

DELEGATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION TO THE ARAB REPUBLIC OF EGYPT

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To: Managing Director-MENA (GENTILINI)

Subject: EGYPT – Weekly report (27 September-3 October 2021)

Summary:

- **COVID-19: Surge of infections, as schools and universities prepare to resume.**
- **Vaccines: Donations by the US (1.6 mio. doses of Pfizer) and EU MS.**
- **Water and irrigation: Authorities to tackle waste of water and land violations.**
- **Judiciary independence praised by President Al Sisi.**
- **HR: Calls for further reforms and freedoms, as P. Zaki case is postponed again.**
- **EGY/USA: Visit of National Security Adviser Sullivan to EGY – do the US really link military support to human rights compliance?**
- **GERD: ETH ambassador in EGY – FM Shoukry lambasts in the media ETH attitude on never ending negotiations, focusing on filling and operation of the dam.**
- **EGY/COP27 on climate: EGY selected as nominee to host next year's event.**
- **EGY/SYR: QAT funded press report on EGY pledging the return of SYR into the Arab League after FM Shoukry met his SYR counterpart in NY.**
- **EGY/RUS: Talks in the margins of UNGA on partnership and strategic cooperation agreement – FM Shoukry visits Moscow on 4 October.**
- **EGY/LBY: EGY FM links support to LBY reconstruction with implementation of the electoral deadlines and withdrawal of foreign fighters.**
- **EGY/TUN: EGY supports the new TUN PM appointed by President Kais Saied.**
- **MEPP: Negotiations with Hamas under GIS auspices continue on the prisoners' swap, easing ISR siege. First EGYPTAIR direct flights from Cairo to Tel Aviv.**

Detail:

1. **Covid-19:** Representing a surge in infections (September 2 to October 2) of 151%, the Health Ministry registered 800 new positive coronavirus cases, bringing the total number to 306030 while the death toll totals 17399 with 32 new fatalities recorded, when recovered cases totalled 258 252. The Education Minister stated that teachers and administrators are being vaccinated, with about 900,000 teachers and administrators vaccinated so far, as the rest are scheduled to be vaccinated in the course of the upcoming week. The Education Ministry announced its plan to deal with COVID-19 outbreaks in schools. It said that classrooms where two or more cases are discovered within two weeks would be closed for 28 days, and schools where two classrooms or more are closed, would be closed for 28 days.
2. **Vaccine: Egypt receives Pfizer and AstraZeneca vaccines:** On 30 September, Egypt received its first shipment of the Pfizer vaccine, with the Health Ministry announcing the arrival of a shipment of 1.6 million doses donated by the United States through the COVAX initiative. Poland also donated over 100,000 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine.

3. On 27 September, President Al Sisi directed the government and the relevant agencies to start removing all **violations on irrigation facilities and agricultural lands** within six months and to provide him with a monthly progress report. Al Sisi explained that the state's spending on reclaimed lands aims at increasing agricultural production and providing food security for the people. He stressed that punishing violators would also include the withdrawal of any kind of subsidies.
4. **President Al Sisi highlighted the judiciary's independence in the Egyptian Judiciary Day:** On 2 October, President Al Sisi celebrated the EGY Judiciary Day, for the first time, to mark the start of the new judicial year, in a ceremony attended by the heads of judicial authorities. Vowing that he would never interfere with judicial decisions, he noted that the government directed the necessary allocations to develop the judicial system to achieve prompt justice, pointing to the need to speed up the provision of judicial services to citizens.
5. **Renowned journalist calls for reforms and more freedoms:** On 27 September, political commentator and renowned journalist Abdallah Al Senawy said that without the MB, Egypt would have presented a real democratic experience in the aftermath of the January 25 revolution. He called for ending pre-trial detention, releasing prisoners not involved in violence and opening media space to the opposition to present its views. Al Senawy criticized the Parliament's performance as weak. His call, which echoed several recent calls including from former MP Mohammed Anwar Al Sadat, was welcomed on social media. Users hoped the government listens to the "friendly advising voices".
6. **UN says EGY authorities target HR defenders cooperating with its bodies:** On 29 September, UN Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights Ilze Brands Kehris presented a report to the UN Human Rights Council showing that human rights defenders have faced reprisals from EGY authorities for cooperating with the UN by abusing local counter-terrorism and national security legislations.
7. **Trial of Patrick Zaki postponed for second time:** On 28 September, Mansoura Misdemeanour Court postponed the trial of human rights researcher Patrick Zaki to 7 December. The court granted the postponement to allow the defence to review the case. After publishing an article about the struggles of Christians in Egypt, Zaki was arrested on 7 February 2020 and charged with "spreading fake news". On 2 October, Amnesty International called for his immediate release, urging President Al Sisi to put an end to the "brutal" crackdown on dissent. "Free Patrick", a committee supporting Zaki's release, accused the authorities of "intending to keep Patrick imprisoned as long as possible without any legal basis".
8. **EGY/USA: NSA J. Sullivan visited Cairo** on 29 September and held a meeting with FM Shoukry as well as a joint meeting with President Al Sisi, FM Shoukry and GIS chief Kamel. The visit comes a few weeks after the Biden administration said it would hold back a portion of Egypt's annual military aid (\$130 million) until the Sisi administration acts to improve the nation's human rights record. Since then, the President has announced a new human rights strategy and charges have been dropped against another four NGOs accused of receiving illicit foreign funding — one of the conditions attached to the aid named by a US official earlier this month. Coupling the issues of HR and military support – since 1979, an annual total of 1.3 billion dollars earmarked for EGY to buy US military equipment – is not new and remains very limited in its range (10%). EGY authorities did change parts of their HR strategy while being adamant to keep it as part of a national and sovereign policy. The EGY presidential statement after the meeting touched upon several issues, starting with the EGY request for a sustainable solution for the PAL issue and Gaza reconstruction, then emphasising on the strategic partnership between the US and EGY. Unsurprisingly it did not mention the human rights issue. However, press reports mentioned that NSA discussed securing "tangible and lasting improvements" in HR with President Al Sisi. The NSA was quoted as praising

EGY's "effective efforts to combat terrorism and extremist thinking". Both agreed on the need to intensify their coordination regarding Libya's incoming elections. On GERD, the NSA only assured EGY of US efforts' to ensure EGY water security, in a way preserving all parties' interests. TUN political situation was also raised.

9. **GERD:** A member of **Ethiopia's GERD negotiating team** said this week that his country would never sign an agreement on the dam that affects Ethiopia's future development. In response, **FM Shoukri** in a phone interview said negotiations relate only to the filling and operation of Ethiopia's mega-dam and did not affect Ethiopia's future development, and described Idris' statement as "prevaricating and lacking credibility". Meanwhile, ETH Ambassador in Cairo, Markos Tekle, confirmed to BBC Arabic that work at the Embassy will be suspended for three to six months starting in October for financial reasons related to a reduction in the Embassy's operating budget.
10. **EGY/COP27:** US Climate Envoy John Kerry revealed on 2 October that **EGY has been selected as the nominee to host the next COP27 UN climate conference 2022**, one week after President Al Sisi declared EGY's interest at UNGA as a country representing Africa. The announcement even with the status of a candidate may strengthen EGY's position as spokesperson for the African continent on climate issues. President Al Sisi will undoubtedly use EGY's position at the regional, cultural and geographic crossroad to value EGY's efforts in tackling climate change challenges as he urged previously the developed countries to shoulder their responsibilities for reducing CO2 emissions in implementation of their international commitments. The environmental-friendly city of Sharm El-Sheikh is due to host the conference according to media reports.
11. **EGY/SYR:** After **FM Shoukry's meeting on 25 September with the SYR FM** for the first time in ten years, rumours and press reports mentioned EGY's efforts to end SYR's suspension of its rights at the League of Arab States (LAS). EGY sources were quoted in QAT-funded news as discussing the likelihood and benefits of persuading Arab countries to support efforts to end the isolation of Syria from LAS. In a television appearance last week, speaking on the possible Egyptian role in the Syrian file and its return to the Arab League, Shoukry said: "What concerns us now is compliance with Security Council resolutions and an understanding among States actors and stakeholders that the Syrian Government looks after its people to serve their interests and that displaced refugees return". He continued saying that "Once the military battles have calmed down, we must have a role to play in communicating with a view to exploring the steps necessary to preserve the Syrian people's capabilities, to emerge from this crisis and to restore Syria's position as an actor in the Arab context". The KWT presidency of the LAS ministerial confirmed to us its interest to work for reintegrating SYR in the concert of Arab nations but, after contacts with different stakeholders considered the matter not ripe yet and stated that it urged SYR to comply with various UN resolutions. UNSE Pedersen announced that the next round of negotiations on drafting a Constitution and constitutional reforms would start on 18 October in Geneva.
12. **EGY/RUS:** Against this backdrop, the RUS MFA announced the **visit of FM Shoukry to RUS on 04 October**. FM Shoukry met FM Lavrov in the margins of UNGA. Both are likely to tackle the SYR file, as well as GERD and bilateral trade and economic issues. FM Shoukry will also meet RUS Security Council Secretary to discuss enhancing coordination. As this comes after Lavrov's visit to Cairo last April – after President Putin postponed his venue to EGY – and the resumption of direct flights from RUS tourists to the Red Sea last August, both ministers discussed strategic relations between the two countries, as well as Syria, Libya, and the MEPP. In a context where the US are pressing EGY to improve the HR situation and couple it to its military support – as well as threatening of CATSAA sanctions over the purchase of RUS military goods (SU 35), EGY/RUS talks will be under scrutiny in particular regarding any military deal.

13. **EGY/LBY: Direct flights from LBY to EGY resumed** on 30 September after eight years of suspension, as announced by LBY PM Dbeibah. LBY Afriqiyah Airways will operate nine flights per week. On 30 September in a speech given during the AU Peace and Security Council meeting, FM Shoukry reiterated Egypt's call for the "unconditional, simultaneous, and coordinated exit" of all foreign fighters and mercenaries from Libya. On 2 October, LBY Presidential Council called for Egypt's continued role in the reconstruction and development of Libya in a meeting between its vice-president Al-Lafi with FM Shoukry in Cairo. EGY seems now to link its support for development and reconstruction – through inking 14 MoUs and 6 executive agreements during the EGY/LBY higher committee – to further efforts by all parties to meet electoral (parliamentary and presidential) deadlines and EGY's support to the 5+5 Commission on the withdrawal of all foreign forces.
14. **EGY/TUN:** In a statement, EGY MFA welcomed the appointment by TUN President Kais Saied of the first woman, Najla Bouden, as PM of TUN. The EGY MFA hailed the assignment and the "country's "movement towards the future under the wise national leadership of President Kais Saied". This display of support to an internationally much-criticized TUN President dismissing PM Mechichi and suspending the activities of the elected parliament last July comes as a boost for a shift towards a Presidential regime, right after demonstrations against K. Saied took place last week in Tunis to object to his decision last week to overrule parts of the constitution and rule by decree.
15. **MEPP:** A **Hamas delegation** headed by the group's leader, Ismail Haneyah, arrived in Egypt on 3 October. The delegation will also include its Gaza chief Yahya Al-Sinwar, the deputy chairman of the movement Saleh Al-Aruri, his deputy, Khalil Al-Hayat, Roha Mujahi and Marwan Issa, and the foreign political bureau chief, Khaled Mashal. It will reportedly sit down with Egyptian officials to continue negotiations on a prisoner swap agreement with Israel, easing Gaza siege, working on Gaza reconstruction and improving the humanitarian situation. Following its announcement on 13 September in the margins of the meeting in Sharm El Sheikh between President Al Sisi and ISR PM Bennett, Egyptair inaugurated on 3 October its first official flight to Tel-Aviv. Four flights are expected every week.

Sign-off: Christian Berger Head of Delegation

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