

# INSIDE LIBYA

November 2020

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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 present our third monthly report on Libya. This new 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 contextualization of developments in the wider Libyan context. The report is 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 political resolution to the year-long conflict is needed, these monthly reports emphasize 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 emphasize the importance of 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.** Despite the official start of the UN-mediated Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF), the forum lacks domestic legitimacy and is facing threats from spoilers.
- 2.** Positive developments this month have revolved around the security track, with the signing of a permanent ceasefire between the Government of National Accord (GNA) and the Libyan National Army (LNA) on October 23, and the economic track, with discussions on a possible unified budget.
- 3.** Libyan oil output increased seven-fold in October and is on the way to reaching 1 million bpd by December. The prolongation of this oil revival is however tied to the success of the economic track and the risk of a new blockade still remains.
- 4.** Resulting from the revival of Libya's energy industry, the country's electricity sector has managed to decrease the power generation deficit in both eastern and western Libya.
- 5.** With low oil prices and a global pandemic, Libya is a long way from any budget surplus or improving the state of its banking system, even if oil exports increase and the country reopens air and land transport.
- 6.** October has seen a vast campaign of arrests on corruption charges in the west of the country, continuing trends outlined.
- 7.** In this transitional period, both eastern and western authorities have had to resort to action against rising criminality. Yet, armed groups are proving to be unyielding.
- 8.** Despite important milestones, deep-seated domestic grievances and continued interference by foreign actors risk harming the path to peace.
- 9.** Libya's political landscape remains highly fragmented. The atmosphere of political opportunism surrounding the UN's political track has exacerbated the process of atomisation.
- 10.** The chances of the LPDF leading to a breakthrough are slim, despite it being the only legitimate international effort currently on the table. The likelihood of a parallel political track sponsored by Russia, or the resumption of war under different alliances is increasing.

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## MILITARY AND ECONOMIC TRACKS GUIDE LIBYA TOWARD PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT

*Positive developments this month have revolved around the security track, with the signing of a permanent ceasefire on October 23, and the economic track, with discussions on a possible unified budget.*

The key milestone this month has been the signing of a permanent ceasefire between Libya's rival parties on October 23 following the fourth round of talks of the 5+5 Joint Military Commission (JMC) in Geneva. Heralded by the successful military talks in the Egyptian town of Hurghada last month, the ceasefire agreement signed in October demonstrates the effectiveness of military personnel in achieving tangible results through their focus on technical issues during negotiations, instead of power-sharing dynamics. Now ratified by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), this ceasefire has the potential of acting as an independent foundation for Security Sector Reform (SSR) and Demobilisation, Disarmament and Reintegration (DDR) of armed groups. It also sets the stage for state- and nation-building processes that may lead to national reconciliation if appropriately leveraged by Libyan actors and supported by the international community. In Geneva, the JMC agreed to freeze the implementation of military agreements until a unified government has been put in place. The Libyan representatives also agreed to work towards dismantling militias and securing the departure of foreign mercenaries within 90 days.

The ceasefire agreement is also a good example of how a bilateral initiative between Libya and Egypt was able to converge into the security track sponsored by the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), which runs alongside the parallel economic and political tracks that were created following the Berlin Conference in January 2020. While the ceasefire was preceded by many rumours of incoming attacks from both sides, and therefore remains fragile, it demonstrates a rapprochement between the GNA's top military brass — headed by Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, Mohamed Ali al-Haddad — and the LNA. However, it is important to note that this rapprochement has also coincided with growing divisions between the GNA's military brass and armed groups in western Libya. The two sides have already agreed to meet between November 2-4 in the northwestern city of Ghadames to discuss the implementation of the ceasefire. This includes monitoring and verification mechanisms, as well as the establishment of sub-committees to fast-forward security and intelligence cooperation and the release of military detainees. As we examine below, if it were not for the serious risks posed by spoilers, this ceasefire agreement would strongly va-

validate comments from various domestic and international actors that Libya's transitional period is reaching an end and that a comprehensive political agreement is within reach.

On the economy's side, Deputy Prime Minister Ahmed Maiteeq has continued to seek solutions to build on the relative success of the agreement to reopen Libyan oil assets struck with Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar in September. Over the past month, Maiteeq has tried to connect officials from the Government of National Accord (GNA) and the eastern-based Interim Government in order to pursue the resumption of an economic reform programme, with the imperative of unifying the country's financial institutions. While September saw the first direct financial consultations since 2015 between the GNA and the Interim Government, October saw discussions around the budget and ways to unify it. While no major breakthrough has been announced, both sides have agreed to pursue discussions through technical work committees. The GNA has already prepared a draft budget and proposed reforms that mainly tackle the issue of public sector salaries and identify ways to unify finances with eastern Libyan authorities, as well as enhancing the efficiency of the Ministry of Finance. Among other proposals, potential reforms include the restructuring of the Finance Ministry through the establishment of a media office and a spending cuts unit, as well as the audit of state accounts since 2008 – a key demand put forward by the Central Bank of Libya (CBL). While successfully identifying key areas of improvement for state finances, such discussions still remain non-binding. Indeed, fiscal and economic reforms have a poor track-record in Libya.

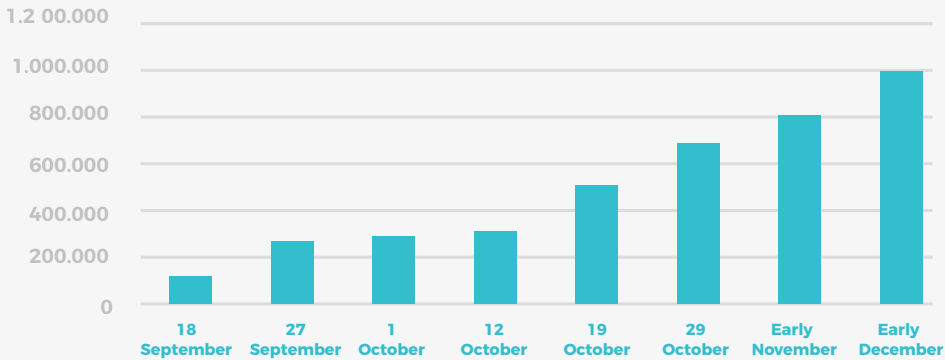
## **LIBYA'S OIL INDUSTRY SEES REMARKABLE JUMP IN OUTPUT**

*Libyan oil output has increased seven-fold and is on the way to reaching 1 million bpd in a month. The prolongation of this oil revival is however tied to the success of the economic track and still runs the risk of a new blockade.*

Since the end of the blockade on Libyan oil assets was announced on September 18, Libya's oil output has exceeded many expectations. Indeed, output increased sevenfold as the National Oil Corporation (NOC) gradually lifted force majeure on all major oil fields and ports. Nearing 700,000bpd, Libyan oil production at the end of October no longer saw any political obstacles to an additional ramp-up with the reopening of the Sidra and Ras Lanuf ports. With this action, Libya's prolific Sirte basin fields have recovered their key export and storage outlets, and the Waha Oil Company is poised to

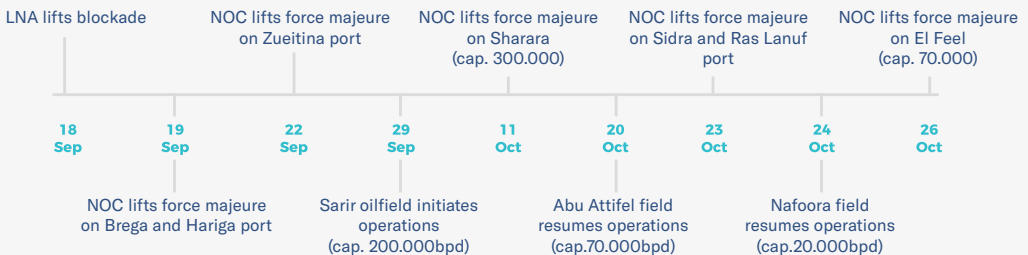
deliver 300,000bpd of additional output over a month's time. Now aiming for 1 million bpd in December, the quick rebirth of Libya's oil industry has also rekindled interest in drawing foreign oil workers. The GNA's Ministry of Labour has contacted several embassies to discuss such matters. After nine months of blockade, Libya had around 24 million barrels in storage, mainly situated in eastern ports. From early September, when a few tankers managed to onboard oil even before the blockade's lifting, to the end of October, more than 21 million barrels have been exported to both European and Asian markets. Despite the oil glut, Libya is managing to find more and more buyers, doubling its average monthly exports to 370,000bpd in October. China's Sinopec continues to be Libya's primary oil charterer with 7 million barrels bought over the period, followed by France's Total (2.7 million barrels) and Italy's Saras (1.8 million barrels).

### LIBYAN OIL OUTPUT (bpd) END 2020



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### RESUMPTION OF LIBYAN OIL ACTIVITY



Nonetheless, Libya's path to recovering its near 1 million bpd of monthly exports from 2019 is still rife with uncertainty. NOC seems to have lifted force majeure based on little more than informal or verbal agreements with the Petroleum Facilities Guard (PFG) and its desire not to be perceived as an obstruction to Libya's economic recovery. While the permanent ceasefire signed on October 23 makes note of restructuring the PFG, the fact remains that there is no immediate formal agreement to guard the future of Libya's oil assets. The NOC might have demonstrated its ability to quickly revive the oil industry, but it is not immune from the risk of another blockade should the economic track fail to satisfy Khalifa Haftar's key demands. The continuation of the grace period for Libya's oil industry is linked to talks on reaching a unified budget that would guarantee a transparent distribution of oil revenues between western, eastern and southern Libya. As long as this remains a possibility, Haftar may maintain the blockade's lifting – even if his deadline has already passed.

## **ELECTRICITY FILE SEES NOTABLE IMPROVEMENTS**

*Resulting from the revival of Libya's energy industry, the country's electricity sector has managed to decrease the power generation deficit in both eastern and western Libya.*

Similarly to the oil file, Libya's electricity sector has shown significant signs of improvement as political obstacles to power generation abate. Although the situation remains far from ideal, the electricity sector is in a notably better state compared to September when the country was rocked by protests over electricity, water and fuel shortages.

In western Libya, the General Electricity Company of Libya (GECOL) has been hard-pressed to answer civil society and mayors' calls to review the electricity crisis following a catastrophic month of September. This pressure has been channelled through the Audit Bureau, which keeps GECOL under tight scrutiny as the company is accused of having spent 1.6bn LYD (€~1bn) in 2019, with nothing to show for. As a result, experts from Algeria's Sonelgaz, Germany's Siemens and America's General Electric have been contracted to carry out maintenance work on several power stations and transmission lines. Key successes have been the linking of a new turbine from Khums' emergency power station to the public electricity grid as well as the resumption of Zawiyah's refinery units to tackle fuel shortages. The Office of the Public Prosecutor has also been busy taking several municipal and utilities officials to court for obstructing GECOL's fair load-shedding scheme.



In eastern Libya, the resumption of operations at Tobruk's refinery and the gas fields in the Sirte basin have had a positive impact on electricity and fuel shortages, thus reflecting eastern-based Prime Minister Abdullah Al Thani's pledge to solve the electricity crisis by the end of October. Per the General Authority for Electricity and Renewable Energy (GAERE), the eastern electricity grid's deficit had already dropped from 1GW to just 250MW by early October. Siemens technicians have also been busy maintaining production units in power stations such as Sarir, North Benghazi and Zueitina, while GAERE devised an emergency plan for the winter that bets on improvements in transmission lines as well as Derna's power station.

## **WHY LIBYA'S ECONOMY IS NOT OUT OF THE WOODS YET**

*With low oil prices and a global pandemic, Libya is a long way from any budget surplus or improving the state of its banking system, even if oil exports increase and the country reopens air and land transport.*

Despite the revitalisation of the country's oil sector and intra-Libyan financial consultations, the Governor of the Central Bank of Libya (CBL), Sadiq al-Kabir, has made it clear that the economic situation is not improving during an address to the House of Representatives' (HOR) Tripoli branch in early October. The CBL Governor stressed that, given current low oil prices, Libya would need to produce 1.7 million bpd — a level not reached since the ouster of Gaddafi — to balance the budget. Addressing acquiescent MPs, the stage was left for him to lambaste the spending and debt of both the GNA and Interim Government, accusing Tripoli of systematically exhausting foreign reserves and failing to overhaul Libya's problematic levels of public employment and subsidies. For instance, the CBL Governor argued that, out of the 181bn LYD spent by the GNA between 2016 and 2020, 160bn LYD (€~100bn) went to pay salaries, subsidies and operational costs.

While the CBL's conservative monetary stance is justified considering risks linked to rising debt and depleted reserves, it has obvious consequences — notably on cash-strapped commercial banks. This policy has drawn widespread criticism, notably from the GNA Minister of Finance and Acting Minister of Economy, Faraj Boumtari. The latter has described the banking sector to be in a state of "complete paralysis" as the CBL imposes strict Forex controls and hardly grants loans to support the private sector and commercial banks. Al-Kabir has been accused of suspending bank clearing instruments for the Libya Commerce and Development Bank, rejecting an

allocation of 1bn LYD (€630mn) from the Finance Ministry to municipalities in southern Libya. The CBL Governor has admitted to having recently denied over 642,000 bank cheques worth 24bn LYD (€15.1bn) due to low liquidity levels. However, the longer the blockade is lifted, the more scrutiny will rise over the CBL as it will be harder to blame low liquidity levels on a lack of oil revenue. As discussed in [last month's edition of "Inside Libya"](#), the extent of the CBL Governor's power is increasingly on the line as Libyans reconsider their economic and financial settings. Under preliminary institutional arrangements reached during the Bouznika talks, both the HOR and High Council of State (HCS) would work to appoint new personnel for the CBL and ensure a balance of power between the Governor and the board of members, which is clearly lacking today.

On another note, the permanent ceasefire achieved this month has led to the reopening of air and land borders, with Libyan Airways and Afriqiyah Airways announcing renewed domestic and international flights to nearby destinations. In the west of the country, persisting protests on both sides of the border with Tunisia also led authorities to reopen the Ras Jedir border crossing, an important transit point for trade with Tunisia (both licit and illicit).

## **WESTERN LIBYA SEES CONTINUATION OF ANTI-CORRUPTION SWOOP**

*October saw a vast campaign of arrests on corruption charges continue in the west of the country.*

Over the past year, charges of corruption, abuse of power or waste of public funds have piled up without the Attorney General doing much for fear of ripple effects on the stability of the GNA and its wider coalition. However, since protests erupted throughout Libya over this summer, there has been renewed interest in tackling corruption. The month of October was no exception to this rule, with the arrest of several mid-level officials from municipalities, specialised and commercial banks, the CBL, GECOL, Afriqiyah Airways as well as the Ministries of Finance, Interior, Health, Education and Local Government. This anti-corruption swoop has been facilitated by the financial disclosure declaration of GNA Prime Minister Fayez al-Sarraj and has become a wave that many politicians, among whom Interior Minister Fathi Bashagha, have surfed on to gain legitimacy. Indeed, the latter recently discussed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the American investigative, compliance, and cyber defense services firm K2 Intelligence to develop a department within the Interior Ministry aimed at tackling money laundering and terrorism financing.

Much criticism has been raised inside Libya as to who is targeted by the anti-corruption campaign, as senior officials have so far kept clear of any formal accusations. The intensification of the anti-corruption campaign also begs the question of its usefulness at such a transitional period, when everything is subject to change. Supervisory institutions have themselves overstepped their mandate or targeted their counterparts, as is the case with the Military Prosecution Office. The latter has notably arrested non-military personnel within the GNA Ministry of Finance's Committee for the Rationalisation of Salaries, and has also arrested Noman al-Sheikh, the Head of the National Anti-Corruption Commission, for having allegedly concealed documents concerning the case of financial abuse related to Covid-19 aid within the Military Medicine Service.

## **RESUMPTION OF POLITICAL DIALOGUE INTENSIFIES BELLIGERENCE AMONGST ARMED GROUPS**

*In this transitional period, both eastern and western authorities have had to resort to action against rising criminality. Yet, armed groups are proving to be unyielding.*

The permanent ceasefire signed in late October reflects imperatives found on each side of Libya's political spectrum as elements within the GNA and the LNA are adamant to make progress on the SSR and DDR files. In eastern Libya, October started with the Interim Government's Interior Minister giving a one-month deadline to security directorates under its control to carry out a large scale crackdown on criminal activity. This appeal was generally followed by the LNA, which carried out an air campaign against organised crime and extremist activity in southern Libya and accepted to confront a number of unruly armed groups, many of whom are hardline supporters of the LNA itself. [Last month's "Inside Libya" publication](#) outlines the stakes presenting themselves to Khalifa Haftar with respect to the actions of armed groups in eastern Libya, as the Field Marshal must crackdown on unruly elements and expropriators of private property in order to maintain his claim to domestic legitimacy, which rests upon the LNA's ability to provide security to the region.

In western Libya, the most high-profile arrest made by the GNA was executed by the Ministry of Interior against Abdel Rahman al-Milad, aka "al-Bidja", a notorious human trafficker who has not shied away from confronting politicians in the past. This arrest has not only highlighted the desire of some GNA officials to crackdown on militias and organised crime, but also

demonstrated the difficulty of enforcing such tasks within a coalition that is still reliant on armed groups for military backing. Indeed, this month forces from Zawiya, al-Milad's home town, quickly menaced the Interior Ministry and put pressure on Deputy Prime Minister Ahmed Maiteeq and Defense Minister Salah al-Namroush to release him. Moreover, reflecting divisions within the GNA coalition and the brazen attitude of armed groups, the Head of the GNA's Media Office, Mohammed Baaio, was kidnapped and arbitrarily detained by the Tripoli Revolutionaries Brigade (TRB). Although the unilateral action was condemned by senior GNA officials, it was supported by GNA hardliners such as the Libyan Organisation of Martyrs and the Commander of the Western Operations Room, Major General Osama al-Juweili. In the eyes of hardliners, Baaio is a counter-revolutionary, not only due to his Gaddafi-era background but also because of his initiative to tone down war rhetoric in the GNA's official media channel in order to focus on a more reconciliatory tone — especially when addressing controversial figures such as Khalifa Haftar.

Such actions are to be expected in this transitional period as armed groups deliver the message that they cannot be sidelined and that they will not support initiatives involving the LNA. This includes the LPDF or the implementation of key tenets from the ceasefire. Nevertheless, this does not mean that armed groups are unified or that they can be summarised in a coherent bloc. Indeed, clashes have continued throughout October with targeted killings between rival groups — noticeably that of Abdel Moneim Mohammed Al Ghwail in Zawiya, who is the brother of the Rokina Martyrs Brigade's Commander. Civilians and migrants continue to be in the line of fire, with kidnappings targeting businessmen or migrants either working in the country or seeking to find refuge in Europe. Most notably, Libya's civil society was shocked by the horrific killing of a Nigerian worker at the hands of militiamen who burned him alive in Tripoli's Tajoura district.

## **POLITICAL AND MILITARY ACHIEVEMENTS AT RISK FROM SPOILERS**

*Despite important milestones, deep-seated domestic grievances and continued interference by foreign actors risk harming the path to peace.*

The political and security progress achieved so far is at risk of deep-seated grievances held in both western and eastern Libya. One key grievance is that of the LNA's assault on Tripoli and the issue of post-conflict justice. Mainly held by GNA hardliners, this is an important thread binding the Justice and

Construction Party (JCP), the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), Mufti Al Ghariani, as well as powerful Misratan figures like Sheikh Ibrahim bin Ghashir, Tripoli's Protection Force, and most importantly the Sirte and Jufra Operations Room's Commanders. Such military figures are linked to militias and have adopted a different tone from the GNA participants of the 5+5 JMC, as they categorically reject dealing with Khalifa Haftar and want him tried. These figures include Commander of the Western Operations Room Major General Osama al-Juweili, who is from Zintan, the GNA's Minister of Defence Salah al-Namroush from Zawiya and Misrata's strongman Ibrahim Bayt il-Mal.

The key other grievance is held by eastern actors and revolves around the position of power enjoyed by Turkey and some Muslim Brotherhood members in western Libya. Recent statements made by Defense Minister Salah al-Namroush and HCS Chairman Khaled al-Mishri, who said that the permanent ceasefire agreement does not place any temporary restrictions on the GNA's military cooperation with Turkey, have unnerved many amongst the LNA. This is made worse by the announcement of a military agreement between Tripoli and Doha, just a few days following the ceasefire's signing in Geneva. Understandably, eastern sensitivities toward Turkish presence are likely to push Ankara to act as a spoiler to the political track embodied in the LPDF. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was the only world leader to directly criticise the LPDF as "lacking buy-in". In turn, Russia tacitly agrees with the Turkish President in that it does not trust that the LPDF will turn into a success. Accordingly, Moscow has announced its intent to develop its own political initiative. Both Russia and Turkey have the most to lose from UNSMIL's political track, and are ready to cooperate on Libya despite backing rival sides in the country. Any faux-pax from UNSMIL serves as an additional opportunity for them to entrench themselves in the country and further their own plans.

As a result, the risk of a return to armed conflict should not be underestimated. While it is true that since the past summer the military option has been deemed unviable, war becomes once again an attractive option as we progress further down the political line and start to face important hurdles. In reality, the LNA might have welcomed the achievements of UNSMIL's security track but it remains highly indifferent to the trajectory of its political plan. The LNA remains highly distrustful of the ability of politicians to strike comprehensive and cross-cutting deals, and it is highly doubtful of the GNA's capacity to implement the permanent ceasefire's key tenets as a whole. So far, the LNA has been cooperating with the international community in an attempt to prove that it is capable of participating in a solution. However, Khalifa Haftar does not believe that the GNA can deliver on its promises due to its intrinsically fragmented coalition. Similarly to previous moments in the past 18 months, Haftar is trying to present himself as someone who is willing

to negotiate on a political solution while at the same time shining a spotlight on the leadership and legitimacy issues that the GNA faces as an entity. As a result, it is difficult to say whether the LNA is genuinely committed to the process or whether it is solely hoping to utilise it as a means of weakening the GNA's political standing.

## **WHAT IS UNSMIL MISSING IN ITS LIBYAN POLITICAL DIALOGUE FORUM?**

*Libya's political landscape remains highly fragmented. The atmosphere of political opportunism surrounding the UN's political track has exacerbated a process of atomisation that has defined the country's politics in recent months.*

As the battlefield has moved to the political stage, traditional alliances in Libya are eroding with each political actor seeking to secure his own future and often betraying past alliances. The fragmented dynamics of the political track are directly linked to the nature of the LPDF, which brings together individuals from many diverging backgrounds and seeks to broker power-sharing agreements between them. This has left a platform for many opportunistic and illegitimate actors to scheme and collude with one another in an attempt to ensure a certain outcome from the dialogue. Participants conveyed in the LPDF have reportedly been offered bribes to take a certain position, while others simply owe their presence to the need to placate some faction or a foreign power. The genuine will to devise roadmaps that could finally bring Libya out of its transitional period is currently missing from the political track.

Despite having already started with virtual sessions on October 26 and scheduled to convene with an in-person meeting in Tunisia on November 9, the LPDF is struggling to garner enough legitimacy and support from many Libyans. To be sure, many Libyans do not feel represented in the design or structure of the ongoing dialogue. These feelings often reflect the grievances that we have highlighted earlier in this report. For instance, groups aligned with eastern-based authorities, such as the Supreme Council of Tribes, have decided to boycott the forum and are arguing that UNSMIL is favouring Muslim Brotherhood members and affiliated parties. In turn, hardliners in the west refuse to have representatives of the LNA decide upon a political solution for Libya, given the LNA's attack on Tripoli. Without trying to give reason to either party, there appears to be a notable imbalance between representatives of the GNA and the LNA that disadvantages the latter. This imbalance stems from an assumption that the LNA is a unique entity, while

the GNA is a collection of groups. In truth, both are aggregates of various interests, with the LNA simply being more cohesive. As a result, UNSMIL's strategy to cast a wide net on Libya's political and social actors has advantaged disaggregated blocs in the hope of serving representativeness. However, this strategy has the unintended consequence of bringing forward many powerless and unrepresentative participants.

In fact, the LPDF and foreign powers sponsoring it have nurtured Libyan figures with a false image of being major power brokers with a strong social base. The House of Representatives' (HOR) Speaker, Agila Saleh, is a case in point to understand the current political predicament Libya faces. Perceived as a central node of Libya's eastern bloc, Saleh had felt empowered by international support, mainly from the United States, and envisaged Libya's political future with himself at the helm of a new Presidential Council, seconded by Fathi Bashagha as Prime Minister and Khalid Mishri as representative of western Libya within the Presidential Council. This plan is now just one of many possibilities as the HOR Speaker has overplayed his hand and lost popular support by being perceived as too opportunistic.

This case is reflective of the international sponsoring of Libyan powerbrokers, who often portray a false sense of centralisation. With several international publicity tours and arranged meetings with tribal leaders, Saleh had wanted to be seen as having access to all tribal leaders and being more influential than Haftar. This led many tribal notables, social leaders and civil society actors from the east to turn against him and seek to ensure that he does not act as their sole representative.

## CONCLUSION & FORECASTS

October might have seen advances in terms of intra-Libyan economic discussions and the signing of a permanent ceasefire, but it remains a fairly uneventful month with respect to political agreements. This is explained by the fact that UNSMIL's political track has just officially started. Nonetheless, the lack of breakthroughs has been accompanied by some backtracking as Prime Minister Fayez al-Sarraj has already retracted his decision to step down while eastern actors have similarly continued to urge Abdullah al-Thani to stay in office. Considering the fragmented political dynamics in Libya on the eve of the LPDF, there is a risk that the dialogue will be bogged down by various caveats discussed above. This leaves the door open for two different scenarios.

The most likely scenario is that the LPDF does not lead to any breakthrough despite UNSMIL's good offices. Previous prognostics championing a governing trio made of Agila Saleh, Fathi Bashagha and Khalid al-Mishri are now slim. A parallel political track sponsored by the foreign outcasts of the LPDF, namely Russia and Turkey, remains a threat over the coming weeks with a focus on real domestic power brokers. What could emerge from behind the scenes' political discussions might ultimately lead to the continuation of the status quo. To be sure, this would entail the continuation of Fayez al-Sarraj as President of the Presidential Council, perhaps presenting an opportunity for an agreement that resembles the 2019 Abu Dhabi agreement, which would have seen Khalifa Haftar and Sarraj creating a government together. As such, this development could well see Khalifa Haftar and Fayez al-Sarraj striking a power-sharing agreement.

The least likely scenario between the two, but one whose likelihood should not be underestimated, is that Libya may still spiral back into conflict. There are reasonable concerns that the current political atmosphere resembles that of the week's running up to the UN-mediated National Conference that was supposed to be held in Ghadames National in April 2019 but was cancelled due to the LNA's attack on Tripoli. Similar to now, Haftar was not initially opposed to a political solution and was considering striking a deal with Sarraj. However, the unruly stance of GNA armed groups, comparable to that of the Sirte-Jufra Operations Room today, led LNA hardliners to press Haftar into privileging war over peace. This potential renewed conflict would not, however, be under the traditional and now incomplete GNA-LNA dichotomy, but rather would likely see an alliance between the LNA and career military officers within the GNA, against independent armed groups in western Libya. This could prove to be Haftar's most attractive option as he would find



new allies to take down old enemies, instead of having to deal with them politically. Nevertheless, the UN's continued efforts and the fact that the next round of 5+5 JMC talks will be held inside Libya for the first time breeds hope for a lasting solution to the country's conflict. The UN and the international community must ensure that appropriate accountability measures are in place in order to dissuade spoilers and interlopers from interfering in this crucial moment for Libya's peace process.

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