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**i) Executive summary**

On 8 April 2021, IISA convened the fifth webinar of the process for human and energy security in Libya. The meeting was attended by participants from Libya, UAE, Egypt, Italy, and regional experts. Participants acknowledged how timely the meeting was and discussed both the current and emerging dynamics of the conflict.

Following an introduction on the current dynamics of the new government in Libya, participants considered the extent to which the new governance structure is sustainable and to what extent it could bring security and stability in Libya.

The following session saw participants discuss the capacity the new government would have for delivering on energy and human security. The discussion centered around how inclusive the new Government might be and if this would be sufficient to deliver on human securities. Participants considered what its priorities should be in order to deliver human security and concluded the second session by examining the role that the new Government can play in relation to revenue allocation and resource management.

Finally, participants concluded the discussion by considering the key priorities on the path to human security in the region, and considered how this group could be most effective in facilitating that.

## **ii) Introduction**

The Government of National Unity was formed on 10 March 2021 to unify the rival Government of National Accord based in Tripoli and the Second Al-Thani Cabinet. Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh was selected as Prime Minister during the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF); intra-Libyan meetings, that were held and facilitated from October 2020 by UNSMIL (The United Nations Support Mission in Libya).

## **iii) Meeting summary**

### **Introduction by regional expert**

An introduction was given by a regional expert who outlined, with cautious optimism, the positive moment in which the meeting took place, due to the new government in Libya and its approval by the House of Representatives in Tobruk. The expert felt that this factor plus the handing over of power were all good news for necessary future outcomes.

## **Politics**

### **Domestic**

Participants discussed at length the impact of the new Dbeibeh government. The regional expert felt that this government was good news and highlighted the expectations of the Libyan people. However, the Libyan representative felt that the election lacked legitimacy. A participant from the UAE felt that the move towards a more federal system could alleviate the competition but may have costs. They argued that the political culture of Libya can be authoritarian but that this would not be the easiest structure for a democratic system to take place in. Due to decades of conflict and civil war it would be difficult to foresee a strong

democratic process because of a weak civil society and civic values are important for civic processes to succeed.

By contrast, a participant from Egypt felt that it is not so important to hold elections. They suggested that there is no homogeneity in tackling problems, as some ministers have a faster tempo than others, and some are making decisions that are causing discontent. A participant from the wider region felt that commitment to elections is important, but that the credibility of the elections is also important. They also expressed the importance of a representative government that is seen to be representative and powerful in order to fulfil the expectations of the Libyan people.

A participant from the UK agreed that the expectations of the Libyan people, for example guaranteed access to basic infrastructure such as electricity and water, were key, and that the Government of National Unity (GNU) would find delivering these difficult at that time.

## **International**

The regional expert felt that there would be some remarkable international developments that had contributed to the changes taking place in Libya. Firstly, the inauguration of the Biden administration earlier in the year initially saw much clearer US foreign policy messaging on Libya. Secondly, although the dynamics have and continue to change at the time of writing, when the meeting was held in April 2021 experts felt that the first important steps towards ending the intra-Gulf dispute contributed to de-escalating tensions in Libya.

Participants from Europe discussed the attempt by Europeans to demonstrate a new level of unity towards the situation in Libya. A delegate from the UAE agreed that the EU appeared a unified delegation, but in reality, from one state to another, the EU were not following the same line. A participant from Italy agreed that the EU had to move much further than beyond the 'photo opportunities' of April 2021. An observer from Germany concurred that Europe had

to move beyond false hope that the US/Biden administration would offer a solution, and added that Europe needs a more “holistic approach” to Libya. They affirmed that they felt the UN Security Council resolution 2570 (2021)<sup>1</sup> in which the Council strongly urges member states to withdraw ‘all foreign forces and mercenaries from Libya without delay’, was a necessary measure. However, its impact was considered somewhat limited, particularly in view of the heavy presence of Russian-backed mercenaries.

### **Military**

The regional expert expressed surprise at the lack of push on the military front by the new Dbeibeh government. They felt and assumed that the Government would most likely wait until after elections to delve into the issue of pushing for any unification of the military or the driving of new appointments.

Overall, the participants agreed that the militias were feeling more empowered for a number of reasons, one being the lack of integration of armed groups and the unwillingness of the new, or past administrations, to push for this. A participant from the UK suggested that the confidence gained by the militias was also to do with the departure of the Minister of Interior, who had announced a Decree (1508/20) to create a mechanism and programme for the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) of militias into the Ministry, towards the end of 2020.

In addition to this, concern was raised by an Egyptian participant about the release of prisoners, often former militia, back into Libyan society. The participant felt that the struggle for these individuals to reintegrate was a very present issue, stating that many refused to, or found it difficult to give up arms, once again falling back into the hands of militia groups. This participant felt quite strongly that elections would not stop them from using weapons.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s\\_res\\_2570.pdf](https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_res_2570.pdf)

A participant from the UAE questioned who would provide the militia with income and positions and suggested that they could be diluted into the military, “an arduous task” but one that the participants felt the government could possibly achieve.<sup>2</sup>

### **Economy and society**

The regional expert gave an economic overview, affirming the new Prime Minister's personal interest in economic pursuits through a keenness to roll out investments and projects. In fact, the expert suggested that some important stakeholders insist that the mandate of the Dbeibeh government is not to pursue investment plans, but to primarily deliver the elections. In addition, by 8 April 2021 when this meeting was held, the proposed budget had not yet been approved.<sup>3</sup>

Overall, human security was a strong theme from the discussion. A Libyan participant felt that the optimism of the Dbeibeh government was merely a “honeymoon period”, that would be short lived once there were no changes seen in the lives of Libyans who were suffering with a lack of infrastructure, economic opportunity, displacement, and effective public health solutions. The participant suggested that the role of women was growing in presence and importance and stated that Libyans would generally support this.

A participant from Egypt highlighted the importance of solutions coming from within the Libyan people themselves. They strongly urged the group that ignoring the tribal ties in Libya is to ignore one of the “fundamental bases of Libyan society”. They emphasised the importance of intra-Libyan dialogue and concluded that it would not be a feasible or successful solution to “apply a Western paradigm to Libyan society.”

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<sup>2</sup> Subsequently, at the time of writing, August 2021, the GNU has been struggling to gain control as militia groups still control large sections of south and east Libya. In addition, it has been heavily criticised for legitimising militias by paying them salaries and hence seemingly incorporating them into state institutions. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/08/libya-government-of-national-unity-must-not-legitimize-militias-and-armed-groups-responsible-for-harrowing-abuses/>

<sup>3</sup> The budget was formally rejected by the House of Representatives on 20 April 2021 and by June 2021 was still being blocked.

## **COVID-19**

At the time of the meeting the Libyan participant noted gladly that there had been 100,000 doses of the Coronavirus vaccine, out of a promised million doses, arriving in Libya, but that these would take a while to filter down to the average Libyan.

Another participant agreed that there would be a need for the House of Representatives to negotiate a budget, however as various constituents would demand budget, often through salaries, that there would be considerable excess spent in such areas, rather than investing in Covid responses and an improved healthcare sector to deal with that.

## **Moving forward**

The combination of these political events, despite potential hurdles, was seen as a brief moment of optimism by the majority of participants. All participants agreed that it would be important to be open and honest about the challenges faced by this group in the context of attaining human security in Libya. A priority list of issues that the GNU should tackle first was determined:

1. Security issues and national reconciliation.
2. Support for electoral bodies and preparation to ensure legitimacy within the electoral process.
3. Role of the militia.

The role of the militias and their ability for coercion within the election process was considered the most pivotal element that would influence the future of Libya.