



FINO-Pointer 24.10.2020

Will there be an End to the Libyan War of Succession Soon?

Reinhard Schulze (FINO)

At noon on October 23, 2020, five officers from each of the Libyan belligerents signed an agreement in Geneva for a "complete and permanent ceasefire". As members of a Joint Military Commission, they had been working for some time on measures for a disengagement of troops off the central Libyan city of Sirte, the southern airbase al-Jufra and on other local frontlines as well as for a withdrawal of foreign mercenaries from the immediate vicinity of the front. The result so far has been an unofficial ceasefire that has been in place since July 2020. Since last Monday, the negotiation of a binding ceasefire has been on the agenda of the military commission. Under the auspices of the United Nations Libya Mission headed by Stephanie Williams, an agreement was negotiated in which the provisions for a "permanent ceasefire" were laid down on three pages in twelve clauses.

The armistice

Both sides then appeared in front of the press for a joint photo session, leaving the impression that the Libyan government in Tripolitania under Prime Minister Fāyiz al-Sarrāj and the East Libyan government of the House of Representatives, which is in fact under the control of the so-called Libyan National Army (LNA) of Khalīfa Haftar, for the first time recognized each other as negotiating partners. The "complete and permanent ceasefire agreement in Libya between the Libyan Army and the Libyan National Army of the General Command of the Armed Forces" defines in twelve articles the practical measures that should be made possible because of the ceasefire. These include the withdrawal of foreign mercenary units within three months, the withdrawal of both sides from the frontline, the establishment of a joint police force to secure the cleared areas, and the listing of all militias and combatants in a common register that should serve as a starting point for their

integration into the armies or their demobilization. The agreement on de-escalation in the media is also significant. The treaty states: "The media escalation and the hate speech that is currently spread via audio-visual propaganda channels and websites must be stopped, and the judicial authorities and the competent authorities are required to take the necessary measures to ensure that these channels and their websites are seriously and deterrently prosecuted". Furthermore, connecting roads between the two territories should be opened and air and sea traffic should be allowed to resume.

In addition, the Military Commission has agreed to neutralize the powerful Petroleum Facilities Guard in the west and east of the country, which until now have been close to the LNA, and to instruct their commanders to work out a proposal with representatives of the National Oil Corporation in Tripoli to re-structure and organize the Facility Guard. This will allow for the

immediate resumption of oil production and the shipment of the oil in the ports of Eastern Libya.

A compulsion for a ceasefire

The sharp increase in the number of infections with the coronavirus in Libya put the political representatives of the belligerent parties under pressure. In contrast to Egypt, where the number of infections has been falling significantly since July, the daily number of infections in Libya has increased fivefold. Although the weekly incidence is still lower than in Western Europe, Libyan authorities fear that without coordinated health policies between the two governments the situation could spiral out of control.

The agreement makes it clear that due to the military stalemate that has existed since July 2020, both warring parties have come to realize that a continuation of the war would only lead to the further fragmentation of their armed forces and thus to the ruination of their own power. A resumption of fighting would also have created the danger that the cold proxy war between the supporting powers Turkey on the one hand, Russia, and Egypt on the other would have turned into a hot conflict and that the interests of the local warring parties would thus be overrun.

Insisting on the unity of the country

The agreement maintains the "unity of the Libyan territories and the protection of their borders by land, sea and air" and stipulates that the country's policies and resources are not subject to any "foreign power". To the outside world, this raises the illusion that the permanence of the state "Libya" is undisputed and that the war was or still is primarily a war for legitimate rule of that state. The fact, however, that both parties recognized each other as equal contractual partners points in a completely different direction. The agreement first confirms the division of sovereignty over the country and the national territory. Critics of the agreement in Tripoli, such as the militias of the "Revolutionaries of Tripoli," therefore suspect that the government of national accord in Tripoli has de facto approved of Haftar's military rule in the east of the country

(Barqa). Last Thursday they kidnapped Muhammad Ba'ayū, head of the government's information office in Tripoli newly appointed in September 2020. Ba'ayū had wanted to make sure that all Islamist propaganda disappeared from the official and semi-official media and that the martial polemics against Khalīfa Haftar were stopped. Haftar, according to an old promise of the government of al-Sarrāj, should in any case be put on trial and executed in Benghazi. This demand had been fuelled by the discovery of mass graves in Tarhūna, where Haftar's militias had buried their victims. It is likely to be difficult for the government to enforce peace in Tripolitania without some form of legal preparation.

Haftar, for his part, has so far held back with statements. It will be difficult for both sides to find sufficient support for this ceasefire and the pending power sharing in their respective areas of power. At present, the majority of news in the media is still based on the demonization of the enemy. Clumsy statements like those made by Haftar's spokesperson al-Mismārī are of little help. He is said to have recently announced that the mercenaries of the Russian Wagner troops should receive Libyan citizenship and therefore would not have to leave the country. Confidence-building measures that the agreement calls for look different.

Power sharing as partition plan

Even if the Europeans and the UN demand the preservation of national unity, the Libyans have probably realized that this demand would only perpetuate the war. Only the cautious move away from this maximum position made a compromise possible, based on the political recognition of the opponent as a contractual partner. This politically catches up on something that has long since taken place on a social and cultural level in Libya, namely the dissolution of the unity of Libya constructed by Italian colonialism.

The division of the country itself is less controversial. The internal borders have already been marked out and in part coincide with very old social and cultural cleavages. Thus, it is no coincidence that the Tripolitans' offensive stopped right outside the city of Sirte and that the Egyptian president had defined this position as a red

line that the Tripolitans were not allowed to cross. This line has always corresponded to the eastern border of Tripolitania. The distribution of the unequally distributed resources in the country is controversial. Certainly, Tripolitania, especially in the south bordering Fezzān area, has rich oil and natural gas deposits, but the real wealth of resources is to be found in the region of Ajdabīyah in the east of the country, precisely in the region from which Haftar originated and where he has his allodium.

Ceasefire as military conflict settlement

The ceasefire is thus initially a military solution to the conflict. The political solution, based on a balance of interests and thus on a balancing of burdens and revenues, has been delayed. At least both sides seem to have agreed that the dismantling of enemy images and the corresponding propaganda should be included as an accompanying measure to secure the ceasefire. The reopening of communication channels will also promote the exchange of goods, which will enable the revival or reconstruction of business relations.

Thus, the actual partition of the inheritance in Libya has yet to take place, but it can hardly be prevented. From the perspective of the war-weary population, however, it is imperative. According to many commentators in Libya itself, it is only through the division that a new partnership can be created between the populations of the two countries.

It is unclear what will happen to the southern territories. In the Fezzān basin of Murzuq, there are also major oil and gas production sites, but these are still controlled by militias of the LNA. This legacy from the estate of the Gaddafi regime is coveted and therefore controversial. Local communities have so far drawn little profit and benefit from the production. For this reason, more and more people are coming forward to speak out for the secession also of Fezzān. A peace between East and West does not mean a peace throughout the country. It is no coincidence that these forgotten regions are

increasingly becoming niches for ultra-Islamist alliances that carry their terror into the neighbouring areas. A political solution for the South is thus also a condition for a successful partition of the inheritance that could end this long and devastating war.

The division of the estate

The six-year war over the legacy of the Gaddafi regime will probably lead to a division of the estate. All other models of reconciliation are rather utopian. While the political structures in Tripolitania suggest further decentralization due to the different republican traditions of the coastal cities, the power structure in a future Eastern Libya (Barqa) is still vaguely contoured. A revival of the monarchical traditions that have been dominant in this area since the mid-19th century by the Sanūsī dynasty cannot be ruled out. Haftar's claim to autocracy points to this, even if he is more likely to be celebrated as a Libyan Nasser. However, opposition to Haftar's rule is already forming in Benghazi and other cities in the East, even extending to the ranks of the House of Representatives in Tobruq. In recent weeks, the chairperson of the House of Representatives, 'Aqīla Sālih (Aguila Saleh), has distanced himself increasingly from Haftar. Some claim that Saleh, a lawyer from the region of Derna in eastern Libya, even sees reconciliation with Tripolitania as a chance to become president of a united Libya. That is unlikely to happen. It is more likely that the municipalities and cities in eastern Libya will use a peace with the West to put an end to Haftar's military rule, which until now has lived exclusively from Gaddafi's legacy.

Nevertheless, it cannot be ruled out that the optimism explicitly formulated in the ceasefire agreement is only an interlude in the Libyan War of Succession and that after a respite the fighting will continue. The devastation that Libya would then have to experience would eclipse all the suffering that the population has had to endure up to now.