Peacebuilding and state-building in Libya:
What role for the European Union?

Wednesday, 18th October 2017
Stanhope Hotel, Rue du Commerce 9, 1000 Brussels

Conference Report

On 18th October 2017, almost six years to the day since the liberation of Libya, the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS), the European People's Party (EPP) and the European Foundation for Democracy (EFD) hosted a conference on "Peacebuilding and state-building in Libya: What role for the European Union?". Led by a panel of experts, the conference focussed on the potential roles the European Union (EU) could play in the consolidation of peace in Libya, providing an opportunity to address key concerns and obstacles in Libya's path to stability and how to overcome them.

The conference was opened by Ms Roberta Bonazzi, President of EFD, followed by introductory remarks from Mr Joseph Daul, President of EPP, and Mr Elmar Brok, member of the European Parliament. The conference's key note speaker was H.E Dr Mahmoud Gebril, former Prime Minister of Libya and leader of the National Forces Alliance. The panel of experts for session one comprised journalist and researcher, Ms Mary Fitzgerald; non-resident fellow of the Atlantic Council, Mr Mohamed Eljarh; Mr Wolfgang Pusztai, Chairman of the Advisory Board of the National Council on U.S.-Libya Relations; and Mr Lorenzo Kluzer, Policy Officer for the Maghreb Countries in the European External Action Service. The session was moderated by Dr Demir Murat Seyrek, Senior Policy Advisor to EFD. The second panel was composed of Dr Arturo Varvelli, a Senior Research Fellow for the Italian Institute for International Political Studies; Dr Nikolay Kozhanov, an academy fellow with the Russia and Eurasia programme at Chatham House; and Ms Annemie Cumps, Desk Officer for Libya at the European Commission. The session was moderated by Dr Canan Atilgan, Director of the Regional Program South Mediterranean, KAS and closed by Ms Sabina Woelkner, Director of the Multinational Development Policy Dialogue, KAS, Brussels.

The opening session, entitled "Fragile state, fragmented territories, fractious actors", addressed the shifting balance of power across Libya according to various competing local factions, highlighting the current impossibility of a single constitutional actor. The second session focussed on the role external actors could play in fostering "conditions for stability and state-building in Libya", looking at how past practices by individual and regional actors have in fact complicated the situation and should not be repeated.

The *fil rouge* throughout the discussions was the importance for the EU to reach a better understanding of the current political and socio-economic climate in Libya, in particular the contending domestic actors. Indeed, the topic was first introduced in Mr Daul's welcoming remarks, who said understanding one another was the only path to conflict solution. Focus was placed on the fluidity and multiplicity of power in Libya, as Mr Daul warned that the implementation of any future guidelines which excluded local forces would not lead to any

practical solutions. Later, Dr Gebril touched on this point when he spoke of Europe's "obsession" with institutions and elections. He warned against the continued rush for elections and highlighted, "we have developed a state structure for a state that doesn't exist" while Mr Brok declared a totally centralised system simply "will not work". From the offset, Mr Brok hit upon the difficulty of instating a unified Government in Libya by noting that it has never been a centralised country, with the exception of the years under Mr Gadaffi. He underscored, however, that the EU supports the roadmap proposal of the new envoy for Libya, Ghassan Salamé. In his remarks, Dr Gebril supported Salamé's approach of bringing together the influential players in the Libyan conflict. However, he expressed concern over Salamé's decision to put the Libyan Political Agreement into the hands of the Joint Drafting Committee (JDC), suggesting the amendments first be drafted at the National Conference before being passed to the Committee. The National Conference, he claimed, reflects the real power on the ground as all Libyan groups, including militias, are to be present. Dr Gebril further cited vested interests amongst the JDC, as well as the House of Representatives (HoR) and the State Council, insinuating that political positions are becoming purchasable. Giving precedence to the JDC in this vein is a mistake which may "create some problems" in the future.

The issue of whom to invite to the National Conference table was promoted by Ms Fitzgerald, prompting questions on legitimacy and representation. According to Ms Fitzgerald, the difficulty in ascertaining legitimacy, and by extension a place at the National Conference, is manifold; current concepts of control rely on a balance of allies, creating a fluid and ever-changing shift in power due to deep internal fissures. The role of tribes was used to illustrate this complexity; given their role in conflict resolution, tribes have gained certain legitimacy in the eyes of the population. However, they have also been considered regressive, particularly in relation to women's rights and suffer fractioning, remaining deeply divided over both local and national issues.

The role of domestic actors is not the only obstacle to overcome; during his presentation, Mr Eljarh addressed both the internal and external barriers to peace in Libya. For the internal drivers of instability, the lack of a functioning state institution underlay many of the problems. For example, the institutional void and, by extension, lack of inclusive military command structure, has enabled the proliferation of militias and weapons across the country. Mr Eljarh called for the creation of a structure able to have a monopoly over the use of legitimate force – including on Libya's borders. Similarly, Mr Eljarh cited the lack of governance as a catalyst for instability following the 2011 liberation; the swift withdrawal of the international community meant no institution was capable of upholding stability and structure and the multiplicity of actors were unable to make decisions on key issues.

Mr Eljarh cited the rise of foreign armed groups, together with foreign interference and human traffickers, as further external drivers of violence and insecurity. Indeed, the emergence of external opposition groups, such as Daesh, who exploit Libya's power vacuum and use it as a foothold between Europe and their shrinking caliphate, heightens instability in the region. Mr Pusztai estimates between six to eight hundred Islamic State (IS) fighters are currently in Libya, with some Islamic extremists influencing Libyan politics from the shadows.

The issue of illegal migration was also raised throughout the conference, particularly in relation to human rights abuses by traffickers, with Dr Gebril calling for a crackdown on transnational organised crime by the EU. Dr Gebril remained staunchly critical of the EU's focus on managing the Libyan border, at times supposedly with the support of militias. With Africa's population expected to double by 2050, Dr Gebril reiterated that this current policy has no long-term prospects, stating that by this time millions of young Africans will be "marching North, looking for jobs". Both Dr Gebril and Mr Brok placed importance on the EU and Libya working together and 'joining hands' in the fight against human traffickers. Similarly, the

smuggling of fuel was cited as a barrier to stability; Mr Kluzer addressed the current financial situation in Libya, particularly its economic policies regarding oil. Mr Kluzer criticised the use of state subsidies for petrol, an act he suggests costs the Libyan treasury billions of dinar. Furthermore, alliances between local militias result in armed groups profiting considerably from distortions in the official exchange rate and black-market price. Mr Kluzer suggested this is an obstacle Libya could overcome independently. Importance was also placed on better defining the rights and powers of a future elected president; Mr Kluzer warned that the installation of a president whose powers are not clearly decided could lead to an abuse of power, calling for checks and balances to the constitutional system.

The second panel of experts was led by Dr Varvelli, who declared that from the outset the Libyan crisis has been shaped by the diverging interests of external actors. Whilst some states have been more proactive in their influence, using Libya as a political stage in which to export their political model, others have influenced events by simply withdrawing. Similarly, the divergence within the EU over the 2011 crisis was highlighted, amid claims EU engagement and coordination has only gotten worse. Dr Varvelli summarised that without an agreement between such influential external actors, any agreement between internal Libyan actors would be difficult. The role of internal actors was once again mentioned by Dr Kozhanov, who discussed Russia's changing approach towards Libya given its multiplicity of powers. Particular emphasis was placed on the security and stabilisation of Libya to ensure stability of the region, given Russian influence. Dr Kozhanov also attributed Russian interest to the elements which make the Libyan case unique; firstly, and as mentioned throughout the conference, the fact that Libya is not a fully legitimate player enables Moscow's involvement with multiple actors on the ground, rather than with a few central players. What further attracts interest is that Libya allows Moscow to be 'opportunistic'; given the lack of a clearly defined vision of Libya's future, together with the low-cost of involvement for Russia, Moscow can be both 'pragmatic and opportunistic' in their involvement.

Returning to the introductory remarks made by Dr Gebril and Mr Daul, Ms Cumps addressed the challenges facing the EU in its bid to prevent conflict and promote international stability, peace and unity. Ms Cumps offered a more detailed account of how stability could be achieved, breaking the process down into three stages; firstly, prevention, relating to a better understanding of dynamics and actors on the ground, secondly, peace-building through mediation and preventive diplomacy, and thirdly, post-conflict management. The lack of on-the-ground counterparts was cited as a clear barrier, and a 'coordination platform' was suggested as a tool for cooperation with local actors.

The conference was closed with a questions and answers round, with particular attention placed on the importance of a united Europe as a supporter, rather than implementer, of stability, change and state building in Libya. Participants of the conference also raised issues relating to how exactly the EU could be better informed on the situation, as well as questions on whether individual EU member states could, or should, exercise their influence over local armed actors. Indeed, the lack of past EU coordination was a common concern among participants, to which experts replied that a united European Union remains a precondition to achieving a sustainable solution. Ms Woelkner made the closing remarks, thanking the panel and participants for a successful and engaging discussion on the path to peacebuilding in Libya.