

DELEGATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION TO THE ARAB REPUBLIC OF EGYPT

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To: Managing Director-MENA (GENTILINI)

Subject: EGYPT – Weekly report (11-17 October 2021)

Summary:

- **COVID-19: further measures to enhance EGY's vaccination campaign.**
- **State subsidies: President Al-Sisi calls for a change in the system so as to fight corruption.**
- **HR: trial of EGY officials over murder of Regeni suspended. A number of pre-trial detainees referred in misdemeanour cases.**
- **MB: internal rift deepens between fronts abroad.**
- **EU-EGY Political Dialogue: meeting covers bilateral and foreign/regional themes.**
- **V4 + EGY Summit: discussions on further cooperation.**
- **EuroAfrica interconnector: EGY signs bilateral MoUs with EL and with CY.**
- **GERD: negotiations reportedly to resume at the end of the month.**
- **SYR: UNSE Pedersen holds separate meeting with EGY FM and with LAS SG.**
- **EGY/TUN: EGY support to formation of the new government.**

Detail:

1. On 17/10, EGY reported 17/10 861 new **COVID** infections and 44 new deaths (bringing the reported total to 318,456 and 17,970 respectively). A World Bank report ranked EGY fifth in the world in the underreporting of deaths from COVID 19. As of 15/11, unvaccinated government employees will not be allowed in government offices without a weekly PCR test. As of 1/12, the measure will be extended to members of the public. The Presidential Health advisor stated on 16/10 that 18 million people (about 18% of the population) had received at least one dose of the vaccine. According to the Health Minister, vaccination centres would soon be set up in courts, metro and train stations. On 16/10, the Health Minister announced that EGY would export Sinovac/Vacsera as of next week.
2. A **second US donation** of 1.6 million Pfizer vaccines reached Cairo on 16/10, as part of a US donation of 8 million Moderna and Pfizer vaccines to EGY through COVAX. USAID stated that it would provide EGY with \$ 5 million in urgent assistance to fight COVID. On 17/10, PM Madbouly extended by six months a **pandemic austerity measure** to limit public spending. A report of the Central Agency for Public Mobilisation and Statistics indicated a yearly fall in EGY's poverty rate to 29.7 per cent (from 32.5%).
3. As part of the state's program to eradicate slums, President Al Sisi inaugurated on 16/10 a **project for 13 800 alternative housing units**, built by the armed forces. His inaugural speech covered known themes such as the negative effect on economic development due to population growth or violations on agricultural lands, and emphasized citizen

awareness as part of the solution. He called for a revamp of the existing state subsidy system, which has led to corruption, and for increased use of digitalisation.

4. On 13/10, the Military Criminal Court upheld a life imprisonment sentence (25 years) for **32 defendants found guilty** of forming “*terrorist cells*” to assassinate President Al Sisi and former KSA Crown Prince bin Nayef in 2014. A court renewed the detention of former presidential candidate **Aboul Fotouh**, held without trial since 2018. On 14/10, an Italian judge suspended the trial of four Egyptian security officials charged with the murder of **Giulio Regeni**, citing lack of certainty that the defendants were formally notified of the charges brought against them. It is uncertain if new proceedings will be initiated in lower court. On 18/10, prosecutors referred HR lawyer **El Baqer** and activists **Abdel Fattah** and **Mohammed ‘Oxygen’** to trial before the emergency state security misdemeanours court. All three have been held for over two years in pre-trial detention on charges that include ‘*joining a terrorist group*’. The new trial case, postponed to 1/10 concerns the misdemeanour charge of ‘*spreading false news*’. Unverified media reports surfaced on 18/10 that **42 people** were ordered released after being detained in 12 political cases.
5. The **internal rift** in the **Muslim Brotherhood** deepened after the MB's London-based acting guide Ibrahim Mounir dissolved the group's TUR- based administrative office, in response to a rapprochement between EGY and TUR. The TUR-based MB office reacted by removing Mounir from his post. Leaders in London and Istanbul offices traded accusations, with MB youth accusing both offices of spreading chaos.
6. DSG Mora held a **Political Dialogue in Cairo** on 12/10 with an EGY delegation led by AFM Abdel Atty, upcoming Ambassador to the EU, accompanied by other AFMs and high-level officials of the MFA. The meeting, which followed the Association Committee on 5th October, confirmed the willingness of both sides to increase cooperation and underlined convergence of views on several important foreign policy files.
7. President Al Sisi visit to Budapest provided an opportunity for discussions notably on deepening economic cooperation with the **Visegrad countries**. During the joint press conference, President Al Sisi reassured that EGY did not intend to become a transit country for mass migration into Europe and asked for a ‘*different level of understanding*’ of the EGY perspective of HR, which placed a heavy emphasis on social rights.
8. EGY and **EL** signed on 14/10 a MoU that will see the two countries build an undersea cable connecting their grids. On 16/10, EGY and **CY** signed a MoU that would see them connect their electricity grid. The agreements form part of the **EuroAfrica interconnector** project. This adds to EGY's momentum to establish itself as a regional electricity hub.
9. The statement of SSDN President Kiir on 10/10 that ETH is ready to negotiate on **the GERD** were it not for the Tigray crisis did not cut ice with MFA interlocutors, who noted that the conflict did not stop ETH from carrying out a (unilateral) second filling. On 11/10, EGY irrigation minister Abdel Atty stated that EGY's negotiations with ETH over GERD are “*all but frozen*”, but SDN officials stated on 16/10 that ETH is ready to resume talks and that an AU delegation would soon be sent to EGY, SDN and ETH. Unconfirmed reports suggest that Cairo diplomats are preparing for a next round, reportedly at the end of the month.
10. **UNSE for SYR Pedersen** met with **FM Shoukry** on 14/10, ahead of the Geneva talks on the constitutional reforms. The EGY MFA SPOX stated that the talks covered ways to coordinate international efforts to advance a comprehensive political settlement of the crisis. The EGY MFA statement contained known positions, including support for UNSCR 2254. In his separate meeting with the UNSE, **LAS SG Abul Gheit** stressed the need for a political solution, noting that SYR was an Arab country whose independence and territorial integrity must be maintained. He added that foreign interventions on SYR

territory complicated and perpetuated the crisis, and that the various parties needed to review their positions in order to find a way out of the crisis.

11. On 14/10, EGY and six other AU countries reiterated their request for dismissing the **ISR ambassador appointed as observer to the AU**. Last August the embassies of EGY, COM DZA TUN DJI, MRT and LBY to the AU had sent a NV objecting to the admission of ISR as an observer to the AU. The AU Commission Chair said that the decision fell within his competence and expressed the hope that the admission of an ISR observer would strengthen the AU call for the realization of a two-State solution.
12. On 16/10, FM Shoukry attended the 3rd mid-year coordination meeting of the AU, the regional economic communities and the coordination mechanisms. He recalled EGY's support to the COVID 19 response fund, and noted that the pandemic presented an opportunity to enhance cooperation regarding **Agenda 2063's objectives**. He also praised the role of NEPAD for continental integration of projects.
13. President of Al Azhar University el Mehresawi stressed on 13/10 the importance of relations with LBY, including its clerics and scholars. A LBY delegation of scholars and clerics took part in a training workshop, held by the World Association for Al-Azhar Graduates, on "***the role of Libyan clerics in protecting the social unity***". EGY sees this as part of its efforts to combat religious radicalism and fighting a MB influence.
14. On 13/10, President Al Sisi called **TUN counterpart Saied** to congratulate him on the formation of the new government. On 16/10, PM Madbouly called new TUN PM Bouden Romdhan and recalled Al Sisi's directives to offer all means of support to TUN. According to the press statement, PM Bouden noted that President Saied had strong relations with President Al Sisi and that TUN counted on EGY support and cooperation.
15. The call of **UK PM Johnson** to President Al Sisi on 14/10 provided an opportunity to discuss preparations for COP26, in light of EGY's likely hosting of COP27. According to an EGY Presidential statement, the talk covered bilateral issues, notably security, CT, defence and efforts to revive British tourism to EGY, as well as regional files including LBY and GERD. EGY diplomacy is working towards a first meeting between President Al Sisi and **President Biden** in Glasgow. The visit of US Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chair Menendez to Cairo provided an opportunity for exchanging views on key regional and some bilateral files.
16. The EGY MFA SPOX called on 14/10 all **LBN parties** to exercise self-restraint and refrain from violence, and prioritise the supreme interest of LBN and its people with commitment to the Constitution and the law in order to preserve LBN stability and security and get its people out of the cycle of crises. He called on the state to assume its responsibility in managing the country so that the international community can help LBN.
17. EGY media reported on 17/10 the **reopening of the Rafah border crossing** after the weekend. This came after Presidential directives were issued to facilitate the movement of PAL stranded at the crossing. Borders were (re)opened for humanitarian situations and assistance, technical crews and reconstruction equipment into the Gaza Strip.
18. LAS SG Abul Gheit SG of the GCC Al-Hajrf signed on 10/10 a MoU to strengthen cooperation between the **LAS and the GCC**. This lays emphasis on promoting common goals, with utmost support for Arab interests, primarily the PAL issue and other regional issues, notably through the exchange of information and visits.

Sign-off: Marina Vraila, acting Head of Delegation

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