

BULLETIN

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Libyan Crisis and International Community's Reaction

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The stepping down of Muammar al-Qaddafi seems inevitable, but it could cause more bloodshed and the collapse of the Libyan state. The international community should immediately bring pressure to bear on the present Libyan authorities, so as to prevent further destabilization. Particular responsibility for further developments rests on the European Union as Libya's close political and trade partner. The fate of Libya, dependent on exports of energy sources, internally divided, lacking a functioning political structure and responsible armed forces, is much more uncertain than the future of Egypt, or Tunisia.

The revolt in Libya breeds more serious consequences than have the revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia which first set it off. The country's leader Muammar al-Qaddafi has lost control over a large part of the state's territory, and by authorizing the use of force against peaceful protesters (internal Libyan sources put the number of fatalities at no less than 300) he has lost legitimacy to rule. During the ongoing crisis many officials of the administration (including Abdul Fattah Younis al Abidi, the minister of interior in control of the police and a close associate of Qaddafi) have resigned - or deserted - thus depleting the forces of the regime. Given Muammar al-Qaddafi's eccentric personality, a peaceful surrender of power by him is unlikely. In that case, bloody riots in Tripoli cannot be ruled out, including the people's taking the law in their own hands and lynching Qaddafi and his family. As there is no other institutionalized force in the country capable of temporarily assuming control, more chaos and bloodshed are very probable.

Determinants. In his forty-two years in power Muammar al-Qaddafi has created his own, specific political system, called "a state of the masses" (Jamahiriya), in which, nominally, government is exercised directly by the Libyans. Qaddafi himself has not taken any office, assuming instead a symbolic role of "leader of the revolution", but in fact he has wielded autocratic rule in the state. According to *The Economist Intelligence Unit*, in 2010 Libya ranked 158th (out of 167) by observance of democratic standards. Qaddafi has appointed ministers and hand-picked the leaders of the revolutionary committees and security forces which have controlled the army, the media, and social life. He himself has never enjoyed broad support either from the Libyans or from state institutions and yet, owing to the obscure division of power, he and his relatively small entourage have been able to manipulate major forces in the country - the army, the tribes and the oligarchs.

The national identity of the Libyans (about 6.5 million citizens) is one of the weakest in North Africa. For the inhabitants of Libya, tribal-clan membership is the principal point of reference. Traditional divisions have survived to this day owing to specific geographic conditions; large distances, long stretches of desert land, and a low population density have effectively kept clusters of population apart, preventing the development of strong political links with the capital. Several tribes, including the largest one, Warfalla (close to 1 million people), refused to support the leader who comes from the Qadhafa tribe, and the Zawiya tribe near Benghazi threatened to paralyze drilling in nearby oil fields. The tribal divisions are reflected in the armed forces - for instance, the Qadhafa tribe controls the air forces. The troops' loyalty is, first and foremost, with their fellow-tribesmen, but not at all times with the senior officers. The weakness of the armed forces' structure has made possible the desertion of whole units in the east of the country where civic committees have taken over control of towns and villages. The weak Libyan opposition has only operated abroad (at home, establishing political parties is illegal) and local opposition could develop in the aftermath of actions of the officials who

have refused to obey Qaddafi. Even so, tribal conflicts could impede the evolution of an efficiently functioning political system.

In opposition to the secular Qaddafi regime, the underdeveloped and marginalized communities outside the capital of the country have preserved their conservative-religious character. This has contributed to the popularity of Islamic movements, chiefly in the Cyrenaica region in the east of the country – from the Libyan arm of the moderate Muslim Brotherhood which conducted dialogue with the regime, to the radical Libyan Fighting Group (Al-Jama'a al-Islamiyyah al-Muqatilah bi-Libya, LIFG). Of the 88 Libyan Islamists fighting in Iraq (at 2007 figures) a majority came from Darna and Benghazi in Cyrenaica.

The condition of the state's economy in Libya - an OPEC member with a GDP that consists in 70% of profits from oil and gas exports – has been relatively good in recent years (with an economic growth of about 3% a year, on average). Even with the government subsidizing first-necessity goods, social discontent is caused by high unemployment among young people (about 30%, with more than 50% of the population aged 25 years or less). The remaining 70% of Libyans are, formally, in state employment, as are about 2 million migrant workers (chiefly from other African states) whose presence in the country has been giving rise to social conflicts.

International Community. If Qaddafi steps down, the political system will need thorough reconstruction to reflect the real social-and-clan structure. The absence of strong state institutions and efficient administrative apparatus also means that the Libyan crisis must be internationalized, and it puts on the international community part of responsibility for developments in this state. The U.N. Security Council has already condemned the use of force against the demonstrators and it might consider the imposition of no-flight zones to protect civilian population. The United States' diplomatic and economic contacts with Libya being limited (mainly because of the many-years-long history of conflict between the two states), the U.S. cannot bring a direct pressure to bear on the regime. Accordingly, it is for the European Union, with its best-developed economic and political relations with Libya, to play a special role in the ongoing conflict.

Since 1999 and 2004 when the U.N. and the U.S. lifted sanctions against Libya, the country's political and economic contacts with EU members have been developing rapidly. The EU receives over 70% of Libyan exports (mainly energy sources): Italy 38%, Germany 10%, and France and Spain 8% each. Also, Italy has a 17% share in imports to Libya, and Germany's respective share is 9%. Poland signed with Libya in 2008 an agreement on exploration of a gas field in the Murzuk basin estimated at about 150bcm – more than Poland's documented gas reserves. In addition, according to the latest EU report on military technology and equipment sales, in 2009 EU member states granted Libya licenses worth close to EUR700 million.

Therefore, as Libya's closest partners and neighbors, the European Union and its members have the largest stake in an early ending of the conflict. A range of instruments the EU can apply to put pressure on the Qaddafi regime is broad – from imposing a travel ban on top state officials and freezing funds in their foreign bank accounts, to suspending the fulfillment of military contracts and threatening Qaddafi with being held personally responsible for the civilian fatalities. Even so, the EU's reaction (much like in the case of Egypt) has been symbolic and incommensurate with the circumstances. The EU has only suspended negotiation on a framework agreement with Libya. Italy and Malta have shown reluctance towards a proposal of sanctions to be imposed on the regime. The difficulty of hammering out a EU position lies in member states' dependence on economic relations with the Qaddafi regime. The Libyan oil workers' strike has already resulted in the interruption of gas supply to Italy. If the Libyan state collapses, long-term stoppage of deliveries of energy sources is almost certain, although at present this can be offset by imports from other OPEC states. The destabilization of the state could also trigger a humanitarian crisis and generate a wave of refugees who will attempt to cross into the EU territory. In view of that, the provision by the EU, as soon as possible, of aid to the Libyan society is clearly indicated.

The European Union absolutely should set the tenor of international reaction, particularly as the present regime is very unlikely to stay in power. If the EU again shows itself powerless while so violent a crisis is unfolding in its nearest geographic and political neighborhood, its international credibility will suffer. The developments in Libya will also affect dangerously the neighboring states – in particular Algeria and Morocco, with which the EU has the most advanced political and economic relations in the Mediterranean basin.