba's political savviness, the GNU has the potential to be much more than its predecessors and gain the support of Libyans. However, maintaining past methods of government will hardly be conducive to in-depth political reform that can strengthen good governance and democratic culture.

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