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North Africa

#Libya – A wavering peace-process



Source: Middle East Online

On the 1st of February Libyans delegates met in Geneva at the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum to nominate the temporary executive that will guide the country to the next national elections, scheduled for the 24th of December.

By the 5th of January the 75 attendees from different political factions will select the Prime Minister of the Transitional government and three-member presidency council from a list of 45 candidates. Each of Libya's three geographical areas will be headed by a member functioning as president while the Council will serve as Libya's head of government. The three elected leaders should then lead the country to a permanent reconciliation and restoration of full democracy.

Although the UN-backed talks are slowly leading to a transitional government expected to guide the country to democratic elections, Libyans fear that the selection process could stimulate old and new competitions and jeopardise the cease-fire reached by the parties last October.

The selection process seems in fact to favour representatives of the Government of National Accord (GNA) with the Interior Minister Fathi Bashaga and House of Representatives' President Aguila Saleh increasingly gaining support. A transitional government led by Fathi al-Bashaga as Prime Minister could indeed undermine al-Serraj's political ambitions within the new government and disadvantage Haftar and the Libyan National Army, leading to further attempts to disrupt the peace process.

The UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has further highlighted that the presence of foreign mercenaries and troops might represent a significant threat to the pacification process in Libya and urged all external parties involved in the Libyan crisis to leave the country. Adding that, now that the Joint Military Committee (composed by representatives from the Libyan Army affiliated with the GNA and forces aligned with Khalifa Haftar), has attained an important achievement by reaching a cease-fire agreement and preserving it, and the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum had successfully come to an agreement on key issues, such as the elections and the transitional government system, the country cannot afford any interference from foreign militias.

To know more about this topic:

- *Stratfor*, As Libya's peace process reaches a critical stage, spoilers line up, 28/01/21, available at: <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/libyas-peace-process-reaches-critical-stage-spoilers-line>
- *The Libya Observer*, Gueterres urges foreign forces to "leave the Libyans alone", 30/01/21, available at: <https://www.libyaobserver.ly/news/guterres-urges-foreign-forces-leave-libyans-alone>

- *Daily Sabah*, Libyans meet for UN-led talks to choose temporary executive, 01/02/21, available at: <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/libyans-meet-for-un-led-talks-to-choose-temporary-executive/news>
- *Daily Sabah*, Obstacles prevail as peace process nears critical phase, 02/02/2021, available at: <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/libya-obstacles-prevail-as-peace-process-nears-critical-phase/news>

Levant

#Palestine – President Biden to reverse Trump’s policy towards the Palestinian authority



Sources: Tunisia News – The President of the United States Joe Biden together with the President of the Palestinian National Authority, Mahmoud Abbas (also known by the Kunya Abu Mazen)

On the 26th of January Joe Biden’s administration pledged to restore diplomatic relations with the Palestinian authority. According to the US Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations, Richard Mills, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) diplomatic mission will be reopened and financial aid will be reallocated to Palestinians. By renewing diplomatic ties with the Palestinian leadership, the new US administration aims at reversing Trump’s diplomacy and move towards a peace resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Back in 2018 the Trump's administration closed the PLO's diplomatic mission in Washington, following the Palestinian boycott to protest over the US recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital (for most countries Tel Aviv is still the capital). A year later, in 2019, the US consulate in Jerusalem that served as embassy to Palestinians in East Jerusalem, was shut down and the mission was integrated into the US embassy to Israel.

As pointed out by the US President, Washington will continue to support Israel and will encourage further countries to normalise ties with Israel. However, it will firmly oppose unilateral resolutions, such as the annexation of territories and demolitions to host new settlements or any action that could undermine a two-state solution.

After Trump's unilateral approach, Biden's administration could succeed in at least having a relationship with both Israel and the Palestinian Authority, and thus uphold peace. On the other hand, Palestinians eye the US rapprochement with scepticism and doubt that this will mark a significant change in the US foreign policy.

To know more about this topic:

- *Al Jazeera*, Joe “no saviour” of the Palestinians, 08/11/20, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/11/8/joe-biden-no-savior-to-the-palestinians>
- *The Times of Israel*, US announces its renewing relations with Palestinians, seeking two-state solution, 26/01/21, available at: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/biden-to-reopen-palestinian-diplomatic-offices-restore-aid-says-us-envoy-to-un/>
- *Stratfor*, Washington to restore ties with the Palestinian Authority, 27/01/21, available at: <https://worldview.stratfor.com/situation-report/us-palestinian-territories-washington-restore-ties-palestinian-authority>

Gulf

#SaudiArabia #UAE – Italy stops arms sales to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates



Source: Governo.it

On the 29th of January the Italian Foreign Minister, Luigi Di Maio, announced the definitive suspension of arms export to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to prevent any future involvement in the Yemen war, making permanent an 18-month temporary suspension.

Already in 2018, the Italian government announced its intention of ending arms sales to Saudi Arabia because of the critical stage reached by the Yemen's war and the murder of the journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

In 2019 Italy, along with many European countries, froze arms sales to the two Gulf countries actively involved in the world's largest humanitarian catastrophe.

The decision taken by the Italian Government to revoke and not only suspend the arms exports to Saudi Arabia and the UAE, ranked 10th and 11th in the list of the biggest markets for Italian arms exports, is a

significant step, in line with the caveats of the arms export law 185 (1990, modified in 2003) that have stringent requirements. The original contract foresaw the supply of 20.000 inert casings and tailfin assemblies to the two countries, where the bombs (Mk 82 and Mk 84) were assembled for operational use.

The move comes after the US President Joe Biden announced on the 27th of January a temporary suspension of arms sales to Saudi Arabia and the UAE, authorised by the former President, Donald Trump. According to the Italian deputy of Democratic Party, Lia Quartapelle, *“this common vision will help Italy to improve a new dialogue with the United States, to manage the relationships in the Mediterranean in a more balanced way and to put an end to a proxy war that is devastating the country”*.

Lastly it is relevant to note that the revocation came in the middle of another Italian government crisis; it remains to be seen if the next government will uphold the decision.

To know more about this topic:

- *Al Jazeera*, Italy permanently halts arms sales to Saudi Arabia and UAE, 29/01/20, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/1/29/italy-makes-permanent-arms-sale-freeze-to-saudi-arabia>
- *Daily Sabah*, Italy permanently blocks arms sales to Saudi Arabia, 30/01/21/ available at: <https://www.dailysabah.com/world/mid-east/italy-permanently-blocks-arms-sales-to-saudi-arabia-uae-over-yemen>

#ArabInsight

By Maria Bagnara

#UAE – A new citizenship policy sparks criticism on social platforms



Source: *The Filipino Times*

As reported by [Al-Hurra News](#) on the 30th of January the Prime Minister of the United Arab Emirates and Ruler of Dubai, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashed Al Maktoum, announced, in a quite rare move, that select foreigners will be allowed to apply for citizenship.

The ruler confirmed on his [Twitter](#) account that “بتوجيهات من رئيس الدولة حفظه الله .. اعتمدنا اليوم تعديلات قانونية “ تجيز منح الجنسية والجواز الإماراتي للمستثمرين والموهوبين والمتخصصين من العلماء والأطباء والمهندسين والفنانين والمتقنين والهدف هو استبقاء واستقطاب واستقرار العقول التي تساهم بقوة في مسيرتنا التنموية وعائلاتهم – “Following the decision taken by the Head of the State – may god protect him – today [the UAE] adopts legal amendments that will allow investors, specialised scientists and doctors, engineers, artists, intellectual and their families [residing in the country] to grant the nationality and the UAE passport. [The decision] aims at retaining and naturalising investors and high-talented figures that will have a significant impact on the country and will improve the Emirati community.” He added that the UAE residents eligible to apply for the citizenship will be selected by the Council of Ministers, local offices and executive councils under strict criteria. Expats will be allowed to keep their existing nationality but the

Emirati passport will maintain supremacy on the other. The decision came completely unexpected and represents a remarkable step for the Emirati citizenship policy.

Citizenship represents a sensitive topic for many Gulf countries where usually foreigners, mostly from Asia, represent a large segment of the population while locals remain a small minority. In the United Arab Emirates, nationals represent only 11% of the entire population. Expatriates account for 89% including a 60% from India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Philippines.

With a very small local population, the government has long privileged and guaranteed its small community with an extraordinary high standard of living and a very generous welfare system that grants job positions (with no risk of being fired), free housing and free medical insurance. To protect and to make sure that the privileges of being Emiratis is allocated exclusively to Emirati natives, citizenship has been rarely opened to expats.

Foreign residents usually hold renewable visas tied to their employment. Once on retirement, they are forced to leave the country. For those who cannot return in their countries or for the second-generation of expats, that has born and lived the entire life in the UAE, the return to the country of origin remains indeed an open issue.

As reported by the Kuwaiti newspaper, [Al-Watan](#), since last year, the United Arab Emirates adopted a more flexible residency policy by granting medical staff, virologists, experts in the field of artificial intelligence and computer science with a “الإقامة الذهبية” – “golden visa” which can be renewed every 10 years in order to “في وقت تسعى لاستقطاب المواهب للعمل ضمن برامجها العلمية المتسارعة، من الفضاء إلى الطاقة النووية” – “attract experts that could improve and accelerate scientific programs from the space field to the nuclear energy sector”.

The announcement by the government about the possibility for expatriates to obtain nationality sparked optimism, but also a rare level of criticism from both local and expatriates on the fraught citizenship topic.

Mohammed bin Saqr, on his [Twitter](#), page criticised the decision and pointed out the fact that Emiratis are not allowed to own dual nationalities while expatriates will maintain their existing nationality. On the 30th of January he tweeted “الإماراتي إذا حصل على جنسية أخرى تسحب أو تسقط جنسيته كأنه مجرم” – “If Emiratis obtain another nationality their citizenship will be revoked like they do with criminals”. He added: “الترشيح لجنسية الدولة” – “The candidacy to obtain the nationality means indeed favouritism, and facilitates the naturalisation of those who serve the authority and not the country”.

Many others also pointed out the already existing disparities in the citizenship policy and the fact that many categories of the society have been repeatedly denied citizenship rights.

In the United Arab Emirates, as well as in many other Gulf countries, citizenship is patrilinear and cannot be passed from the mother. Any individual born by an Emirati woman and a non-Emirati father will need to apply for a residence visa in order to live in the UAE. By contrast, an individual born by an Emirati father and a foreign mother receives full citizenship at birth.

According to [Yemen Now](#), straight after the announcement of the new citizenship policy, the wife of the ruler of Sharjah, Shaikha Jawaher Al Qassimi, made comments alluding to the fact that Emirati women do not have the right to pass on citizenship. According to Shaikha Jawaher, the government should first allow women to pass on their children citizenship instead of granting nationality to expatriates.

Another critical category that will probably not be granted with the Emirati passport are the Bedouin (Bedu), Emirati natives that belong to ancient nomad groups who used to move within the borders of the UAE and its neighbouring countries. These tribal groups remained stateless until 2008, when the government agreed to give them a passport from the Comoro Islands, becoming citizens of a country they do not belong to.

Although the Government has lately shown flexibility on the citizenship policy, these categories remain vulnerable and nationality for them is still not guaranteed. Furthermore, it remains unclear if low-income workers, that represent a significant segment of the population and that have indeed contributed and continue to contribute in the development of the country, will be allowed to apply for citizenship or will be considered once again second-class workers.

Lastly, many locals highlighted the risk that this decision might represent now that the country normalised relations with Israel and opened its borders to Israelis.

The editor in chief of Al Mesriyoon newspaper, Gamal Sultan, wrote on his [Twitter](#) page: “ في سبتمبر وقعت #الامارات اتفاقية تطبيع كاملة مع إسرائيل، وبعدها بشهر أعلنت إلغاء تأشيرة دخول الإسرائيليين فتدفقوا على دبي ” الماضي – ”وأبو ظبي، وأمس أعلنت الإمارات تغيير قوانين الجنسية لتسمح بتجنيس أصحاب المهارات والكفاءات والمثقفين من جنسيات أخرى “*“Last September, the UAE normalised its diplomatic ties with Israel. After one month, Israelis were permitted to entry the country without a visa. Yesterday the UAE announced legal amendments that will grant citizenship to talented*

individuals and foreign intellectuals” referring most probably to the possibility for Israelis to obtain, in a near future, the UAE citizenship.

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