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Rival chambers in the east and the west: a Libyan déjà vu

On 21st September the High Council of State in Libya said it assumed legislative powers as a result of the current political impasse, accusing the House of Representative (HoR) of failing to implement the Libyan Political Agreement (LPA). Signed in Skhirat, Morocco, on 17th December 2015, the LPA provides a complex political architecture for Libya. The agreement established the High Council of State as an advisory body to the HoR, here recognised as the legitimate Libyan legislative authority. At the same time, the LPA created the Presidency Council (PC) a nine-member presidential institution and the Government of National Accord (GNA), a government of national unity.

The Skhirat agreement also stated that the GNA must obtain the confidence of the HoR, but the Parliament based in Tobruk failed to endorse the government of Prime Minister Fayed al-Sarraj so far. In two occasions (more recently on 22nd August) the HoR rejected the GNA, enduring the current political stalemate and raising doubts about road map drawn in Skhirat.

The GNA successfully managed to replace the Government of National Salvation (GNC) in Tripoli, gradually seizing buildings and offices. In and outside the capital, the GNA relies on different militias, which quickly shifted their allegiances, betting on the success of the Sarraj's experiment. Moreover, according to the provisions of the Skhirat agreement the General National Congress (GNC, the rival parliament in Tripoli elected in 2012 and resumed in 2014 during the second phase of the Libyan civil war between the Operation Dignity and Libya Dawn) recently morphed in the newly formed High Council of State. Former GNC members assumed relevant positions inside the High Council of State, such as the current Chairman Abdulrahman al-Swehli from Misrata and its Deputy Chairman Saleh al-

Makhzoum, member of the Justice and Construction Party (JCP, the local political branch of the Muslim Brotherhood) and one of the main actors of the Skhirat agreement.

Nevertheless, the awaited collaboration between the HoR and the High Council of State did not materialise, confirming the current regional divide in Libya. The deputy President of the HoR Emhmed Shuaib defined the 21st September declaration as a coup against the authority of the legitimate parliament. The move was also condemned by the same members of the High Council of State, concerned about the escalation of the current political and regional division.

At the same time, rumours about the establishment of a parallel High Council of State in eastern Libya spread. The parallel institution has been associated with the members of the 94 Bloc, a group of former GNC members in which the National Forces Alliance (NFA) of former Prime Minister Mahmoud Jibril is well represented. The NFA strongly criticises the declaration of the High Council of State, defining the move as a violation of the LPA. The feared political escalation progressed at the end of September, when the High Council of State mulled appointing the heads of the top civil and military offices, threatening the position of General Khalifa Haftar, the real point of contention between the main Libyan factions.

The increasing rift between the two chambers reminds of the rivalry between the HoR and the GNC in the last two years, confirming a déjà vu scenario of the ongoing regional split. It is likely that political tensions between the east and the west of the country will continue, given the current inability (and unwillingness) of the HoR to vote on the GNA and the different positions of relevant regional actors vis-à-vis the Libyan crisis.