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| **DELEGATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION TO TURKEY**  **DELEGATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION TO EGYYPT** | | |
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*Ref.: E-note EUDEL Cairo 51/2021, e-note EUDEL Ankara 144/2021*

**Subject: TURKEY/EGYPT – Joint e-note on the second round of TR-EGY exploratory consultations (Ankara, 7-08/09)**

**Summary**

* ***TR Deputy FM Onal and his Egyptian counterpart Loza held a second round of exploratory consultations on 7-8/09 in Ankara, addressing bilateral issues as well as a number of regional topics.***
* ***Muslim Brotherhood (MB): EGY sees some positive steps in reducing negative media coverage broadcasted from TR. EGY demands however to curb criticism from influential AKP members. TR MFA underlined that one has to take only the official statements by the President, FM and MFA into consideration and not adhere too much attention to such individual statements.***
* ***Libya: EGY wants to see a withdrawal of TR-backed forces and weapons from Libya. TR MFA however is confident that Cairo starts to understand that the TR military counsellors form no threat to EGY. For Ankara, the military cooperation agreement with the legitimate government is the basis for TR military presence and cannot be compared to the presence of mercenaries.***
* ***Eastern Mediterranean: Nothing much concrete seems to have been discussed on energy cooperation in the Eastmed. TR repeated its offer that the countries could start discussing on technical level the issue of maritime zones based on the work of 2007-2011.***
* ***Next steps: no major progress in upgrading diplomatic relations: DFM’s engaged to meet again before the end of the year. No concrete indications to bring the Ministers together in a formal meeting, neither to start discussing the exchange of Ambassadors.***

**Assessment**

* No substantial progress during the second round of the exploratory talks are to be noted. However, as TR is gradual improving its relations with the countries of the region (see also UAE); this is also setting a better atmosphere in the TR-EGY talks. The cautious TR approach on developments in Tunisia also fits in this framework.
* The countries’ appreciation of the talks remain however distinct. TR paints a rosier picture than EGY interlocutors do. The main topic of discussion appears, once again, to have been the bilateral agenda and in particular the harbouring of the EGY Muslim Brotherhood in TR. In that sense, one can clearly see that TR is the requesting party, which puts EGY in a more comfortable position to set the agenda and pace of the talks.
* Nothing much has changed from an EGY perspective and the process of meetings is “*a long ongoing path*” as mentioned by EGY interlocutors. EGY is likely to keep an identical pressure on TR to meet two main demands: toning down MB-run media in TR and their criticism towards the EGY regime, and the expulsion from TR of EGY MB members. Other files are rather far from being agreed upon, with the biggest issue, Libya.
* Ankara is walking a fine line to engage EGY and at the same time not to alienate its own public opinion. This being said, the lines are set by official Ankara and in particular by the Presidency, the Intelligence Service and the MFA. The continued criticism of the AKP foreign policy advisor Aktay on this course of action seems the longer the more an operation to keep the religious grassroots of the AKP on board. The TR argument that procedures against the MB need to strictly adhere to the regulations and legal rules in place is somehow remarkable, if one takes into account the state of rule of law and independence of the judiciary in the country. Persons accused of links to the Gulenist movement (“FETO”) cannot count on the same judicial prudence.
* Although wished for by Ankara, proper technical discussions on EastMed are not in the cards yet. EGY most likely did not accept nor turned down the TR bid. It is more convenient for EGY to use the EastMed as a bargaining tool. Furthermore, EGY does not fully exploit oil and gas resources within its current maritime borders, so additional maritime space would be useless without drilling capabilities.
* On re-establishing diplomatic relations, EGY MFA most likely intends to make this process “*long and slow*”. EGY interlocutors outlined that they would wait for TR initiatives and do not foresee any upgrade in the diplomatic relations in the near future.

**Detail**

EUDEL Cairo and EUDEL Ankara paid visits to the respective Ministry of Foreign Affairs in both countries and other interlocutors on the topic of the TR-EGY exploratory talks.

1. TR Deputy FM Onal and his EGY counterpart Loza held a **second round of exploratory consultations on 7-8/09 in Ankara**, addressing bilateral issues as well as a number of regional topics, such as Libya, Syria, Palestine and the Eastern Mediterranean. In run up of the talks, a meeting end of August between intelligence officials from both countries was reported.

The parties issued a joint statement underlining the desire to make progress and the need for further steps to facilitate normalization. The statement remains however vague and only refers to three common grounds between TR and EGY: the need to continue “*these consultations*”, the “*desire to make progress in the areas under discussion*” and “*the need for further steps to facilitate normalization of their relations*”. The wording remains more positive than the last statement on 6 May, which mentioned “*frank and in-depth discussions*” and the need for the two sides to “*evaluate the outcome of this round and agree on the next steps*”.

2. EGY interlocutors are prudent on **their assessment of the talks** and mentioned an “*ongoing process*” after eight years. EGY does not envisage a rapid improvement but rather supported the need for confidence-building measures. EGY interlocutors did not expect much from these first rounds but considered them as a “*positive step in itself*”. TR, said EGY officials, would like to “*show a breakthrough*” between the two nations. EGY MFA also qualified the atmosphere as a “good working mood”.

TR MFA sees the atmosphere in the Middle East improving and it assesses that in this general context Cairo is more enthusiastically talking to Ankara, at least compared to the first round of talks in May.

Since these first round of talks both parties have issued constructive statements and TR MFA claiming to have “*encouraged*” the highest level to follow this line to improve relations with EGY. Indeed, in the past months President Erdogan has made positive statements on EGY. In the same vein of improving the tone, TR MFA issued on 5 September a press release conveying its condolences for a bus-accident, which had taken place in EGY. TR and EGY FM’s also had a short chat in the margins of the Bagdad Conference for Cooperation and Partnership. However, TR assesses that it has delivered more in preparing its public opinion on the rapprochement then EGY has done so far (see also below).

3. The main topic of discussion appears to have been the bilateral agenda and in particular, the harbouring of the **EGY Muslim Brotherhood (MB)** in TR:

* TR MFA takes into consideration that a core point of attention for Cairo is the issue of MB media-outlets operating from TR. According to TR MFA Cairo is now more reassured that the targeting of the EGY leadership and the spreading hate speech from TR soil will not be allowed. On the other hand, for the TR government all the measures that are taken in this context need to be in accordance with the TR regulations, including the guarantee of freedom of expression.

EGY noted some progress on media coverage and noted that “*progress had been made*” with the prohibition of two of the most provocative anchor men. However, the channels have not been shut in spite of EGY requests. EGY assesses that the tone used by the media was “*less provocative*” but that media still criticized the EGY government’s actions. Additionally, harsher criticism can be found in some articles published by AKP’s counsellor.

* During the exploratory talks, the EGY side has referred to the public debate in TR on the TR-EGY rapprochement, and in particular, to the harsher criticism of AKP members (in particular AKP Foreign Policy advisor Aktay). This had led EGY to convey its griefs to TR authorities through its embassy in Ankara. TR MFA underlined that one has to take only the official statements by the President, FM and MFA into consideration and not adhere too much attention to these individual statements of AKP figures.
* The TR side is adamant that during the exploratory talks the EGY side has not provided any list of MB members that it wants to see handed over. The ground of the cooperation is hindered by a different definition of terrorism; whereas EGY sees the MB as a terrorist entity, TR sees the Gulenist (“FETO”) as a terror grouping. Nonetheless, the relevant authorities [*read the TUR intelligence service and the EGY counterpart*] are in touch to look into such issues that fall under their competence. If it would ever come to expulsion, this would need to be processed by the relevant judicial bodies according to the regulations in place. The existence of death penalty in EGY is in this context a matter of concern and one very sensitive to the TR public opinion.
* Both EGY and TR Embassy in Cairo confirmed that two MB, living in TR and responsible of the killing of the attorney general Hisham Barakat in 2015 and sentenced in EGY, were instructed to stay in TR with a prohibition order to leave the territory. However, EGY officials complained about the lack of action on the expulsion of MB living in TR, while TR officials raised the issue of the TR nationality granted to some of these individuals, making their expulsion impossible. TR officials suggested EGY authorities should collaborate against the Gulenist movement, by closing the Gulenist schools and centres. Unsubstantiated reports about the arrest of 15 MB in TR were not confirmed by EGY or TR MFA interlocutors

4. **Libya** is without a doubt the top regional issue between the two countries. Fr TUR the role of EGY in the national reconciliation process in Libya is clear, also because of its strong links with the Eastern political movements and tribes.

* TR MFA is confident that Cairo starts to understand that the TR military presence (“military counsellors”) constitute no threat to EGY. TR military presence is based on a military cooperation agreement with the legitimate government and for Ankara is no way to be compared to the presence of mercenaries. Cairo is keeping the same well-known positions, requesting the full withdrawal of foreign forces, without limiting it to RUS mercenaries. EGY colleagues warned against a “blame game” played by TR against RUS, each party accusing the other of maintaining their presence on the ground
* A major outstanding issue is the perspective on the Libyan elections, scheduled for 24/12. Whereas EGY is holding strongly to this date, TR points out lack of a free and secure organisation in eastern Libya. If these conditions cannot be guaranteed, voters might not turn out in this area. TR is concerned that Libyan factions (see Saleh) and EGY will consider the GNU illegitimate in case the elections are not hold on time. It is even more concerned that this possibility might be the pretext for Haftar to attempt another assault.

5. **PAL question and MEPP**: help offered by TR for reconciling the factions: TR interlocutor recalled that TR has high-level contacts with Gaza that could be used with EGY to find unity solutions for the PAL leadership. TR offered help to EGY to reconcile the factions, including Fatah and Hamas during the last exploratory talks in May.

6. Other regional files. On **Syria**, TR provided details on its position regarding Idlib, northern Syria, the political track and the fight against YPG/PKK. TR touched upon its relation to **Qatar** and the improving relation with the **UAE**, which is also positive in its relation to Cairo. interlocutors also mentioned that the “*Abraham accords*” normalising the relations between four Arab States and ISR had left EGY looking to extend its political contacts and avoid “*staying out of the regional scene*”.

7. Nothing much concrete seems to have been discussed on energy cooperation in the **Eastern Mediterranean**. TR repeated its offer that the countries could start discussing on technical level the issue of maritime zones based on the work of 2007-2011. As usual, this would imply extended maritime borders to EGY, compared to the agreements it has with EL and CY. TR MFA however acknowledges that EGY is still only in a phase to consider opening technical discussions. EGY MFA underlined it declined in the past the idea of an EastMed Conference with TR. EMGF membership or association was not mentioned during the talks.

In the meanwhile, EGY displays a resolute close relation with CY and EL on EastMed and EMGF issues. Few days before the TR/EGY meeting, a large CY delegation headed by its President visited EGY for an intergovernmental summit. On 4 September, President Al Sisi and CY counterpart Anastasiades agreed to accelerate work on the planned pipeline connecting Cyprus’ Aphrodite natural gas field to EGY. The pipeline will allow Cyprus to export its gas to Europe via EGY’s liquefaction facilities. The two leaders are set to meet againin October and December at two planned tripartite summits with EL. The EGY/CY committee affirmed that CY’s sovereign water rights and maritime borders should be respected. President Al Sisi added that any dispute should be solved according to international law and maritime demarcation agreements.

8**. Next steps**: DFM’s engaged to meet in again before the end of the year. Although TUR is requesting high-level steps, TUR MFA acknowledges that no fix plan exists until this date to bring the Ministers together in a formal meeting and to start discussing the exchange of Ambassadors.

**Signed off: Nikolaus MEYER-LANDRUT, HoD EUDEL Turkey and Christian BERGER, HoD EUDEL Egypt**