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THE LIBYAN CONFLICT AND THE CHANGING POSITION OF EUROPEAN ACTORS

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INTRODUCTION

The intervention in the political processes in Libya of some EU countries, especially France, Italy and Germany, has recently gained a new dimension, and has become clearer in the following period when Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh was appointed as the Prime Minister of the Libyan Government of National Accord. In this sense, the appointment of transitional administrative staff to lead the country to the elections of 24 December at the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum held between 1-5 February 2021 in Geneva under the auspices of the United Nations (UN) has been a turning point with regard to EU countries' attitude in Libya. The Head of the Presidential Council, Mohamed al-Menfi, and the Dbeibeh government, which received a vote of confidence from the parliament on 10 March, attracted significant attention from the European Union (EU) countries in the last two months, particularly from Italy and Greece. While a similar interest was also

shown by countries such as France, Germany and Malta in reshaping their relations with the legitimate government in Libya, the situation paved the way for the EU countries to implement new strategies in Libya.

Expressing at every opportunity their support for Libya's reconstruction process and the newly established Government of National Unity (GNU), the EU countries have intensified their diplomatic contacts with Libya while focusing on their own political and economic gains. While some of these countries consider Libya as a security area where they can control the flow of irregular migrants to Europe via the Mediterranean, others aim to provide opportunities for their companies to meet the needs in the reconstruction of Libya. Apart from security and economic approaches, states such as Greece and France tried to balance Turkey in political and military terms and undermine its gains due to concerns over its growing influence in Libya and the security

and maritime jurisdiction agreements signed with the UN-supported Government of National Accord (GNA) on 27 November 2019. While Turkey's position remains the same in the face of these initiatives, Ankara maintains its good relations with the GNA in various areas.

Recent activism and transforming policies toward Libya of the EU countries directly or indirectly involved in the Libyan issue are important in revealing these countries' motivations

in Libya. This study focuses on the motives behind the recent Libya policies of countries such as Greece, Germany and Malta, as well as Italy and France, which have a colonial past in Libya, and on what level these countries' Libya policies can be discussed within the context of regional alliance or competition. The study also examines which foreign policy priorities these countries have in the context of Libya, based on their previous Libya policies and in the light of recent developments in the region.

RESPONSES AND REPERCUSSIONS



Second Berlin Conference on Libya

Considering the events in Libya after 2011 and especially after the Libyan Political Agreement (LPA) signed in 2015, the EU countries became the target of criticism due to their rather passive attitude in the face of the aggression by the leader of militia groups in the east of the country, Khalifa Haftar, and his coup attempt against Tripoli that started in April 2019. The environment of uncertainty in the country and the volatility of the balances on the field prevented the EU countries, which follow a balancing policy between the parties, from openly supporting either one of the parties. The Palermo Conference held in November 2018 and the Berlin Conference hosted by Germany in January 2020 failed to produce constructive solutions to the crisis, and cast doubt over the legitimacy of the EU initiative's relations with the regional actors in Libya. The negotiations, which started in Geneva in August 2020 under the auspices of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), resulted in a ceasefire prepared by

the 5+5 Joint Military Committee on 23 October 2020, revealing the process up until the present day. At the time, senior officials from the above-mentioned countries made visits to Libya's new leadership in the period from March to July 2021 and expressed their commitment to Libya's state-building process. The motivations and sincerity of these countries in their recent policies toward Libya remain uncertain.

Italy

Italy, which was involved in the Libyan crisis in order to protect its gains in the post-Gaddafi period, has been in close contact with Libyan decision-makers, particularly in the fields of energy, illegal immigration, and accordingly, coastal security. Although Italy seems as if it approaches the situation in Libya with humanitarian concerns, it can be said that Italy's Libya policies are driven by its energy and economic interests.¹ Thus, it can be argued that the energy company ENI and its interests are

¹ Michael Tanchum, "Libya, energy, and the Mediterranean's new 'Great Game'", *Elcano Royal Institute*, 23 September 2020.

at the center of Italy's aims and main priorities in Libya. The fact that ENI's area of operation mostly covers the regions controlled by Libya's legitimate government, the Government of National Accord (GNA) led by Fayez al-Sarraj, pushed Italy to provide diplomatic support to the GNA throughout the process.

In addition, Italy assumed responsibility for the training and financing of the Libyan coast guard units in order to protect the coast and prevent irregular migration via the Mediterranean.² Hosting the International Conference on Libya in Rome in 2014, the country closed its embassy in Tripoli as a result of Haftar's attacks and escalating conflicts in 2015; but reopened it in 2017. The rivalry between France, which aims to increase its influence in Libya through the Total company, and the desire to play an active role in the resolution of the Libyan crisis, prompted Italy to lead the Palermo summit held in 2018. However, the summit was unable to bring the rival parties together and produce concrete solutions.

Italy, which implemented a balanced diplomacy between active rival parties from the date of Haftar's attack on Tripoli in April 2019 until the LPDF, welcomed the GNU, an outcome of the LPDF. In this context, Italian Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio became the first member of the cabinet among the EU countries to visit Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh and the newly established GNU in Tripoli.³ Within the scope of his visit on 21 March 2021, Di Maio held meetings with Foreign Minister Najla Mangoush, Head of the Presidential Council Mohamed al-Menfi, his deputies Abdul-



Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs Luigi Di Maio.

lah al-Lafi and Mossa al-Koni, as well as with Dbeibeh. The role of Italian companies in various sectors in the reconstruction process of Libya and the issue of migration were among the prominent topics in the talks.

On 6 April, 15 days after Di Maio's visit, the new Prime Minister of Italy Mario Draghi made his first foreign visit to Libya and met with Dbeibeh and al-Menfi in Tripoli. In his statements after the meetings, Draghi stated that Italy approached the issue of migration with "not just geopolitical but humanitarian" point of view, and suggested that the cooperation should continue as it did in the past.⁴ Another issue discussed during Prime Minister Draghi's visit to Libya was the strengthening of commercial relations and increasing investments. In this context, negotiations continue between the Italian energy company ENI and the Libyan state subsidiary GECOL (General Electricity Company of Libya) on the establishment and operation of renewable energy power plants in the Fezzan region in the south of Libya.⁵ In this sector, the French energy

² Oğuz Güngörmez, "İstikrar Arayışından Denge Siyasetine: İtalya'nın Libya Politikası", ed. Burhanettin Duran, Muhittin Ataman, *Libya Krizi: Bölgesel ve Küresel Aktörlerin Politikaları*, İstanbul: SETA Yayınları, December 2020.

³ "Italian minister meets Libya's new Tripoli government", *AP*, 21 March 2021.

⁴ "Italy PM Draghi urges Libya to maintain ceasefire", *Al Jazeera*, 6 April 2021.

⁵ "As extreme temperatures cause longer power cuts, Aldabaiba and GECOL head come under pressure", *Libya Herald*, 29 June 2021.

company Areva is also very active throughout the Sahel and in the south of Libya.⁶ So much so that the Fezzan region is turning into a competition ground for France and Italy, which are dependent on uranium resources in the region, both for nuclear energy production and for the development of the defense industry.

On 23 April, Libyan Foreign Minister Najla Mangoush made a visit to Italy where she spoke before the Italian parliament. Mangoush, touching upon the issue of mercenaries and foreign troops in her speech, stated that dialogues were started with Turkey and other states for the removal of foreign forces from the country.⁷ Mangoush's statements received a wide coverage in the Italian press, and some media outlets even pulled her words out of their original context and emphasized that her statements directly targeted Turkey. However, on 27 April, contrary to the statements of the Italian authorities in the past, Foreign Minister Di Maio described the Security and Maritime Jurisdiction agreements between

Turkey and Libya as bilateral agreements between the two states, criticizing the comments of third parties regarding the issue.⁸

With its increasing interest in Libya, Italy reopened its consulate in Benghazi on 29 April, and Foreign Minister Di Maio stated that the consulate was important for Italy's interests not only in Tripoli, but also in Cyrenaica and Fezzan.⁹ On the other hand, Dbeibeh held bilateral meetings with Prime Minister Draghi on Monday, 31 May, in the capital city of Rome. A warm atmosphere was observed in the joint press statement made after the meetings, during which Prime Minister Dbeibeh emphasized that Italian companies were the strongest partners for the reconstruction of Libya, and stated that ENI was an important partner in increasing daily oil output to 4 million barrels. After his meetings with Draghi, he participated on the same day in a business forum titled "The new Libya introduces itself to Italian companies" organized by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Speaking at the forum, Dbeibeh stated that the country

It seems more likely than the rest of the EU countries that Turkey, which the interim government considers as a sincere and reliable actor thanks to its past activities, will share a common ground with Italy for the preservation of the current ceasefire and stability in Libya.

⁶ Mark Hibbs, "Uranium in Saharan Sands", *Carnegie Endowment For International Peace*, 22 January 2013.

⁷ "Mangoush to Italian parliament: Foreign forces must leave Libya. HSC: its not for government tor everse Turkey agreement to provide forces, *Libya Herald*, 24 April 2021.

⁸ "Di Maio: Libyan-Turkish maritime agreement is a bilateral issue", *Libya Observer*, 17 April 2021.

⁹ "Italy reopens consulate in Benghazi", *Libya Observer*, 29 April 2021.

needed the help of many countries in the reconstruction efforts, but that Italy had a privileged position.¹⁰

Parallel to these developments, Mohamed al-Menfi also made similar statements the day before the Second Berlin Conference held in Berlin on 23 June. Menfi, in his statements after his meetings with Prime Minister Draghi, said that Libya considered Italy as a 'strategic partner'. This shows that Libya puts Italy, which had a more neutral stance compared to France, in an important place in the rebuilding of Libya's future.¹¹

It seems more likely than the rest of the EU countries that Turkey, which the interim government considers as a sincere and reliable actor thanks to its past activities, will share a common ground with Italy for the preservation of the current ceasefire and stability in Libya. Thus, it can be said that the Dbeibeh government gives the two countries a different status in the social, political, and economic reconstruction of the country. Indeed, the fact that Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu said in his statement during his visit to Rome on 27 June that Turkey would stay in close contact with Italy for a permanent political solution in Libya points to the potential cooperation opportunities between the two countries in the disputed Eastern Mediterranean region, and especially in the North African country.¹² In addition, following Italian Defense Minister Lorenzo Guerini's visit to Istanbul on 13 July and his meetings with his counterpart Hulusi Akar, the parties' emphasis on good neighborly relations between the two countries confirms the positive signals regarding the future of Italy-Turkey relations in the Eastern Mediterranean and Libya.¹³



French President Emmanuel Macron meets President of the Presidential Council Mohamed al-Menfi and his deputy Musa Al-Koni.

France

France, one of the countries with the most intense engagement among the European actors in the political processes in Libya, has increased its initiatives especially in recent years. The most important element of Paris' strategy for Libya, which pursues economic, political and military goals in Libya in line with its national interests, is to create the perception that France is an impartial foreign actor. Accordingly, France aims to act as a mediator between rival parties in Libya and in this way, it tries to gain influence by having a say in the future of Libya. This approach can also be defined as a strategy that tries to conceal the interventionist policies of France. In this way, Paris succeeds in appearing as an actor that avoids direct intervention, while aiming to remain in a position where it can directly affect the political processes in Libya behind the scenes.

France's direct interests in Libya include economic and energy activities, and exports of military technology. France placed the interests of Total, which has active investments in

¹⁰ "Libya Başbakanı Dibebe: Yeniden inşa için en iyi partnerimiz İtalya", *BBC*, 31 May 2021.

¹¹ "Italy is a 'strategic partner', says interim Libyan leader", *Arab News*, 22 June 2021.

¹² "Turkey, Italy cooperation vital for Libya, region", *Daily Sabah*, 28 June 2021.

¹³ "Libyan peace process on table in Turkish Italian meeting", *Libya Observer*, 15 July 2021.

the Gulf of Sidra and the Oil Crescent region under the control of Khalifa Haftar, at the top of its priority list in Libya, and considered Libya as a former colonial country from which it imports secure and cheap oil via the Mediterranean. In fact, France's interests in the field of energy can be seen in its covert support to Haftar.

France became the first country to intervene in Libya at the international level following the anti-Gaddafi protests that started in 2011. In March 2011, NATO-backed French warplanes bombed many locations in Tripoli, Misrata and Sidra, igniting the chaos environment that has reached to this day. The 10-year civil war and the deep political and social crisis the country has fallen into raised questions over French military intervention in terms of its timing and content. The architect of France's post-2011 Libya policies is largely cited as the then Defense Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian. Le Drian masterminded the support to the operations carried out by Khalifa Haftar against the so-called Islamist groups in the east of Libya after 2014.¹⁴ So much so that after the LPA, France approached both the GNA and Haftar's side in an equal manner, until a helicopter crash in 2016 revealed

France's Libya policies. Three French soldiers, who turned out to be on a secret mission, lost their lives during Haftar's ongoing air operations against the so-called Islamist groups in the east of Libya.¹⁵ France, which participated in the operations on the side of the illegitimate forces against the legitimate GNA recognized by the UN, has implemented since then two-sided policies under the name of active diplomacy. President Emmanuel Macron, shortly after his inauguration in 2017, brought Fayeza al-Sarraj and Khalifa Haftar together in La Celle Saint-Cloud near Paris, and after the talks, French and international media outlets announced that a ceasefire had been reached between the parties.¹⁶ However, the following process revealed the opposite of the picture drawn in the French-led negotiations. Trying to portray the putschist Haftar as a legitimate actor at every opportunity concerning the Tripoli attacks that started in 2019, President Macron supplied weapons to Haftar via Egypt despite the UN Security Council's (UNSC) arms embargoes. In this context, Rafale fighter aircrafts sold by France to Egypt were used in numerous air operations between April 2019 and June 2020.¹⁷

Until the conflicts that lasted till June 2020, Macron and Foreign Minister Le Drian saw Haftar as part of the solution and based France's future strategy on Libya around him.

¹⁴ Paul Taylor, France's double game in Libya, *Politico*, 17 April 2019.

¹⁵ Leonard Faytre, "İstikrar Arayışından Denge Siyasetine: İtalya'nın Libya Politikası", ed. Burhanettin Duran, Muhittin Ataman, *Libya Krizi: Bölgesel ve Küresel Aktörlerin Politikaları*, İstanbul: SETA Yayınları, December 2020.

¹⁶ "Libyan rival leaders agree to ceasefire after Macron-hosted talks", *The Guardian*, 25 July 2017.

¹⁷ "How French warplanes sold to Egypt helped Libyan warlord Khalifa Haftar", *Mediapart*, 29 September 2019.

Until the conflicts that lasted till June 2020, Macron and Foreign Minister Le Drian saw Haftar as part of the solution and based France's future strategy on Libya around him.. Taking its Libya policies to a different level with the new actors elected after the LPDF, France signaled its support to national peace and reconciliation by establishing close ties with the Prime Minister of the new unified government Dbeibeh, and the President of the Tobruk-based Presidential Council, Menfi. In his statement during Menfi's visit to France on March 23, President Macron stated that he was indebted "to Libya and the Libyans" and expressed France's support for the new unified government. Macron, who made mention of his concerns over the issue of foreign powers in Libya, emphasized that the troops affiliated with Turkey and Russia should leave the country in order for the process to work properly.¹⁸ On the second day of his visit to France, Menfi and his deputy Musa al-Koni had meetings with Defense Minister Florence Parly, and it was reported that issues such as irregular migration to Europe via the Mediterranean and border security were discussed. France has been largely criticized by countries such as Italy and Malta due to its policies aimed at peace and stability in Libya, as it was relatively less affected by the influx of migrants thanks to its geographic location.

Announcing on 29 March that it had reopened its consulate in Tripoli after 7 years, France gave the green light to open another consulate in Benghazi in the east of Libya, as did Italy. Dbeibeh's visit to France on 1 June as part of his Europe tour is the most recent diplomatic contact between the two countries. Prime

Minister Dbeibeh has visited France for the first time since he took office, and met with President Macron, Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian, Defense Minister Florence Parly and the French Employer Federation (MEDEF) and its prominent officials. Dbeibeh was accompanied by Foreign Minister Najla Mangoush and State Minister Adel Jumua at the meetings. In the joint press statement made after the meeting, Dbeibeh emphasized the importance of international efforts in recognizing the political legitimacy of the unified government, supporting the country's sovereignty and ending the presence of foreign powers in Libya. On the same day, Dbeibeh met with his counterpart Florence Parly in the capacity of Defense Minister and was accompanied by Minister of Interior Khaled Mazen during the talks. The parties discussed border security and cooperation opportunities in different fields. President Macron, on the other hand, stated that foreign intervention in Libya should end and foreign mercenaries should be withdrawn from the country as soon as possible.¹⁹ Another highlight of Dbeibeh's visit was his meetings with MEDEF and some French companies. The meetings were attended by the ministers of economy, health, transportation and oil, as well as senior executives of Denos, Sanofi, Vinci and the energy giant Total.²⁰

As one of the participants to the Second Berlin Conference, France may be held accountable for the inability of the conference held in a constructive atmosphere to bring binding solutions. So much so that France, while important problems remained unaddressed such as the budget crisis between the House

¹⁸ "Macron: Libya'da istikrar ve barış sağlanmadan Akdeniz, Sahel bölgesi ve Afrika'da barış olmaz", *Anadolu Ajansı*, 23 March 2021.

¹⁹ "Fransa Cumhurbaşkanı Macron, Libya Başbakanı Dibeibe ile görüştü", *CNN Türk*, 1 June 2021.

²⁰ "Libya's reconstruction whets appetite of French companies", *Africa Report*, 8 June 2021.

of Representatives (HoR) and the GNU, the constitutional debates, and most importantly the initiatives of Khalifa Haftar that disrupted Dbeibeh government in the east of the country, tried to make Turkey's legitimate presence in Libya the main discussion topic of the conference and aimed to put pressure on Turkey. The efforts of France at the LPDF meeting on 28 June stalled the process of determining the constitutional basis of the country. However, the concrete decisions taken by the participating countries at the meeting in Berlin on various controversial issues, such as the candidacy criteria, would have reduced the cacophony of Haftar's supporters in the LPDF and help implement a roadmap in line with Libya's political reconciliation process.

At this point, the failure of successive international and local summits strengthened the Haftar side. Announcing after the LPDF negotiations that ended on July 2 that he could restart his invasion attempts against Tripoli if the elections do not take place on the specified date, Khalifa Haftar, in a sense, reminded the environment of chaos after the First Berlin Conference in January 2020.²¹

In this context, Haftar announced the closure of the Algerian border, even though he did not have the authority, using the terrorist attacks in the south as a pretext. These statements and Haftar's recent activity followed France's announcement that it would soon end the large-scale Operation Barkhane in Niger, Chad and Mali, which suggests that France may place new proxies in the region and covertly support Haftar's troops stationed on its southern border. Such a scenario can be interpreted as an inevitable strategy whereby France will once again support Khalifa Haftar and the so-called Libyan National Army (LNA), with which it was closely allied in the past, in the event

that the political process would fail. The fact that many war crimes committed by Haftar and his supporters in the country after the First Berlin Conference were not condemned at the conference held on 23 June may support this argument.

France has maintained from the very beginning its anti-Turkish stance in Libyan politics. Disturbed by Ankara's relations with the legitimate government in Tripoli, Paris considers this alliance to be a hindrance to its own interests. France also tries to prevent the cooperation between Turkey and the EU countries in the context of Libya. Expressing his opposition at every opportunity to the Security and Maritime Jurisdiction Agreements between Turkey and Libya signed in November 2019, President Macron invites Libya to try to get along with the EU countries, and accordingly, to recognize the maritime jurisdiction areas of the EU countries such as Greece and the Greek Administration of Southern Cyprus that are contrary to international law.



Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs Nikos Dendias meets Khalifa Haftar in Athens.

Greece

As a Mediterranean country, Greece's Libya policies were shaped after the Turkey-Libya Maritime Jurisdiction Agreement signed on 27 November 2019. Reflecting its rivalry with Turkey over the Eastern Mediterranean to its activ-

²¹ "Haftar rahat durmuyor: Seçimler yapılmazsa Trablus'u alırsız", *Hürriyet*, 4 July 2021.

Giving the impression of wanting to have a fresh start with Libya's new actors and to set aside the controversial issues of the past, Greece accelerated its diplomatic contacts with Libya.

ities on the field in Libya, Greece, contrary to international law and in line with its own interests, set aside concepts such as legitimacy and legality and supported Khalifa Haftar after Turkey's agreement with the GNA, and aimed to be included in all anti-Turkey political and economic unions established in the region in order to undermine Turkey's gains. In line with these policies, Mohamed al-Menfi, the then Ambassador of Libya to Athens, was expelled and the President of Tobruk-based HoR was invited to Athens in December 2019. In the statements made after the negotiations, it was claimed that the Maritime Jurisdiction agreement between Turkey and the legitimate GNA was not a valid and legitimate agreement. In the following process, Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis signed the draft text of the Eastmed Natural Gas Pipeline Agreement on 2 January 2020, together with his counterparts from the Greek Administration of Southern Cyprus and Israel. Greece, whose attempts to participate in the Berlin Conference hosted by Germany on the same dates were rejected, sided with the camp of Haftar and his international supporters with all its means.²² In addition, the Greek parliament ratified on 15 May 2020 the Eastmed Natural Gas Pipeline Agreement, which disregards Turkey in the Mediterranean.

Apart from this, Operation Irini, carried out by the EU under the Common Security and Defense Policies in order to monitor the UN arms embargo, stands out as another issue in which Athens actively shows its anti-Turkey stance. Monitoring and inspection of arms shipments by sea within the scope of the operation constitutes a serious advantage for Haftar, as he receives weapons and equipment support from Egypt mostly by land and air. Therefore, strategically targeting the aid provided by Turkey to the legitimate GNA causes Greece to more actively and fiercely participate in the operations. It was undoubtedly Greece's efforts which came to the fore in extending the mandate of Operation Irini that expired on 31 March 2021.

As stated above, Greece based its Libya policies around its anti-Turkey stance as an extension of the rivalry in the Eastern Mediterranean, and approached the new interim administration in this way. Giving the impression of wanting to have a fresh start with Libya's new actors and to set aside the controversial issues of the past, Greece accelerated its diplomatic contacts with Libya. On 6 April 2021, Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis visited Libya and met in Tripoli first with Prime Minister Dbeibeh and then with Mohamed al-Menfi, who had been expelled while

22 İsmail Şahin, "Yunanistan'ın Libya Politikası", *ORSAM*, Analiz No: 253, 30 June 2020.

he was the Ambassador to Athens. Mitsotakis, who reopened the Greek Consulate in Tripoli during his visit, stated that Greece was against the Turkey-Libya Maritime Jurisdiction Agreement and that it should be cancelled, emphasizing Greece's plan to establish a committee for the signing of a similar agreement between Greece and Libya whereby cooperation opportunities could be discussed.²³ Using a similar discourse to France's and hiding behind Greece's EU identity, Mitsotakis stated that the withdrawal of foreign troops from the country is a key element for Libya to make progress in its relations with the EU. Prime Minister Dbeibeh, on the other hand, underlined that Libya was open to all kinds of agreements that respect the national interests of Libya, Greece, and Turkey.

On 12 April, one week after Mitsotakis' visit, Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias met with Deputy Prime Minister Hussein al-Qatrani and HoR President Aguila Saleh in Benghazi. At the same time, Dendias met with HoR President Aguila Saleh for the planned-opening of a Greek Consulate in Benghazi and during the meeting, he expressed his dissatisfaction with the presence of foreign powers in the country by pointing to Turkey, which received various reactions from in and outside Libya. The meetings Dendias held in Benghazi, where Greece spoke with a third actor in Libya, which is already split into two in terms of representation and going through a sensitive period, and where the legitimacy of the GNU was questioned, show that Athens still keeps the current alternatives on the table in Libyan politics and that it does not compromise its past policies detrimental to Libya's stability.

Finally, President of the Presidential Council Mohamed Menfi made a visit to Athens on 14 April where he held talks with President

Ekaterini Sakilaropoulou and Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis. During the meetings, Menfi was asked for his opinion on a possible agreement between Greece and Libya to determine the maritime areas, and Menfi replied that the Presidential Council did not have the authority to sign international agreements.²⁴

The main priority of Greece, which was not invited to the Berlin Conference held on 23 June, is to drive the Dbeibeh government away from Turkey by using its limited engagements in the Eastern Mediterranean. Trying to undermine Turkey's credible image in Libya by hiding behind the discourse of foreign powers, Greece has concerns at the same time over a pro-Turkey government that may emerge in Libya, which it considers as a neighbor according to the maritime jurisdiction areas determined in violation of international law, and considers the situation as a serious threat to its own economic interests in the Eastern Mediterranean.



German Chancellor Angela Merkel at the Second Berlin Conference.

Germany

Another important EU country, Germany, abstained from the NATO operations launched against the Gaddafi regime under the leadership of France in 2011, and made a proposal for expanding sanctions. Thus, it is possible to say that Germany's approach to the Libyan

²³ "Yunanistan Başbakanı Libya'da: Türkiye ile yapılan anlaşma iptal edilmeli", *Euronews*, 6 April 2021.

²⁴ "Inside Libya", *Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAD)*, May 2021.

crisis continued in line with its approach in the post-World War II period that refrained from military intervention. Germany, which shares the same concerns with France and Italy over irregular migration from Sub-Saharan Africa to Libya and from there to European countries, has implemented a multilateral foreign policy in Libya based on mediation, taking into account the economic and social impacts of the migration crisis within its borders. In this context, the Merkel administration, which considers peace and stability in Libya as part of Germany's interests, was highly disturbed by Macron's aggressive policies in Libya. France's support for Haftar as a military option was severely criticized by Germany on the grounds that it hindered the reconciliation process by intensifying the conflict, and was cited as one of the main factors feeding into the migration crisis. In this context, Merkel blamed France for preventing the EU from forming a common Libya policy.

However, the competition between Germany and France to assume the leadership of the EU has urged the countries to become more active in Libya. The Berlin Conference on Libya, which was held under the leadership of Germany in January 2020, stands out in this sense and is an indication of Germany's multilateral approach. In the leaders' summit participated by the representatives from Turkey, Italy, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Arab League, African Union and the EU, in addition to the 5 members of the UN Security Council, it was aimed to end the ongoing conflicts since April 2019 and to produce permanent political solutions to the Libyan crisis. In article 6 of the final resolution, the participating states guaranteed not to intervene in the armed conflicts in Libya and its internal affairs.

The 5+5 Joint Military Committee, which initiated the permanent ceasefire on 23 October 2020, was also formed as a result of the initiatives at the Berlin Conference. However, the fact that Haftar's militias continued their attacks against Tripoli after the conference and the participating states continued the deployment of foreign mercenaries, cast doubts over the applicability of the decisions taken at the conference. In the following period, at the Munich Security Conference held as a follow-up meeting to the Berlin Conference, a report that can be considered as self-criticism titled "Westlessness" was published as a joint declaration of the EU, particularly Germany, in which it was stated that Western powers prevented post-revolution massacres in Libya, but were unable to produce constructive and comprehensive solutions after the conflicts.²⁵

In the light of this background, German Chancellor Angela Merkel approached Libya's new interim administration positively like her European counterparts, and congratulated Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh, the Prime Minister of the newly established GNU, in a telephone call on 5 March 2021. During the meeting, Prime Minister Dbeibeh expressed that he welcomed Germany's contributions to peace and stability in Libya and its support to the LPDF process as well as the Berlin Conference.²⁶ On 25 March, German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas, together with his Italian and French counterparts, visited Prime Minister Dbeibeh and Foreign Minister Najla Mangoush in the capital city of Tripoli. In the joint statement issued by the ministers of the EU countries after the talks, it was emphasized that the visit was a token of mutual support for the stability and the achievement of GNU's goals in Libya. In his statement, Dbeibeh invited European min-

²⁵ Burak Çelikpençe, "Almanya'nın Libya'daki Önceliği Güvenlik mi?", *ORSAM*, 30 March 2020.

²⁶ "Dbeibah and Merkel discuss latest developments in Libya", *Libya Observer*, 5 March 2021.

isters to recognize the new government in Tripoli and to provide support against illegal immigration. Approaching the sensitive issue of foreign mercenaries in a similar manner with his counterparts, which Greece and France used as leverage against Turkey, Maas deemed all foreign forces within the borders of Libya illegal.

On the other hand, Germany wants German companies, especially Siemens, to undertake important projects in the reconstruction process of Libya. In this context, the Third German-Libyan Economic Experts Forum was held in Tripoli on 31 March with the participation of high-level government officials such as Libyan Minister of Economy and Trade Mohamed Hwej, Libyan National Oil Corporation chairman Mustafa Sanalla and the General Director of the General Electricity Company of Libya (GECOL). At the meeting, issues such as energy, public services and local governance were on the agenda, and the potential contributions of German companies were discussed. In the upcoming period, the EU country Germany will gain the trust of the GNU consisting mostly of technocrats with its consistent Libya policies since 2011. Thus, it is expected that Germany will have a say and represent the EU countries if tensions increase around the elections in December.

Germany, which hosted the Second Berlin Conference under the leadership of Foreign Minister Heiko Maas, invited the President of the Presidential Council Menfi in addition to Prime Minister Dbeibeh and Foreign Minister Mangoush. At the Conference, participants agreed upon many topics, and issued a 58-item final declaration. The declaration made a general emphasis on peace and stability in Libya, but the meeting itself remained insufficient to address certain concerns. So

much so that in the meetings, the relationship between Russia and the Russian security company Wagner was pushed into the background, and the events in the city of Tarhuna, where many mass graves were found, and Haftar's human rights violations were not brought up. Germany remained silent against the countries that tried to label Turkey's military presence in the country as the main problem, causing Libya's more important problems to be pushed into the background.

Malta

Malta is a critical actor in the Libyan crisis due to its location in the Mediterranean, and has experienced a serious influx of illegal migrants since the beginning of the conflict. Seen as the first stop for refugees who want to reach Europe via the Mediterranean, Malta's policies toward Libya are aimed at preventing the flow of irregular migrants. With the escalation of the civil war in Libya, the indifferent policies of Italy and France pushed Malta to use the refugees at its borders as a trump card against the EU.

The legitimate Fayez al-Sarraj government and Malta, which has made radical changes in its policies on the Mediterranean by getting closer to Turkey, was mentioned in the joint statement issued by the Foreign Ministers of Turkey and Libya on 6 August 2020. In the statement, the countries expressed their concerns and opinions about the fact that illegal immigration poses an important problem not only for the EU but also for Libya, and accordingly, the need for Libya's southern borders to be strengthened, in addition to the shortcomings of Operation Irini.²⁷ However, about a month after the statement, Maltese Foreign Minister Evarist Bartolo criticized the Libya policies of Turkey and Russia during his visit

²⁷ "Türkiye-Malta-Libya Ortak Açıklaması", No: 166, T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı, 6 August 2020.

to Athens on 8 September 2020, and blamed President Erdogan and Russian President Putin for the refugee crisis in the Mediterranean.

Robert Abela, one of the first prime ministers among the EU countries to visit the newly established unified government, held bilateral meetings with his counterpart, Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh, as well as with Libya's Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Interior in Tripoli on 5 April 2021. In the joint statement after the talks, Abela stated that steps were being taken for the reopening of the Libyan Consulate in Malta and that it would be operational as soon as possible, and flights between the two countries would resume.²⁸ Dbeibeh, on the other hand, emphasized that many meetings hosted by Malta, which he sees as an important economic partner, contributed significantly to the stability and peace environment in Libya, and that Libya will endeavor to develop commercial and political relations between the two countries.²⁹ Malta, which is

350 km away from Libya, also stands out as one of Libya's strong commercial partners in the region.

Finally, on 12 June, Foreign Minister Bartolo met with the UN Special Envoy for Libya Jan Kubis in the capital city of Valletta, where he underscored the importance for the international community to be involved in the Libyan crisis before the Berlin Conference. In the meetings, illegal immigration and security issues were at the table, and Bartolo indicated that a unified Libya would benefit its own interests.³⁰

As one of the participants to the Berlin Conference, Malta can be considered as a supporter of national reconciliation process in the country. In case the election process in Libya is disrupted, Malta is one of the neighboring countries most likely to be affected by an internal turmoil created by military alternatives like Khalifa Haftar and a consequent wave of immigration.

²⁸ Malta to reopen embassy in Libya, relaunch flights", *Daily Sabah*, 5 April 2021.

²⁹ "Malta's PM vows to reopen embassy in Libya soon", *Libya Observer*, 5 April 2021.

³⁰ "Malta reiterates support for internal solution to Libyan crisis", *Libyan Observer*, 12 June 2021.

COMMON EU APPROACH



Although each EU country has different priorities in Libya, their common policies toward Libya can be grouped under three main headings. Their common interests include: prevention of irregular migration to Europe via the Mediterranean with a new administration, enabling companies operating in different sectors in the rebuilding process to get a share of the pie, and in the field of security, focusing on expelling foreign powers from the country to balance Turkey and Russia.

Prevention of Irregular Migration

The EU, focusing on training and capacity building services for Libyan Coast Guard personnel as part of its train-and-equip plan since 2014, has allocated a significant part of its budget to this area, especially in order to prevent the wave of migration that broke out in 2015. In his statement in 2017, President of the European Council Donald Tusk stated that there was a sharp decrease in arrivals to Italy

thanks to the train-and-equip program, and said that the existing support would be increased.³¹ However, tens of thousands of refugees every year are caught on the Mediterranean Sea and are returned to Libya or kept in refugee shelters under poor conditions. In this context, Libyan officials at the time criticized EU countries for discriminating between immigrants based on their qualifications, as qualified people were admitted to EU countries and the rest were returned, emphasizing that the EU was flawed in comprehending the humanitarian dimension of the refugee crisis. The bombings of and attacks against immigrant camps during the conflicts in the past brought the issue of illegal immigration back to the agenda. Hundreds of African refugees lost their lives as a result of air strikes against the refugee camps in the Tajura region, south of Tripoli, especially during the Assault on Tripoli in 2019. EU countries avoided confronting Khalifa Haftar, who was considered as the

³¹ "Başkan Tusk'un Avrupa Bölgeler Komitesi'nde Yaptığı Konuşma", *Avrupa Birliği Türkiye Federasyonu*, 11 October 2017.

The EU, focusing on training and capacity building services for Libyan Coast Guard personnel as part of its train-and-equip plan since 2014, has allocated a significant part of its budget to this area, especially in order to prevent the wave of migration that broke out in 2015.

perpetrator of the attacks, and the operations even received support from some states in the international arena. This contradictory attitude of EU countries was widely criticized. At this point, the problem of illegal immigration is a subject that has been the main focus of the EU leaders' visits to GNU officials. The EU's unilateral migration policy needs an overall review to address not only the security dimension but also the social dimension of the issue.

Economic Prospects

The instability and uncertainties since 2011 have seriously affected the oil trade, one of Libya's most important economic activities. This situation has gradually been overcome with recent developments and the partial reconciliation of the parties in the country. Mustafa Sanalla, Chairman of the Libyan National Oil Corporation, stated that they plan to increase daily oil output to 2.1 million barrels if the required budget is allocated.³² The ceasefire in the country and the acceleration of the political solution process will put the country back on the track in terms of its oil revenues. On the other hand, the Libyan Contractors Union stated that the country needed 450

billion dollars and 3 million foreign workers for the rebuilding process.³³ A significant share of the budget granted to the HoR by the GNU is allocated to development and infrastructure projects. Currently, an amount of 400 million Euros from the budget offered in the first stage has been rejected by the HoR. However, the budget crisis that has turned into a political showdown is expected to be resolved soon.

In the light of these local dynamics, EU countries encourage their leading companies to take part in the reconstruction process in Libya in order to meet the demands in the fields of construction, energy and infrastructure. In this sense, international companies such as Greek MYTILINEOS, French Total, Italian ENI, and German Siemens undertake important projects through large-scale infrastructure and energy contracts. EU countries aim to provide new opportunities for these experienced companies with great operational capacities. As Prime Minister Dbeibeh attaches importance to the development of the country and the economic indicators, the visits had a special emphasis on economic cooperation.

³² "Libya's oil output down to 1M barrels: Official", *Anadolu Agency*, 22 April 2021.

³³ "Libya needs US\$ 450 billion and three million foreign workers for reconstruction over a five-year period: Libyan Contractors' Union", *Libya Herald*, 24 March 2021.

Security Reasons: Discourse and Description of "Foreign Powers"

Libya is one of the countries that has been subject to the most intense intervention of foreign actors in the region since 2011. While it is observed that among these actors, the activities of the UAE, France and Egypt deepen the instability in Libya, Turkey's intervention, which took place upon the invitation of the Government of National Accord, plays a vital role in ensuring stability in the country. On the other hand, Turkey's long-term military presence in Libya or its existing military gains highly disturb the countries which are active in the Eastern Mediterranean, as well as France, which is the hegemonic power in the Sahel. For this reason, almost all states used the issue of removal of foreign forces as a pressure card against the Dbeibeh government during the visits. However, Turkey's military presence differs from other illegitimate elements in the country due to the agreements concluded with the legitimate government in December 2019. The perception that the EU countries want to create in the last three months is that Haftar's militia groups and Turkish troops could be considered on the same criteria.

The deficiencies in Libya's security sector and the consultancy services to be provided

by some states in this regard also mean having a say in Libya's military structure. In line with this, certain countries develop various projects in order to integrate militia groups into the unified army and to establish a comprehensive military hierarchy. Regarding the security structure of the country, it is also of great importance for the future of stability in the country that the legitimate government in Libya act with reliable actors.

Apart from this, the French company IDEMIA, which offers digital security solutions, has held numerous meetings with Minister of Interior Fathi Bashagha since the period of GNA. An MoU including fingerprint readers, retinal eye scanners and technology transfer in different areas was signed between IDEMIA and the Ministry of Interior.³⁴ In the field of security, France wants new companies to open up to Libya in the new period. On the other hand, German security companies made presentations to the authorities in various topics at the webinar titled "Business opportunities for German companies in Libya", which was held in May and involved 80 German companies. As is known, in addition to energy and infrastructure sectors, German Siemens provides equipment support as well as consultancy services to government institutions for security solutions.

³⁴ "Bashagha, France's IDEMIA sign MoU for security solutions", *Libyan Express*, 19 November 2020.

CONCLUSION



At the UNSC meeting in New York, Libyan Prime Minister Dbeibeh speaks about the political and security situation of the country and the elections planned to be held on 24 December.

Significant changes have been observed in the policies of Greece, Italy and France toward Libya, which entered a national reconciliation process with the new government elected after the LPDF. On the other hand, Malta and Germany, despite their seemingly more neutral stance, act in line with the prevailing approach among the EU countries and consider migration and related security issues among their top priorities. In addition, all these actors aim to get a share of the pie through involvement in the reconstruction process of Libya, which has come to the fore in the new period. Also, as one of the important gas and oil suppliers of the said EU countries, Libya is considered to provide important opportunities for energy diversification, since these countries are mostly dependent on Russian natural gas.

Countries that approach the new actors in Libya with immigration and economic concerns, as well as with an anti-Turkey stance, are taking inclusive and balanced steps integrated into UN solutions in order to increase their gains in the transitional process. With

their common discourse around the removal of foreign powers from Libya, the three countries offer support and cooperation opportunities to the temporary actors in Libya in the fields of border security and flow of irregular migrants to Europe via the Mediterranean. Again, it is seen that all three countries have opened or are planning to open their second consulates in Benghazi in the east of Libya. This seemingly positive development also brings with it some concerns as east-west integration has not been fully achieved yet. Countries that opposed the agreement signed between Turkey and the GNA at the time, perceive Turkey's presence in Libya as a threat to themselves in the long run. Thus, they construct at every opportunity in their statements to the press and during the visits a narrative aimed at reducing Turkey's sphere of influence in Libya, discrediting it in the eyes of local elements, and eliminating its gains. In response to this narrative, important officials such as Prime Minister Dbeibeh, President of the Presidential Council Menfi and Chairman

of the High Council of State Khalid al-Mishri distinguish Turkey's status in the country from that of Russia and other foreign powers and describe Turkey as a state operating in the country within the framework of international agreements.

It is of great importance that the actors who prioritize civil and democratic processes in Libyan politics, especially the Government of National Unity, work with European countries and cooperate with constructive actors to this end. However, it should be remembered that the foreign policy priorities of these actors are

shaped by their own interests rather than of the countries they are involved in. From this point of view, Libya should be highly sensitive and pursue its own priorities in the process of cooperation with European actors. On the other hand, it can be said that if actors such as the UAE and Egypt put an end to their destructive activities in the country and instead adopt a constructive agenda, they can also play a role in the reconstruction of Libya. Finally, it should be emphasized that Turkey is Libya's most important ally in the process of stabilization and establishing a political order guided by democratic institutions.



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