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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 – Weekly of 31/01/22 - Key issues**

1. **SUMMARY**

* ***The majority of Libya’s main political actors continues to be convinced that the country is not ready for elections. The ongoing negotiations are centred on a suitable mechanism to extend the transitional period by reshuffling the current GNU, or replacing it altogether.***
* ***All relevant negotiations are conducted behind closed doors. Therefore, the related parliamentary process is deliberately kept unclear by the HoR Speaker, who is currently focussed on removing PM Dbeiba and identifying a suitable candidate for a new GNU. As a result, Libya could once again slide into a state of further polarization with two parallel governments.***
* ***In prominent media appearances, SASG Williams underlined the necessity of elections within the framework of the existing Road Map, in order to prevent another protracted transitional period. She clarified her position that replacing the GNU would be counterproductive, but that the GNU’s access to budgetary means should be clipped.***
* ***As the re-grouping and re-positioning of Libya’s main military actors is continuing, a limited military confrontation remains possible, if there is an active attempt to remove the current GNU by force. However, given the PM’s entrenched position on the ground, it is more likely that the current belligerent rhetoric intends to extort political concessions.***

1. **ASSESSMENT**

As any concrete **electoral timeline** remains elusive, there can be no doubt that the Libyan people are sick and tired of the entrenched political establishment, including HoR and HCS. The corrupt GNU politicians are not an exception to that sentiment, but Libyans are well aware that the current GNU has not been around as long as all the other actors, who now want to replace it, based on the argument that its term is up. Moreover, there is no tangible popular movement, which would support the HoR presidency’s narrative that replacing the current GNU with another one would steer the country to successful elections.

**HoR Speaker Aqilah Saleh** continuesto employflexible tactics within the HoR creating a largely obscure political environment, in which it is difficult for his opponents to influence the situation in their own favour. As the HoR’s popularity has arrived at an all-time low, Saleh is aware that he should neutralize PM Dbeiba politically, before the latter becomes too entrenched to be possibly unseated. Ideally, Saleh would want to replace the GNU altogether to initiate another transitional loop, in which the HoR, under his command, would retain its decisive role for an undefined period.

However, **alternative deals** are possible, as suggested by SASG Williams, with PM Dbeiba remaining at the helm of the GNU, but with “clipped wings”, as she put it. This could happen, if powerful Tripolitanian actors, who share Saleh’s concerns, would force PM Dbeiba to accept a cabinet reshuffle with limited budgetary access for the GNU. Should alternative deals fall through, Libya would be in danger of either returning to a situation of two parallel governments, or heading towards a limited military confrontation in order to install a negotiated new HCS-HoR friendly government tolerated by a majority of Western militias.

The outcome of the current round of **negotiations** **between Libya’s political actors** continues to be uncertain. While the negotiation between HoR and HCS on a new RM are still ongoing, most observers expect that the HoR Speaker is soon to start the process of forming a new GNU. However, if he succeeds in doing both, negotiating a RM for another protracted transitional period without moving towards a constitution or parliamentary elections, and installing a new GNU dependent on the HoR Presidency, this would put him and his backers in a position of de-facto control over the political process. It is highly unlikely that this could be tolerated by most other influential actors.

The current **status quo** is characterized by a sustained period of relative peace based on a delicate balance between most relevant actors with fire power on the ground. More importantly, the current situation seems to have provided ample room for negotiations across the board to form new political alliances that are transcending the Libyan everlasting East-Western divide. But the fact of the matter remains that the entrenched Libyan political establishment, with of course the exception of PM Dbeiba’s own narrower camp, wants to stop him from using his control over government funds to bolster his position in Libya’s notorious power struggle.

As the internal Libyan negotiations continue to move towards a **reduced role of the international community** in the political process, SASG Williams has clearly spelled out her position that she considers the current attempts by the HoR Presidency, which are characterized by negotiating a new road map after replacing the current GNU, as counterproductive. However, her suggestion to clip the GNU’s budgetary wings can be considered a concession to the HoR that might show a way ahead. In any case, following the lead of the International Community is a slippery slope for Libyan actors, as it has become increasingly unpopular to heed foreign advice.

**Saifulislam Ghaddafi’s** about face in support of parliamentary before presidential elections is consistent with the position of his supporters and backers. The move is designed to side with the people against the political mainstream, but also to foster a climate of unpredictability. Ghaddafi’s image as the mysterious secluded leader capitalizes on the HoR’s all-time low in the popularity, as well as the utter distrust in the entire political establishment. It further draws upon nostalgia for a life in peace and relative prosperity.

While the **security situation** remains murky, no one expects open military style hostilities between Libya’s East and West over the PM position in the GNU. Both sides are negotiating with military actors on the ground, and whoever manages to strike a viable deal, will hold the key to the leadership of the GNU. The recent achievements of GNU Chief of Staff Al-Haddad (ChoD) in consolidating the ChoD forces’ military clout in the capital against the so called Tripoli Militia Cartel would potentially serve any given actor gaining leadership over the MoD chain of command.

The **LNA’s** ongoing efforts to enhance **control over Southern Libya,** including the crucial Sebha area, serve the purpose of strengthening general Haftar’s position in negotiations on a possible deal with PM Dbeiba, or for that matter, any other Tripolitanian actor who could potentially assume control over the GNU. The resurgence of ISIS activity in Libya underscores the importance for both, GNU and LNA, to establish control over Libya’s porous borders. Tripolitanian militia and LNA, have both actively fought ISIS in the past. Therefore, it is only natural that either of them would like to claim to be able to deliver Libya from that menace.

**DETAIL**

1. **Political situation**

The **HoR Roadmap Committee (RMC)** was scheduled to present its findings during the HoR session on 25/1. There were reports that the RMC needed more time, but one committee member announced just yesterday that a new RM to elections based on a permanent constitution was agreed upon and ready. However, other committee members recently stated that they were still in consultations with HCS committees on constitutional aspects, as well as on matters of reconciliation and security.

In the meantime, **HoR Speaker Aqilah Saleh** is reportedly committed to start the process for identifying a new GNU PM already before the features of the new road map have become clear. It is widely expected that he will start receiving applications of relevant candidates as of today. Once a PM candidate is chosen within 2-3 days, he or she would have to form a cabinet within 15 days. Presidential candidate Ismail Sthiwi, who wanted to travel to Tobruk to present his PM candidature to the HoR, was reportedly prevented by LNA forces from entering Cyrenaica on the Egyptian Libyan border.

Plans **on a new constitutional committee** by HoR Speaker Aqilah Salehwere publicly rejected in a statement signed by 43 members of the Constitution Drafting Assembly CDA.

The HoR spokesperson announced that the **parliament voted on excluding the** **HCS** from any say on the selection process for the new PM, but there were conflicting news on the relevant vote count. It was not generally accepted that this HoR decision enjoyed a majority of votes, as some sources quoted that around 30 MPs voted against it (both narratives quoting roughly 50 votes in total). However, the HoR Presidency announced the decision as valid. The public continues to be largely kept in the dark on whether a given HoR decision was taken by vote, or by the HoR Presidency, i.e. Speaker Saleh personally. Therefore, the HoR’s decision making process remains, for the time being, largely obscure,

The last **HoR session witnessed some turmoil**, after at least one MP commended several GNU achievements. Owing to a general state of disorder, the live broadcast of its proceedings were interrupted. In a related incident, a female MP from Zawiya was silenced by Speaker Saleh and threatened to be put under investigation, after she mentioned corruption within the HoR.

Presidential **candidate Fathi Bashaga** was back on political mainstage by pitching several media posts including speeches to his supporters, where he suggested that he was in the lead of a large coalition of patriots, which is about to replace the current GNU with another transitional government. He stated that there was consensus within the Libyan political establishment to form a new GNU, which would be responsible for and able to organize elections in due time.

Supporters of **Saifulislam Ghaddafi** announced that he was expected toreappearon the political scene with an important statement that would lead the country out of its current political crisis. However, the subsequently published statement was simply a written political declaration signed by his lawyer. It identified the HoR as being the main reason for the current impasse, and called for parliamentary elections first in order to remove the current HoR as Libya’s main political obstacle on its way to a better future.

The question of **national reconciliation** re-gained traction in the public debate. In a related development, PC chairman Al-Menfi received a tribal committee working on the release of prisoners associated with the former regime.

**PM Dbeiba** demonstratively conducted business as usual, but struggled to maintain a high public profile, despite traveling on an official visit to Chad with a delegation of several high ranking GNU ministers and officials including ChoD Al-Haddad. By the same token, he publicly tasked his GNU ministers with publishing their ministries’ expenditures in 2021, and stating the percentage of completion for projects. In another public move to attract public attention, he announced an upcoming ministerial meeting to discuss a budget for 2022 amounting to 125 billion LDs. His public expression of condolences on the deaths of the Libyan soldiers that were killed in clashes with ISIS terrorists in Libya’s South, a region that is mostly under LNA control, was immediately rebuffed by an LNA spokesperson as a cheap attempt to capitalize on the LNA anti-terror achievements.

**1st Deputy Prime Minister Al-Qatrani** yesterday issued a public statement calling on the Presidencies of HoR and GNU, as well as the RMC, to overcome their differences and agree on a straight RM with a clear timeline for elections. The statement was perceived by the Libyan media as an appeal to HoR Speaker Saleh and PM Dbeiba to put an end to their personal rivalry for the sake of the Libyan people.

**UN SASG Stephanie Williams** continued her talks with political stakeholders and clarified her position with regard to the existing Road Map in several high profile media appearances. She highlighted Libyan people’s desire to steer the protracted transitional period of government finally towards conclusion. The current legitimacy crisis could only be solved by elections, and successful national reconciliation. She also quite clearly expressed her doubts that the current plans by the Libyan political establishment to replace the GNU were the right way to achieve elections in a timely fashion.

**Turkish ambassador Yilmaz** travelled once again to Benghazi for meetings with Cyrenaican officials, where he was received at the airport by Deputy MoI Qaeem, one of PM Dbeiba’s most outspoken critics, who is well known for his belligerent anti-Tripolitanian rhetoric. During his meeting with the local mayor, Yilmaz was cordially welcomed by MP Badr Al-Naheeb, who is famous in Libya for his previous calls for Jihad against Turkey to liberate the homeland from Turkish invasion. The MP was part of the HoR delegation visiting Turkey last December. On the eve of Yilmaz’s visit, Naheeb had reportedly convened a meeting of 13 out of 53 Cyrenaica HoR MPs at his house with HoR Speaker Saleh present. During the meeting, Saleh was reportedly rallying the MPs support for his role to lead negotiations on behalf of Cyrenaican interests in Libya and abroad, deploring PM Dbeiba’s entrenched position because of the latter’s access to government funds and international support. In a public statement in Benghazi, ambassador Yilmaz reportedly pitched the idea of Turkish-Libyan military cooperation efforts to include Cyrenaica and suggested a possible HoR approval for the GNU-Turkish Maritime Agreement. In a related development, a local militia leader vowed to forcibly remove ambassador Yilmaz from Cyrenaica should he dare to spend the night.

1. **Libya in the international arena**

Owing to divisions within the UNSC, a 3-months rollover for the **UNSMIL mandate** is currently expected to be the upcoming UNSC decision on the mandate. The Libyan public discourse has taken notice of the ongoing discussion, but does not pay much attention to the issue, as Libya’s political establishment continues to be busy with internal negotiations.

PM Dbeiba’s recent visit to **Chad**, where he was accompanied by FM Mangoush, MoI Mazen, and ChoD Haddad, did not gain much traction inside Libya. Despite much media attention to the recent return of ISIS activity in Libya’s southern border region, possible plans to relaunch the security cooperation under the so called quartet agreement with Chad, Niger, and Sudan remained under the public’s radar.

1. **Security and security-related matters**

The number of military style **violent incidents** during the last week was limited. However, there were again various reports on military equipment and troops being relocated from Misrata to Tripoli.

**LNA forces** continued to consolidate their control over southern Libyan, with a focus on the Sebha area, and the relevant border regions. In Sebha, Abdullah Bin Teer, an Oil company CEO, allegedly involved in fuel smuggling, was assassinated. The LNA further continued its anti-terrorist operations against resurgent ISIS presence in Southern Libya. The LNA reportedly killed over 20 ISIS fighters and suffered 4 deaths among its own ranks. The resurgent ISIS presence is reportedly due to Chadian rebel activity in the area, with Tchadian rebel forces apparently tolerating the ISIS presence as a plus to their own firepower in order to deter LNA forces from establishing control over the area.

Tripoli witnessed an unsuccessful **assassination attempt** against the GNU’s Minister of Justice.

1. **Economic issues**

The GNU alerted the UNSC of various attempts to ship **crude oil** worth several hundred millions of dollars from Libya bypassing the NOC. The GNU called on the UNSC to take action in order to prevent these shipments, and notify operation **Irini** accordingly.

The Ministry of Education announced the closure of all schools in the wider Tripoli area for the next 2 weeks, because of a current surge in the **Covid** pandemic.

1. **Human Rights & Migration**

lOM continued its **migrant repatriation** flights, with 167 migrants returned to Tchad and another 148 from Misrata to Niger.

*Signed-off: José Antonio SABADELL, HoD*