



# INSIDE LIBYA

**March 2023**

**No°30**

## 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 2023. 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

**Overview:** On February 17<sup>th</sup>, Libya celebrated the twelfth anniversary of the revolution that toppled the Gaddafi regime. Twelve years on, the country still reels from the economic, security and political repercussions of the revolution: GDP is 30% lower than pre-2011 levels while political representatives with weak and expired mandates continue to control Libya's fate without enacting meaningful change to bring about general elections. In this context, a vastly frustrated Libyan population is placing its hopes in the Special Representative of the Secretary General, who is trying to bring renewed momentum to the country's political landscape and find a path to elections.

### POLITICS

- The House of Representatives and High Council of State hastened discussions on sovereign positions and a constitutional amendment to finalise elections. Despite early signs of progress, they failed to reach a conclusive agreement due to severe political divisions.
- The Special Representative of the Secretary General has outlined a way forward to have general elections in 2023, raising hopes that there might be a political breakthrough in Libya this year.
- The Government of National Unity will celebrate its second anniversary next month, at a time of piling challenges facing its Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dabaiba.
- The Government of National Stability led by Fathi Bashagha has become more active as it senses upcoming political changes.

### SECURITY

- The 5+5 Joint Military Commission has made progress on the military track alongside representatives of Libya's southern neighbours.
- The Libyan National Army is betting on its role as a key security provider in Libya to maintain relevance amidst potential changes to the political scene.
- Clashes in western Libya reflect the Government of National Unity's difficulty in managing its armed group allies.

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## PROGRESS ON THE CONSTITUTIONAL TRACK OR WINDOW DRESSING?

*With announcements on a constitutional amendment and the sovereign positions, Agila Saleh and Khaled al-Mishri seemed on the right track to baffle expectations of their constitutional track's failure. Yet, divisions in and around the High Council of State (HCS) eventually proved such expectations right.*

On February 6th, Special Representative to the Secretary General (SRSG) Abdoulaye Bathily said he had reminded House of Representatives (HOR) Speaker Agila Saleh and High Council of State (HCS) Chairman Khaled al-Mishri of their duty to “work constructively to finalise the constitutional framework” and hold general elections as soon as possible. The two men were also notified that their progress would be assessed during a United Nations Security Council briefing on February 27th, underlining the time constraints and international pressure placed on the HOR-HCS track. This seemed to have sparked renewed determination among the two bodies as the HCS quickly approved a mechanism to select candidates for five sovereign positions and sent its list of approved applicants for the HOR to narrow down. This step promised advances in a file dormant since 2020 and greater cooperation on the constitutional track. In fact, on February 7th the HOR voted on a 13th constitutional amendment with 33 articles, putting in place a presidential system with a bicameral legislature divided between Tripoli and Benghazi. The amendment was sent to the HCS for voting in line with an understanding reached between Saleh and al-Mishri. Saleh considers this amendment as a constitutional basis for general elections, and when the HCS failed to hold a session on the matter, the HOR published the document in its official gazette on February 21st, justifying the unilateral move on the view that the HCS’ approval is optional according to the 2015 Libyan Political Agreement (LPA) due to its status as an “advisory body.”

Despite widespread scepticism facing the HOR-HCS track, it is noteworthy that a final agreement between Saleh and al-Mishri has always been the path of least resistance, including for the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL). According to Saleh, the next steps entail forming a committee of 12 HOR and HCS members to draft an electoral law, in addition to creating a committee of 45 that would include HOR and HCS members as well as independent experts tasked with forming a unified executive authority. “Under international supervision”, this executive authority would replace Libya’s current two rival governments and would govern by interim mandate to organise general elections before year’s end. Saleh also mentioned that the first committee would prepare a referendum to approve the constitutional basis, adding a layer of uncertainty to this process. In reality, Libya is nowhere near engaged in this process since consensus is still lacking around the constitutional basis, with 54 HCS members strongly opposing the amendment on the grounds that it does not solve the disa-

greements over presidential candidates' eligibility, gives broader powers to the president than their preferences, and has a provision saying that parliamentary elections cannot happen without presidential elections. Moreover, there are usual procedural questions relating to the HOR's vote on the amendment, which may not have been "unanimously voted", as claimed by HOR Spokesperson Abdullah Bleiheg, since only 113 MPs were present as opposed to the 120 required for a quorum.

Once more, the Libyan-Libyan political process shows its weaknesses due to the self-interested approach of Libya's political elite and the lack of strict guidelines and unified front by a divided international community. Divisions in and around the HCS are guided by personalities claiming to work for elections as soon as possible. Saleh and Al-Mishri both promise such elections by November 2023 at the latest, but neither have made actual progress and leave many wondering whether current discussions are nothing more than a smokescreen to divert attention away from Libya's stalemate. Their repeated failures to reach a constitutional basis never fall into a final dead-end, however, as the two men always find a way to keep their track alive. Currently, due to blockage with the HCS, more and more MPs are calling for tighter HOR-Presidential Council (PC) cooperation, a view which has also been shared by PC head Mohamed al-Menfi. However, Saleh and al-Menfi do not enjoy a good working relationship and the PC is widely regarded as an ineffective body. As such, the momentum is quickly moving to the SRSG, who is to assess whether UNSMIL should bandwagon its efforts to the Libyan-Libyan track or be more entrepreneurial by outlining an alternative process.

## **“MAKE 2023 THE YEAR OF FREE AND FAIR LIBYAN ELECTIONS”**

*Through wide-ranging consultations, the Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) has encouraged foreign and domestic actors to aim for general elections before the year's end, and cautiously prepares the outlines of his plan to get there.*

The UN has been very cautious regarding any alternative process to the HOR-HCS track, with the Secretary-General reminding that the international organisation "continues to be committed to Libyan-owned and Libyan-led solutions." In fact, UNSMIL repeatedly denied news regarding its rumoured alternative roadmap, stressing that the mission's role was to support a Libyan-Libyan solution, not oppose it. Yet, it is not to be forgotten that Antonio Guterres has himself said alternative mechanisms should be pursued in collaboration with Libyan, African, and international partners should the current Libyan-led process fail. SRSG Abdoulaye Bathily has hastened the pace of his consultations, travelling to Morocco, France, Italy, Germany, Egypt, and the U.S. in addition to meeting key Libyan stakeholders and some representatives from Libya's civil society, including the General

Secretariat for Libyan Women and several labour unions. The SRSG confirmed there was “an increasing convergence of views that elections should take place in 2023” with the U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman underscoring the need to “help make 2023 the year of free and fair Libyan elections.” In Washington, the P3+2+2 and Qatar and the UAE, which is made of the U.S. U.K. France, Italy, Germany, Turkey, and Egypt, noted the “achievements” of the HOR and HCS, but also reportedly went further by discussing ways in which elections could be secured in any case. The idea of a technical committee, shared by Saleh, to ferry Libya toward general elections this year could be a possibility, but UNSMIL has so far avoided the question of whether it would support a process in which the Government of National Unity (GNU) would be side-lined.

In fact, deep international divisions remain regarding how Libyan elections should be organised and by whom. Former SRSG Stephanie Williams has clearly warned that the Security Council is ridden with many differences and that it cannot be fully relied upon for a solution in Libya. Regional countries are also at the frontlines in Libya and primarily cater for their own interests. UNSMIL knows that a majority of MPs, backed by Egypt, require the formation of a transitional government as a preliminary step. This has created tensions with Washington, which sees it as an unnecessary step and would prefer focusing on practical ways to reach elections. The SRSG will eventually have to decide upon this key detail and, should he choose to form a technical committee, the latter’s success will mainly rely on its selection mechanism and the ability to pressure members to fast-track Libya’s way to elections in an independent and technocratic manner. Much attention was therefore directed toward the SRSG’s February 27th UNSC briefing in New York as there is little indication that the HOR-HCS track can succeed without an international-backed reconfiguration or being replaced by a new roadmap. To succeed in any chosen path, the SRSG will also have to redouble efforts to include members of Libya’s civil society, including independent political parties which recently called upon the UN to involve them more in consultations or representatives of minority groups such as the Tebu Congress which called upon UNSMIL to open an office in southern Libya. Moreover, a lot of effort needs to be directed toward safeguarding and maintaining the bureaucracy in charge of holding elections. With the HOR-HCS track seeking to replace the High National Elections Commission’s (HNEC) Director Emad al-Sayeh, there could be further obstacles in organising polls throughout the country. This is particularly true as al-Sayeh has warned there currently are only 2,000 electoral observers available out of the 6,000 needed for adequate supervision.

## THE GNU APPROACHING ITS SECOND AND FINAL ANNIVERSARY?

*Government of National Unity (GNU) Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dabaiba has proved to be an astute politician who has managed to overcome various challenges. However, dire finances, misallocations of funds, and frequent faux-pas are adding to his political hardship.*

Far from being a spectator to the above mentioned developments, Abdulhamid Dabaiba has helped build up divisions within the HCS to disrupt his political adversary al-Mishri who recently accused him of being “the last person in Libya to think about holding elections.” This is mainly because the HOR-HCS track unequivocally seeks the GNU’s removal from power before elections can be held, which is a scenario Dabaiba seeks to avoid by betting on the intermediation of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to establish a power-sharing agreement with the Libyan National Army (LNA). In fact, the GNU Prime Minister travelled to Abu Dhabi this month to discuss such plans, and also visited Turkey to share his condolences following the recent earthquakes and tighten cooperation with Ankara. The Tripoli-based government pledged an initial €47 million in assistance to Turkey, a commitment which was not well-received in Libya as many social media users blamed the Prime Minister for overlooking disaster-ridden localities in Libya. Further criticism was levelled against the GNU’s misallocation of funds after it bankrolled Tripoli’s February 17th celebrations with the equivalent of €19 million, at a time of increased scrutiny over past expenditure. The implementation of social policies was also put under the spotlight as various municipalities called upon the government to re-evaluate the lists of housing loans’ beneficiaries through an impartial committee so as to prevent cases of discrimination, corruption and misallocation.

Seeking to appease anger caused by the extradition of Abu Agila al-Marimi among former regime supporters, Dabaiba removed the names of Mohamed, Saadi and Aisha Muammar Gaddafi from the frozen assets list, and the GNU’s Ministry of Justice ordered a health pardon for Abdullah Mansour. The PC spun the release as a move toward national reconciliation, and in fact, it represents one of the most important post-2011 releases as Mansour was Internal Security Chief during the latter years of the Gaddafi regime. Nonetheless, Dabaiba has also doubled down on revolutionary rhetoric, particularly around the twelfth celebration of the February 17th events and sponsored a revolutionary council meeting in the western town of Zintan to “correct the revolution and take it back from those who stole it.” The location of this meeting was not without offence considering that General Osama al-Jeweili, one of Dabaiba’s fiercest security rivals in Tripolitania, hails from the city. The GNU Prime Minister’s domestic overtures reflect a confused survival tactic that pursues two opposite goals: on the one hand focused on expanding his support base by promising social policies as well as seeking the rallying of rivals, and on the other hand delving



into alliances with the most hard-line elements of western Libya to retain power at all costs. In fact, Dabaiba cannot hope to both oversee elections and participate in elections, and would therefore need to make a critical choice this year.

## THE GNS HOPES TO REGAIN RELEVANCE BEFORE INEVITABLE POLITICAL CHANGE

*Sensing upcoming political changes, the Government of National Stability (GNS) led by Fathi Bashagha has been more present in voicing its position, announcing projects, and cooperating with the Libyan National Army (LNA) on the security front.*

After weeks of relative silence, the Government of National Stability (GNS) and its Prime Minister Fathi Bashagha issued several statements, reflecting the growing sense that Libya's political landscape is about to change. As per usual, many of the GNS statements were directed against its Tripoli-based rival government and criticised UNSMIL for continuing its coordination with the GNU, particularly following a meeting between Bathily and Interior Minister Emad al-Trabelsi. The Sirte-based government also ruled out the holding of elections without a unified government, but encouragingly there are indications that it does not automatically see itself as that unified government as it awaits the implementation of the HOR's process. However, it remains to be seen how both the HOR and GNS will react should the SRSG choose an alternative mechanism that has Agila Saleh lose his central role in controlling Libya's path toward elections. A likely redline will be if UNSMIL allows the GNU to oversee elections without unifying the executive, thus giving the eastern bloc enough ground to reject the UN-backed plan. This reasoning might be behind greater activity from the GNS, whose head finally met with LNA Commander Khalifa Haftar and whose Interior Ministry agreed on a security plan with the military institution.

The security plan, agreed upon by Deputy Interior Minister Faraj Aqim and LNA Head of Anti-Terrorism Prosecution Colonel Issam Adbish focuses on greater cooperation between the police and army to tighten security in Benghazi, collect weapons, and arrest wanted persons. The GNS' Interior Ministry also discussed establishing an anti-cybercrime department to implement the HOR's controversial Law No.5/2022, which activists see as an encroachment on freedom of expression. Bashagha also made several policy announcements, including the preparation of a plan to revamp Sirte's most destroyed and populated areas in addition to committing to a "reform programme" raising institutions' efficiency, achieving security and the rule of law, rebuilding affected areas, and combating financial and administrative corruption. Considering the GNS' near-inexistent finances and the growing urgency toward elections this year, such announcements may seem irrelevant. Nonetheless, they potentially reflect early signs of candidacy. For the February 17th celebrations, both Bashagha and al-Mishri made speeches

that castigated Libya's current situation and the deviation of its revolution. Over the coming months, Libyan politicians are likely to use more populist rhetoric and make direct addresses to the people as the country moves back to an electoral atmosphere.

## **ADVANCING ON THE MILITARY TRACK WITH SOUTHERN NEIGHBOURS**

*Meeting in Cairo, members of the 5+5 Joint Military Commission (JMC) alongside representatives of Libya's southern neighbours built on last month's discussions to bring forward the departure of African foreign mercenaries from the country.*

Building on the discussions covered in [Inside Libya's twenty-ninth issue](#), the 5+5 Joint Military Commission (JMC) met on February 7-8th in Cairo in the presence of the SRSG and representatives of Sudan, Chad, and Niger. According to Bathily, an "atmosphere of cooperation" prevailed during the meeting and participants approved the establishment of an integrated mechanism for joint coordination and data exchange to facilitate the full withdrawal of mercenaries and foreign fighters from the country. The LNA's head of delegation at the 5+5 JMC, Lieutenant General Imraja al-Emami, explained that for now the easiest option was being pursued, that is the removal of African mercenaries from Libya. This remains the easiest option since these mercenaries are often not backed by their home states which are more open to cooperating with Libyan authorities to put their combatting nationals abroad in check as they often belong to rebelling factions. Already, Sudanese fighters in Libya have started being registered to leave the territory as Qatari-mediated talks between Khartoum's military and rebel groups are making progress.

This trend is likely to help drop the number of foreign fighters in Libya by a few thousands. Of note, it is widely believed about 20,000 foreign mercenaries are still present in the country. However, al-Emami reminded that much remains to be done to first distinguish African mercenaries accurately from illegal migrants and then ensure that such mercenaries, who are often members of the opposition, can return back home without lingering in Libya or using it as a rear base. Moreover, the LNA official noted that only the unification of Libya's executive authority would achieve the effective withdrawal of foreign troops. Past experience shows the situation is so complex that even this prerequisite does not evidently lead to withdrawal as seen in 2021, when the GNU was the legitimate interim government ruling throughout Libya. Back then, Tripoli neither had the ability nor political will to pressure its Turkish ally and force Russian private military contractors out of the country. Through their use of Syrian mercenaries, these two countries represent a large portion of foreign troops present in Libya that are more challenging to remove. This time around, realisations within the LNA coupled with pressures from Washington raise the possibility that al-Rajma

will no longer cover for the Wagner Group's presence in Libya. Such realisation in Tripoli regarding the presence of Turkish-backed troops remains to be seen.

## THE LNA PURSUES ITS REBRANDING EFFORTS ACROSS ITS TERRITORIES

*The LNA sees its political worth as being presented as one of Libya's top security providers and has continued to tackle criminal and terror networks, tighten control over cyberspace, collect weapons and secure southern borders.*

Ahead of expected political developments, the LNA has doubled down on its self-portrayal as Libya's key security provider. Through greater cooperation with the GNS, the LNA carried out campaigns against criminal gangs in eastern Libya, including raids against drug dealers in Benghazi, and launched a weapons collection campaign. Accordingly, any citizen in illegal possession of arms is expected to hand them over to the nearest LNA camp or GNS security directorate before the end of February or face the risk of raids and anti-terrorism prosecution. Such campaigns are not entirely new and should not be seen as a definite move toward Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR), but they reflect al-Rajma's rebranding efforts and its desire to quell any internal source of disruption. The LNA's efforts have received praise and elevated its standing despite its continued repression of civil society and illegal detention of activists. The National Oil Corporation's (NOC) Chairman Farhat Bengdara praised the LNA's "contribution to the stability of oil production and exports" while the former head of the dissolved Libyan Media Corporation Mohamed Baio praised the LNA's critical role in defeating the Islamic State in Libya.

The spokesperson to the Supreme Council of Libyan Tribes has also called for the empowerment of the LNA to expel foreign mercenaries, reflecting the LNA's own comments that it would "not compromise on the territorial integrity and security of Libya." The SRSB also met Haftar this month to secure his continued support to the military track, which augurs that the LNA will probably be given a large role in securing the withdrawal of foreign forces. In fact, there are encouraging signs regarding the overall security front in that LNA brigades have coordinated operations with GNU-aligned armed forces which have expanded toward central and southern Libya to tackle illegal activities, particularly cross-border smuggling and terror flows in line with the GNU Interior Ministry's security action plan. Such coordination can be explained by communication channels between the Dabaiba and Haftar families, in addition to the PC's growing role in contacting the LNA, with al-Menfi once again visiting Haftar in Benghazi this month. Naturally, fault lines remain vivid between eastern and western Libya, but technical and pure security matters are being pursued between the two sides.

## FAST-PACED SECURITY DYNAMICS CONTINUE TO HARM WESTERN LIBYA

*Continuing clashes in and around Tripoli reflect the GNU Prime Minister's own difficulty to keep his armed allies content with political positions and financial dues.*

Despite the GNU Ministry of Interior's highly mediatised security action plan, the western region still reels from insecurity. Although GNU-aligned armed groups now dominate the region, they are not immune to internal divisions and competition which are proving difficult to control for Abdulhamid Dabaiba. This is particularly true regarding this month's clashes around Tripoli's Mitiga International Airport as the current present force, Rada, feels threatened by reconstruction plans that would involve security being provided by its rivals, i.e., the 444th and 301st Brigades. As a result, Rada carried out a series of attacks on the airport road to put an end to the reconstruction project, arguing that such work should only be carried out under a unified government. The armed group headed by Abdulraouf Kara has also drawn closer to its former enemy the Stabilisation Support Apparatus led by Ghneiwa al-Kikli to counteract the expansion plans of the aforementioned brigades.

Growing divisions within the pro-GNU forces augur renewed clashes in the coming months and will require Dabaiba to finetune his distribution of official positions and state-owned businesses to changing dynamics. According to some reports, the Ministry of Interior may potentially change hands from al-Trabelsi to al-Kikli, with the difficulty to manage repercussions of such a reshuffle being a likely reason why the GNU has not yet made such changes. With armed groups in western Libya growing more demanding and at times closing key infrastructure such as the Coastal Road or Zawiya's Oil Refinery Complex, the security situation does not look to be stable, and the GNU will need to redouble in its efforts to contain or at least evade the impact of power plays. Whether in the southern Tripoli area of Tajoura, Zawiya or Ajaylat, insecurity caused by GNU-aligned forces clashing with one another does not give encouraging prospects to the local population and it may eventually lead to the failure of the Interior Ministry's plan to stabilise the region.

## HIGH AMBITIONS FOR LIBYA'S OIL AND GAS SECTOR DESPITE UNCERTAINTY

*Libya's energy sector has high ambitions for the coming years but security and political dynamics remain too volatile for a straight trajectory.*

Last month's multi-billion euro gas deal with the Italian energy giant Eni has increased confidence among Libyan energy officials. This is in spite of procedural and legal challenges that might hamper the agreement since it was signed in urgency and was not presented to the adequate administrative bodies such as the High Council of Energy and the Audit Bureau. The urgency behind the agreement can be explained by the fact that such investments were weighed by Eni since 2008 and, by expediting the dormant process, the GNU saw an opportunity to strike a record deal and argue it saved Libya from becoming a gas importer. Regarding oil production, this year could see an increase from 1.2 to 1.5 million barrels per day according to the chairman of the Arabian Gulf Oil Company (AGOCO), a subsidiary of the NOC. The latter's chairman also unveiled a four-phase strategic plan in coordination with a U.S. consultancy to revise the corporation's structure, add and improve workers' capabilities, and significantly boost capacity building by aiming for 2 million barrels per day of oil production within a few years.

Mohamed Aoun, the GNU's Minister of Oil and Gas shares this goal and said it could be reached "if efforts are combined, work is done with high efficiency, and international companies cooperate with Libya." This latter point is the most uncertain due to Libya's security situation. Austria's ambassador recently said the country was not yet safe enough for the return of Austrian oil companies, therefore putting a dent to expectations of OMV's full return. On top of the risk of temporary blockades driven by local grievances, growing pressures on the LNA to move aside from its cooperation with the Wagner Group is already showing signs that Russian elements might target energy infrastructure and solidify their own illicit trade networks within central and southern Libya, where most fields are located. Moreover, there is a race against time between on the one hand Farhat Bengdara who seeks to maintain professional standards at the NOC and on the other hand the Ibrahim Dabaiba and Saddam Haftar duo who would like to deepen their July 2022 tacit agreement on the lifting of the oil blockade by restaffing the high echelons of NOC subsidiaries to their benefit. The economic track, and more particularly how oil revenues are processed and distributed, will remain a key focus of the SRSG if the further politicisation of Libya's energy sector is to be averted. Bengdara is looking for legal and administrative mechanisms that would ensure his institution's budget is automatically deducted from the country's energy revenues, thus closing any avenue for political interference.

## CONCLUSION & FORECASTS

During his UNSC briefing on February 27th, the SRSG made it clear that he had specific plans to achieve elections this year. Referring to the LPA's article 64, which allows the convening of a Libyan political dialogue following a "severe breach" to the 2015 agreement, Bathily announced his plan to establish a High-level National Steering Panel for Libya. This panel would be tasked with not only adopting a legal framework and roadmap for general elections this year, but also with seeking consensus on election security and a code of conduct for all candidates. Bathily's Security Council briefing was highly encouraging as his wide-ranging domestic consultations seem to have influenced him into including civil society organisations, women, youth representatives and tribal leaders on top of representatives of political institutions, major political figures and security actors. The SRSG made sure to raise awareness about the crackdown on activists and rights defenders both online and in-person, calling upon authorities to stop using security, morality and cybercrime laws to attack civil society and instead allow for the inclusion of women and civil society organisations in political and reconciliation processes.

Maintaining his blunt stance, the SRSG noted that "most Libyan institutions lost their legitimacy years ago" and highlighted Libyans' frustration with national institutions' unwillingness to move the political process forward. He also weighed on the HOR-HCS track's latest progress, assessing it as insufficient and saying that the HOR's 13th constitutional amendment remained controversial as it did not solve disagreements over presidential candidates' eligibility, did not provide a clear roadmap for elections this year, and does not adequately define regional representation for the Senate. Overall, it is safe to say many Libyans were relieved by Bathily's speech as he did not have a preferential stance toward any domestic or international actor, instead pointing the finger at actual weaknesses and providing tangible alternatives. Despite holding out hope, Libyans understandably remain sceptical due to their prior experiences with UN-led processes that promised momentous change but repeatedly failed to deliver. Ultimately, the success of the SRSG's newly announced plan will come down to its execution. Bathily will need to determine what the strengths of his plan are and find ways to utilise that to convince and at times pressure domestic and foreign stakeholders to engage constructively and minimise spoiling.

The UN's panel and its roadmap remain uncertain and will have many obstacles on its path. The SRSG did not altogether sideline national institutions as he notably encouraged a "Libyan-led mechanism" to solve the economic track by bringing about Central Bank reunification, economic reforms, and a fair distribution mechanism for energy revenues. Likewise, HOR and HCS members are also meant to be included in the High-level Steering Panel for Libya and their progress so far is likely to be a starting block for its work. Nonetheless, participants and supporters of the HOR-HCS process did not respond well to Bathily's plans, seeing it as an attack on the "Libyan state's

national sovereignty” as put by al-Mishri. Similarly, the HOR and GNS targeted the plan for allegedly violating the LPA and the competencies of national institutions, once again hiding behind a 2015 agreement which, in the eyes of many Libyan and international actors, has become more of a liability than an opportunity. The coming weeks will be very challenging for the SRSG who will be forced to confront criticisms, wield his mandate effectively, try to gain the trust of Libyans and pressure national institutions to reach a consensus and refrain from spoiling. The al-Mishri-Saleh duo is likely to be reactivated to push for a parallel path to the one now supported by the UN. However, this time, the SRSG may gain the upper hand as he adopts a strategy of including Libya’s civil society in the process while empowering Libyan media and activists to hold accountable actors that actively try to censor and silence them, which could turn into a formidable ally in neutralising domestic spoilers. Much attention will also need to be directed toward foreign actors’ interactions with the High-level Steering Panel. For now, most countries welcome the plan, but their differing views will surely impact its implementation.

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