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Libya at a crossroad

In the last months political developments in Libya have been strictly associated with the on-going negotiations for the formation of a Government of National Accord (GNA). Talks between the internationally recognized House of Representative (HoR) in Tobruk and the General National Congress (GNC) in Tripoli continued despite increasing difficulties and a growing level of distrust towards mediators.

The scandal that rocked the United Nations Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) was a huge blow for the peace process and jeopardized the Libyan Political Dialogue. At the beginning of November a scoop by the British newspaper The Guardian revealed how UN Secretary General Representative in Libya Bernardino León was negotiating a job offer from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) government. Accused to meddle in Libya's internal affairs, Abu Dhabi interfered by supporting HoR. Leaked mails showed how León favoured HoR in the negotiations, refusing an equal standing for both rivals.

After the refusal by HoR and GNC to approve the Skhirat agreement signed in Morocco in July and amended several times in the following weeks, the León-UAE *affaire* de-legitimized the United Nations'

role in solving the Libyan crisis, slowing significantly Libya's transition. The main unintended consequence of this impasse was the development of an unofficial track of negotiations between the two factions. Known as the Libyan-Libyan consensus, these alternative talks between HoR and GNC were held in Tunisia and Malta and produced a compromise on 5th December. While refusing any foreign imposition, rival bodies agreed on the creation of two committees of 10 people each (5 from each side): the first charged with naming a government, the second tasked with producing a final draft for the Constitution.

The international community responded promptly. Former head of the Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies pour la stabilisation en République Démocratique du Congo (MONUSCO) Martin Kobler replaced León. In office since the 17th of November Kobler promised a different approach from his predecessor, focusing more on security-related issues. However the Skhirat agreement remained the only option on the table and the German diplomat refused to consider the Libyan-Libyan consensus as a valid alternative. After obtaining the support of the international community at the International Conference on Libya held in Rome on 13th of December, Kobler pushed ahead with a new signature in Skhirat on 17th of December. The new agreement called for a 9 members President Council led by Fayeze Sarraj which is expected to nominate a new GNA in 40 days. According to media sources, 80 HoR members out of 188 and 50 GNC members out of 136 were present in Skhirat.

In the short term, it is still difficult to make any prediction. Despite the UN Security Council resolution 2259 (2015) adopted the Skhirat agreement and called on member States to cease support and any official contact with rival Parliaments, the heads of HoR and GNC Agila Saleh and Nouri Abu Sahmain refused the Skhirat agreement, claiming the Libyan-Libyan consensus as the only game in town. Moreover, the balance of forces on the ground is starting to erode the Skhirat agreement. Supposed to be based in Tripoli, the GNA was not allowed to move to the Libyan capital and was forced to hold its first session abroad, in Tunis.