Libya: Post-Gadaffi Challenges & Opportunities

Africa Briefing Report
Brussels – 7 October 2011

FRACTURED SOCIETY

A first manifestation of that division is the tribal system that has strong intra and inter tribe solidarity. Then there is the shift between regions (Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and Fezzan): the South is linked to the West of the Country and remains faithful to the regime, rather than the East began the uprising against Gaddafi. At the political level, the National Transition Council (NTC) claims leadership, but this remains very fragile. The NTC is also diverse, being composed of different groups: political opponents to Gaddafi's regime, former members of the regime, islamist combatants trained abroad, etc. All these components control armed militia groups and want to be represented in the future government. There remain serious doubts about the representation of the Western tribes in the NTC.

African foreign workers were highly mistreated, due to racism and allegations of being mercenaries. The racism is also directed to Libyans from the South because they are black as well. It is unlikely that foreign workers will return in the short term because of this mistreatment, but they could be replaced by Tunisians and Egyptians.

There is a risk of Somalisation. At the same time there are some mitigating factors and causes for optimism: the country is rich in oil which can be a stabilising factor, the society is well structured due to the strong tribal affiliations. There is no comparison with the situations in Iraq, Somalia and Afghanistan because those countries have had decades of instability and internal conflict. The Libyans have adapted to living in a no-state country with very low expectations from the central government. There is a tradition of negotiation, with little to no ideology only pragmatism and interests.

With its great oil reserves, Libya is a rental State that can easily get financial resources. All parts of the Libyan society have therefore a huge interest to create a trade-friendly context, in order to export oil and to benefits from it.

The causes for concern: the impact of months of violence and war is hard to estimate. The reintegration of combatants into society and the massive availability of SALW (Small Arms and Light Weapons) is a problem, as is the return of IDP's (Internally Displaced Persons) and refugees. The establishment of the rule of law is a priority and will be hard due to a lack of experience. The borders to the South are open and almost uncontrollable. There is also no tradition of a national public

administration culture – in a system based on patronage and there is a revival of strong fractures within the society – dating back to the colonial period. And last but not least there are more than a few with regrets vis à vis the Gadaffi state.

These challenges are likely to appear in the reconstruction effort – a centralised model could cause serious issues.

RESPONSES TO THE CRISIS

The international community has shown an aggressive posture – especially France and the UK. The aim of regime change was immediately clear, with the main argument that Gadaffi is irrational and that negotiations would not work. It was strongly argued however that the past clearly demonstrates that the Gadaffi regime was able to reach and respect international agreements (Lockerby, WMD). A show of force and the swiftness of the reaction would have been a good starting point for talks. The prevailing attitude was strengthened by the geopolitical conditions in the Arab world: none of the Arabs leaders was allied to Gaddafi. Contrary to Syria and other countries Libya was 'an island'. The strategy the NTC is able to follow – because of continued NATO military support is the eradication of all the former regime's forces. Whereas negotiations would certainly be useful at this stage, also to allow for some political consensus-building.

Outside Libya, Gaddafi's disappearance also creates a vacuum because Libya was a protagonist for lot of sub-Saharan countries at the African Union, being one of the key contributors. It should however not be forgotten that a lot of African leaders were also happy to see Gadaffi go. The main issue with the intervention was not the regime change as such, but the manner in which it was organised. A military campaign was certainly needed, but more as a stick to get negotiations really started. The African continent was divided in its response, the African Union preferred to negotiate, but the pre-condition of Gaddafi's immediate departure was impossible to swallow for some AU members-states because they were Gaddafi's clients.

The European Union's reaction to the Libyan crisis can also be described as divided and incoherent at three levels.

First of all, at horizontal level, the conflict revealed that the post-Lisbon establishment of the EEAS (European External Action Service) did not enhance the EU's ability to speak with one voice. Problems of division of strategic guidance and contradictions of views between the EU institutions emerged as well as a lack of synergies and expertise on crisis management. At vertical level, there was incoherence between the Member States on several key issues including migration (Franco-Italian divisions), the approach towards the TNC, etc. Finally, at multilateral level, the EU has implemented the sanctions adopted by the UN and supported UN humanitarian aid delivery, although the UN decisions were contested. Furthermore, the AU-EU cooperation was very limited.

In the coming month, it is likely that the biggest challenge for the EU is still to come in the role it might assume during the post-conflict reconstruction of the country. The economic and security dimensions are in this case both an opportunity as well as a risk as it may lead to short-termism, focused on migration and terror.