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| **DELEGATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION TO LIBYA** | | |
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**To: *Fernando GENTILINI, Managing Director for Middle East and North Africa***

**Subject: Libya – EUD Tripoli mission to Benghazi and Al-Qubbah 31/1/22 – 3/2/22**

1. **SUMMARY**

* ***Substantive and frank meetings with several key political actors, situated in Libya’s East, highlighted the fact that increased focus on the power dynamics of Cyrenaica could be more than instrumental in achieving progress towards a viable solution to country’s current crisis.***
* ***The quest for free and fair elections, alongside with substantive infrastructure and reconstruction efforts, as well as national reconciliation, are shared goals of the vast majority of Libya’s citizens.***
* ***This important common denominator could be instrumental to the International Community’s efforts to encourage Libya’s highly fragmented political class in making more substantive concessions on their entrenched interests.***

1. **ASSESSMENT**

The visit proved successful in providing EUD with a better picture on the geographical dynamics of Libya’s current state of play in the political process. An important factor to that end was the Delegation’s ability to conduct substantive and frank meetings with several key political actors situated in Cyrenaica, including LNA Commander General Haftar and Libyan Parliament Speaker Aquila Saleh.

Given the fact that the current state of political fragmentation in the country has been often identified as a division between two main adversaries, defined by a quasi-historic conflict between Libya’s East and West, the EUD’s visit was also instrumental to take stock of that premise.

By touring the areas visited on the ground, it was possible to assess that the Cyrenaican citizens’ grievances regarding the urgent need for substantial infrastructure development measures are valid beyond any reasonable doubt. The same applies to the urgency of massive reconstruction efforts in heavily damaged urban areas. The aforementioned need is sensed and witnessed almost everywhere on the ground, especially when compared to the uninterrupted infrastructure overhaul efforts that are visible in the capital.

Regarding other politically relevant factors, the structural differences in the security environment in Cyrenaica are more than apparent. Unlike the geographically highly fragmented militia rule in Western Libya, in Cyrencaica, the ubiquitous presence of General Haftar’s LNA forces, or those aligned under his supreme command, are the defining factor of the local and regional security architecture. On the other hand, Haftar’s security architecture, having to operate on a very large territory, is known to heavily rely on franchises with smaller armed groups on the ground.

However, the LNA under its Supreme Commander Haftar does undoubtedly provide an obvious point of reference suggesting a common and reliable umbrella that provides public security to a certain extent. The other side of this medal is equally apparent on the ground: The city of Benghazi, unlike the politically diverse capital of Tripoli, has the air of hushed space where citizens readily show obedience to the supreme command in fear of the ubiquitous presence of the security establishment.

As for the meetings with the main political actors, the visit was able to corroborate that Cyrenaica’s most influential actor in the current political process is HoR Speaker Aqilah Saleh. Pulling the political strings, often with surprise moves, at times swiftly in public on stage, but mostly from behind the scenes, he remains deeply rooted in his own rural and tribal environment, as well as in what many readily define by the label of “deep state”. Saleh’s motives appear to be driven by the personal conviction to be better suited than any of his political peers to lead Libya to stability.

Despite being a local actor, who mostly designs his elaborate scenarios and sly political moves from behind his desk, he has proved very astute in projecting power onto the national level, last not least owing to substantial support by national and external actors. His concept of government is focussed on concentrating power ideally in one hand, while not allowing for certain democratic aspirations of the people to imperil maintaining a maximum level of stability and control. For the time being, Saleh is undoubtedly trying to accumulate as much political power as possible for the current HoR, which he is determined to maintain under his strict supervision and control.

In the struggle for power in Libya, Saleh and Haftar appear to have formed a viable symbiosis between political shrewdness of the former and military clout of the latter. Both sides complementing each other’s missing part of the necessary toolbox to translate political projections into action in favour of their constituencies, themselves, and their external supporters.

General Haftar and his LNA, on the other hand, are geographical guests on Saleh’s turf that has seen fierce battles between local and international islamists against Haftar’s distinctly anti-Islamist LNA, inflicting tremendous damage on urban infrastructure. Cyrenaica, from where the revolution against the Ghaddafi regime started, is known to be more conservative than Tripolitania, and traditionally had strong Islamist leanings. The distinctly secular coalition between Hafter and Aqilah is therefore operating in a somewhat asymmetric environment. The coalition between the two actors is perceived by many Libyans, not only in Tripolitania, as representing the deep state’s battle for restitution against the February revolution.

For his part, general Haftar pursues the goal of assuming a nation-wide role and taking charge of the security management in all of Libya’s territory. He can be described as a national actor, temporarily confined to a regional role by, in his words, the “ongoing Turkish occupation” of Libya’s West. In order for Haftar to eventually achieve his national aspirations, obtaining and maintaining control over of Libya’s South is key. Should he lose significant areas of Libya’s South to the GNU, he would face imminent danger of being reduced to the role of a local actor. Moves by forces loyal to the GNU towards gradually consolidating their control over Tripolitania, while cautiously taking first steps to extend the GNU’s security management role into parts of the South, were perceived by Haftar as a formidable threat, against which he forcefully intervened almost immediately.

Against this backdrop, it can be concluded that generating viable compromise between the interests of the central government in Tripolitania, and legitimate Cyrenaican demands, is key for the success of the political process, as well as for achieving and enhancing stability in Libya. Needless to say that there is no obvious animosity between Cyrenaicans and other Libyans. Quite the opposite, Cyrenaican citizens appear to long for partaking in a new national push for infrastructure development and disbursing a dividend of peace and stability in Libya, which is accepted by the vast majority of Libyans as a geographically and ethnically diverse country.

However, regarding the constitutional process, Cyrenaican stakeholders will sooner or later likely resume their push for a federalist political system in Libya. For the time being, the political coalition around General Haftar, with his national ambitions, largely overrules such tendencies. The coalition’s constitutional aspirations appear to favour replacing the existing constitutional draft by a document that would prevent the forces of political Islam from fulfilling their aspirations of establishing a strong parliamentary system of government in Libya. However, the coalition’s main focus remains currently on extending its control over Libyan territory from its powerbase in Cyrenaica with strong support from neighbouring Egypt and other allied external actors.

In light of the above, the EU should maintain its focus on the preservation of stability and peace, and follow calls by UN SASG for elections as the only sustainable way out of the crisis. We should further utilize our position as co-chairs of the Economic Working Group to address some of the long-standing Cyrenaican grievances, in particular related to financial and budget issues. Last not least, a regular presence of the Delegation in Libya’s East would be an important asset to that end.

On the regional level, the EU could intensify inclusive high-level consultations on the Libyan crisis with all of the country’s direct neighbours. Last not least for strategic reasons, in order to counterbalance the visibly more than proactive role and close engagement of single regional actors in Libya’s political process. Increased and well balanced dialogue with those geographical neighbours of Libya, whose security is directly affected by Tripolitania’s fragmented militia situation, let alone the blatant security void in large areas of Libya’s South, could serve to positively reinforce the International Community’s efforts and regain the initiative in support of Libya’s stability.

1. **DETAIL**

The meeting with **General Haftar** (GH) on 1/2/22 was scheduled for LNA’s General Command HQs in Al-Rajmah, but eventually took place at the Benghazi Airport’s ViP Lounge.During the Meeting, GH stressed his own camp’s general narrative that the LNA is the only reliable Libyan force with the capacity and determination to fight terrorism, including the Muslim Brotherhood, and to end the Turkish occupation of the country. The overarching objective being the re-establishment of peace and security throughout Libya. In this context, the Russian military presence in Libya would also need to be terminated. GH deplored the International Community’s failure to realize the positive role of the LNA in the fight against terror and for the sake of stability in Libya, and accused SASG Williams and UNSMIL of pursuing a U.S. driven agenda interfering in internal Libyan affairs. GH further suggested that the EU should not follow any U.S. or UN lead on Libya, but rather pursue its own interests closely related to migration. To that end, the EU should wholeheartedly support the HoR’s ongoing efforts to replace the current GNU of PM Dbeiba, which he described as divisive. During the meeting, it became apparent that GH was largely unaware of the basic principles of the Berlin process. He was explicitly sceptical about the positive impact that potential progress on the related economical track could have on the Libyan peace process, as long as the security situation in the country was not under the control of the LNA. During the discussion, GH showed great interest in possible internal solutions to the major economic grievances of the Libya’s East and his own GNU. He maintained a lively discussion with his EU interlocutors without avoiding apparent differences in opinion, and was adamant to express his readiness to maintain contact with the EU Delegation in the future.

The meeting with the **Speaker of the Libyan House of Representatives (HoR),** Aqilah Saleh (AS), at his residence in Al-Qubbah on 2/2/22 enabled EUD to gain valuable insights in the personality and motivations of one of the country’s most influential political actors.Regarding the role of the International Community (IC) in Libya’s political process, AS was adamant to limit such role to providing support for decisions taken by Libyan institutions that enjoy legitimacy in representing the will of the Libyan people. He identified the HoR as the only Libyan institution to match that definition. For AS, the main reason for the IC’s inability to work to towards a viable solution to the Libyan crisis, is to be found in the IC’s erratic focus on Tripolitanian as opposed to Cyrenaican affairs, the latter of which were much more crucial for defining Libya’s future. Deploring the negative impact of the IC’s involvement in Libya over that last decade, AS criticized the work of current UN SASG Williams as being inconsistent and lacking sound legal reasoning. By the same token, AS described Libya’s current GNU as illegitimate. Moreover, the GNU’s failure to manage a successful elections’ process, would make swift action by the HoR, to replace it with another government, an inevitable deliverable. AS dedicated considerable parts of his presentation to the personal deficiencies and political failures of GNU Prime Minister Abdelhamid Dbeiba (PMD), as well as to the necessity of removing PMD from office as soon as possible. Regarding the process governing such removal, AS underlined that this matter would fall under the sole responsibility of the HoR, as there was no legal obligation whatsoever to involve any other institution. However, owing to political reasons, AS was willing to consult Libya’s High Council of State (HCS) in the process. AS further described such change of government as having no impact on the unity of Libya as the country would currently already be de-facto divided. He called on the IC not to accept any veto by Tripolitanian actors to the entirely legitimate decisions taken by the HoR. The IC should trust leadership from Cyrenaica. As could be seen on the ground, such Cyrenaican leadership was able to guarantee security and administrative unity in the territory put under the control of Libya’s National Army (LNA). The GNU should not get any credit for the recent period of relative peace in the country, since it was AS himself, who deserves merit for the stable ceasefire between the warring parties.

The 1/2/22 meeting with **Sheikh Senoussi Al-Hleik** (SEN), the presidential candidate of the Libyan Unity Party, who is a major Zweyi tribal leader from Eastern Libya and the Deputy Chairman of the Libyan Council of Tribal Sheikhs, focused on possible solutions to the current political crisis in Libya. SEN positioned himself clearly against partition or protracted division of the country. He underlined his conviction that the LNA is the only Libyan institution that could, if duly re-united, possibly re-establish security in the country. However, SEN clearly stated his discomfort with the presence of Wagner mercenary units in Eastern and Southern Libya, and described their withdrawal as a priority for his constituency. Stability and security would currently be the two main deliverables for the political process, and the International Community should stand in unity to work towards that goal. Successful national reconciliation would be key to achieving those deliverables. According to SEN, the current political efforts of HoR Speaker Aqilah Saleh to remove GNU PM Dbeiba from office were driven by personal motives of the Speaker, who is determined to rid himself of PM Dbeiba as a formidable political opponent. Against this backdrop, efforts should be made to regain the initiative on working towards solutions by re-shuffling and re-structuring the GNU with a view to addressing the legitimate grievances of Libya’s East, and finally holding elections under UN supervision. It would be the exclusive right of the Libyan people to make a decision on Libya’s political future. As countless migrants use Libya’s territory for their attempts to reach Europe, Libya would potentially be in a position to help improving the organization of such migratory movement through establishing a viable country-wide registration system for migrants from its southern borders to the Mediterranean coast. The exchange of relevant data with EU MS could be a potential game changer in the fight against uncontrolled illegal migration.

During the meeting on 1/2/22 with **Libyan Central Bank (CBL) Deputy Governor Ali Al-Hibri** (AH), rather hesitantly commended the recent successful steps towards the re-unification of the CBL. As his core messaging, AH highlighted the East’s main grievances with the CBL’s top management. He criticized CBL Governor Al-Kabir (CBG) for his refusal to delegate liquidity management to the CBL’s Eastern branch, and for his failure to respond to requests allowing free balance movement throughout the country, as well as for his unwillingness to reopen the CBL’s clearing house. In addition, he stated that Libya’s public debt issue in the East of the country has already undergone due process on a managerial and parliamentary level, and the whole issue was currently only pending a political decision by the central government to bear the costs. AH’s assessment of the economic future of the country was rather pessimistic. His main concern about Libya’s financial stability was the excessive spending by the GNU on public salaries without imposing any income tax, which would ultimately lead to a massive devaluation of the Libyan Dinar. The solution to all of those major financial issues of Libya’s East that negatively impact the local financial situation and the reunification process of the country, stands and falls, according to AH, with CBG’s willingness to reconvene the CBL’s Board of Directors (BoD). If this important step happened, the BoD would be in a position to foster a more inclusive decision making process regarding Libya’s pressing financial issues, also with a view to future challenges, such as the urgent need to re-structure Libya’s economy.

The meeting on 2/2/22 with **Benghazi Mayor Alsaqer Abojwary** (BM) provided insights on the actual state of funding for re-construction efforts in Libya’s East, which had witnessed major destruction of infrastructure by protracted fighting between LNA and ISIS over the control of Benghazi and other cities. BM deplored the notorious underfunding of the Benghazi and Derna Reconstruction Fund, which to date has received no more than 10% of its initially earmarked funding. Both cities are in desperate need for comprehensive reconstruction efforts, owing to massive levels of destruction. BM further stressed the need to reinforce the important PM’s decrees on de-centralization that are constantly being undermined by what he described as deep-state actors, who continue to successfully maintain their control over outdated lucrative municipal utilities’ contracting. BM explicitly commended the existing EU-funded projects in his municipality, and was eager to encourage substantial expansion of Europe’s engagement to that end. He criticized various shortcomings of the current GNU in terms of underfunding infrastructure projects in Cyrenaica as well as the GNU’s failure to make reconciliation and rehabilitation of housing for Libya’s numerous IDPs the focus of its efforts. However, BM did voice explicit concerns that the ongoing moves by the HoR to replace the current GNU could imperil the country’s current fragile political balance, which he diagnosed as being key to keeping open armed conflict in Libya at bay. From his position, the only viable solution to the crises would be moving towards elections after establishing a constitutional basis. The current GNU would be good enough to maintain peace for the time being and provide the necessary political umbrella of support for financing pending infrastructure projects worth billions of euros by Turkish companies in Cyrenaica. He further briefed EUD on the ongoing political efforts to facilitate the return of such Turkish economic cooperation to Cyrenaica and confirmed that this comparatively recent development enjoyed the support of the LNA’s Supreme Command.

1. **FURTHER DETAIL**

The above mission’s detailed programme is attached.

More detailed readouts of the individual meetings with the abovementioned political actors can be provided by the Delegation upon request.

A detailed report by the Delegation’s Operations’ Section on related meetings and activities has already been submitted separately.

*Signed-off: José Antonio Sabadell, HoD*