In Libya the HRVP Borrell met with the Presidentail Council (President Mnefi and VP Kouni as VP al Lafi was out of the country) and MFA Mangoush. The scheduled meeting with PM Dbeiba had to be cancelled at very short notice as the PM was urgently requested to appear for a questioning at the House of Representative in Tobruk. The HRVP also met UNSE Kubis.

The implementation of the Berlin Conclusions was one of the main topics of discussion with the different interlocutors. All the interlocutors agreed that the country is living a delicate moment and insisted on the critical importance of the coming weeks for the future of Libya, with several of them warning of the risk of a return to a civil war if the political process is interrupted.

On the elections, the HRVP passed clear messages to all of them on the need to respect the calendar agreed in the political Roadmap. He stressed that the risk would be otherwise to see a crisis of legitimacy of the present institutions after the deadline of the 24th December. FM Mangoush ensured about the Government’s commitment to hold elections by the agreed date. The PM’s immediate decision to make resources available to the High Independent Electoral Commission for their preparation as well as the MoI engagement in preparatory work would be clear evidences of this. She put the blame for the current impasse on the HoR –and to a lesser extent on the LPDF- which was supposed to pass the relevant legislation and has not done so [*in the meantime, the HoR has produced a draft legislative framework for the Presidential elections, although the mechanism of consultation and adoption of it remains unclear and some Members of the House have already contested the draft law*]. FM showed some optimism on the fact that, if there is agreement on a clear plan, it will technically still be possible to hold elections. President Mnefi also ensured the commitment of the Presidential Council, which would go as far as considering the option of a presidential decree that could validate the call for elections. They would be now consulting with the High Judicial Council on the conditions and format of such an exceptional act. UNSE Kubis anticipated the move by the HoR on the presentation of a presidential law, which the Electoral Commission would have already committed to implement even in the absence of a vote by the plenary. He had not yet seen the draft but was informing of his exchanges with Speaker Aguila and reporting about the several conditions to the eligibility of candidates, which, if confirmed, would eliminate many high profile candidates.

On security, the HRVP congratulated the FM and the Presidential Council for the latest positive achievements with the opening of the coastal road, but made a strong appeal for the full implementation of all the elements of the ceasefire agreement and respect of the UNSC Resolutions calling in particular for the withdrawal of all foreign forces and mercenaries. FM Mangoush presented the general lines of the Stability Initiative she is developing in full coordination with the 5+5 JMC and with the UN involvement, explaining that the first Ministerial conference scheduled in Tripoli for 16 October would focus on security. The main objective would be to set the process of withdrawal in motion. The initiative for the moment looks like a rough plan. A first stage would focus on what the FM considered being the low hanging fruit of the withdrawal of Syrian mercenaries from both sides. This would be followed by a more complex exercise with the return of mercenaries from Sudan, Chad and Niger. The FM stressed that this operation would require close coordination with the States of origin and most probably support by international partners to make sure to avoid negative effects of these returns on other ongoing conflicts. The more politically charged issue of the withdrawal of Russian mercenaries and Turkish military forces would be left for a more distant future, but the FM informed she had already been in contact with both Moscow and Ankara. Dismantling of militias and establishment of unified security institutions would also be on the agenda. The FM explained that her main objective would be to start the process with realistic expectations instead of setting unrealistic objectives to avoid being unable to even start moving in the right direction. She also underlined the fragility of the current security situation and the need to keep the stability of the country as the main priority, as the risk to descend into civil war again was still real. To this end FM Mangoush as well as President Mnefi, reminded the EU of the need to be firm with the many internal and external spoilers. They also insisted on the need to support Security Sector Reforms in Libya and make sure that Libya manages to get sovereign, legitimate and stable institutions.

On the bilateral cooperation, the HRVP’s main message to the different interlocutors was the EU’s willingness to do more for Libya, in the short term (as proposed by his April letter to the PM) as well as in the longer term if conditions allow. Capacity building for the central and local administration and institutions is an area where the EU has recognised expertise and Libya has serious needs. With the FM, the HRVP refused Libyan criticism that migration is the only EU priority in the country, explaining that it is certainly a key priority but within a more comprehensive and global cooperation framework that the EU is ready to agree with Libya. The FM and the President asked to resume negotiations of the old Association Agreement and the HRVP replied that the EU would be ready to propose a full Agreement once conditions allow. The HRVP also mentioned Operation Irini, lamenting the misunderstandings around it, insisting on its impartiality and usefulness, and inviting Libya to make a better use of this important tool. He also made a specific reference to the offer to use Irini, as Operation Sofia in the past, for training of the Libyan Coast Guard, stressing that provision of equipment and training need to go hand in hand in a coherent package. The FM remained a bit evasive on this point, insisting on the need to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the operation.

The discussion with VP Kouni focused more specifically on the challenges of the border management in the South of Libya and the potential for cooperation with the EU. The expertise of EUBAM, now fully present in Tripoli, could be also used for the South, within the limits and constraints which operating on the ground entails. VP Kouni informed of his recent bilateral visits to Chad, Niger and Sudan. He revitalised the quadrilateral agreement with these countries but explained that Libya’s ultimate objective is to transform it into more effective bilateral agreements that would allow larger cooperation with these countries, including economic support. The visits of the Presidents of Chad and Niger, and of Vice-President Hemeti of Sudan are expected in the coming weeks. The EU was asked to contribute to these efforts, given its important interest and engagement in the Sahel.