



# WHICH FUTURE FOR LIBYA AFTER AL-SARRAJ'S RESIGNATION?

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In a short televised speech, the head of the Government of National Accord (GNA) Fayez Al-Sarraj announced his upcoming resignation by the end of October and his intention to hand over power to a new executive authority, with the hope that it will find a political solution to restore peace to the country.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, Sarraj stated that the United Nations mediated talks among the rival factions of the country have brought to a new preparatory phase to unify Libyan institutions and to prepare for the elections. A new international summit, the so-called Berlin II Conference, will be held on October 5th and it will be a virtual meeting with the participation of the UN, Germany and all the actors involved, Italy included.<sup>2</sup>

After all, a dialogue had already begun between Fayez Al-Sarraj and Aguila Saleh, President of the Libyan House of Representatives, the political core of Tobruk government.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/mondo/2020/09/16/libia-sarraj-annuncia-le-sue-dimissioni-a-ottobre\\_e067f2f1-6e1c-453d-845e-37d6e42659fe.html](https://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/mondo/2020/09/16/libia-sarraj-annuncia-le-sue-dimissioni-a-ottobre_e067f2f1-6e1c-453d-845e-37d6e42659fe.html)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.libyaobserver.ly/news/un-and-germany-hold-berlin-ii-conference-october-5>



However, in mid-September, the Prime Minister of Tobruk government, Abdullah Al-Thani resigned, bringing further uncertainty to the negotiation.<sup>3</sup> It is in this context of general instability the announcement of Sarraj's resignation should be framed. The GNA has demonstrated to be a weak governmental entity, which is held together only through the support of the militias that ensure the defense of the capital. The weakness of Sarraj reflects the fact that he does not come from the ranks of the army, and this has constantly undermined his field of action. Sarraj asked for help from Misrata militias in order to defend Tripoli against the military offensive launched by Haftar, commander of the Tobruk-based Libyan National Army (LNA), but eventually he had to call upon Erdogan's Turkey. Nevertheless, Sarraj is one of the few figures of stability in the country. His departure, at a very delicate moment for transition, could trigger unpredictable consequences for Libya.

The blockade of energy exports caused by the Libyan National Army (LNA) since January has deprived the Libyan state of most of its usual revenue, worsening living standards and contributing to protests in cities controlled by both sides. In Tripoli, where the presence of militias is widespread, demonstrations have been harshly repressed.<sup>4</sup> Simultaneously the premier suspended from office Fathi Bashaga, the powerful Interior Minister, publicly accusing him of not having handled anti-government protests, and then he reintegrated him a few days after.<sup>5</sup> A reckoning, between the PM and the Minister who over the last months has become Turkey's interlocutor in Tripoli, which was recomposed only due to external pressure.<sup>6</sup> A complex scenario, we also find Ahmed

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/09/libya-abdallah-al-thani-government-resign-protests-benghazi.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://middle-east-online.com/en/protests-erupt-tripoli-against-sarraj-government>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/08/29/libya-interior-minister-suspended-after-gunmen-fire-on-protesters/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://formiche.net/2020/09/bashagha-libia-gna/>



Maiteeg, vice-president of the Presidential Council and potential Sarraj's successor.

Clearly, most of the war between Cyrenaica and Tripolitania is fought for controlling the energy resources, which are also a subject of clashes among the tribes. Hence, the core of the problem is and will be the allocation of oil resources, currently controlled by general Haftar and consequently by the territory's militia, with a solution accepted by all other actors called to the negotiating table. Subsequently, the choice will fall on those personalities who might be able to provide guarantees for everyone and, hopefully, stability.

The solutions proposed by the Libyan parties to the conflict are reflected in the official communiqués published in August together with the cease-fire. The head of the Presidential Council of Tripoli launched an appeal for new presidential and parliamentary elections next March, on "appropriate and agreed constitutional basis"<sup>7</sup>. Sarraj especially spoke of a demilitarized zone in the districts of Sirte and Jufra, thus meeting UN and US requests<sup>8</sup>. On the contrary, Saleh insists on pursuing the Declaration of Cairo, which includes a new Presidential Council composed of only three members in representation of Tripolitania, Fezzan and Cyrenaica, without any mention of the elections. Besides, Saleh put forward the ambitious proposal of making the city of Sirte, current front-line of the frozen conflict, a temporary capital of Libya hosting the new legislative organism which shall unite the people of Libya, despite he did not mention any demilitarized zone<sup>9</sup>.

The political representations of both governments have demonstrated their will of peaceful talks, but their positions still

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/libia-sarraj-ordina-cessate-fuoco-e-annuncia-elezioni-marzo-ADIKWRk>

<sup>8</sup> <https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/2432971/us-administration-proposes-demilitarized-zone-libya%E2%80%99s-sirte-jufra>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.agenzianova.com/a/5f3fbdab598588.18139821/3070556/2020-08-21/libia-ecco-le-differenze-e-i-punti-di-incontro-tra-saleh-e-sarraj>



differ widely. While waiting for a more stable and shared solution, in order to avoid new clashes due to the use of oil sources, a temporary answer could be the creation of a demilitarized zone around Sirte and Libya's oil crescent region, where the most important oil fields are located. Its administration could be temporarily entrusted to the 5+5 Joint Military Commission, an organism created by the Berlin Conference which consists of five representatives of Tripolitania and five of Cyrenaica<sup>10</sup>.

The internal weaknesses of both the present cabinets make a political agreement designed to settle the Libyan issue more a mirage than an actual possibility. It is unlikely that the two central authorities will succeed in persuading the militias to surrender their weapons in order to build an army and a unified police force. Indeed, Tripoli and Tobruk could not oppose the action of the dissident soldiers, in the event of a refusal of the peace agreement by these. After all, a new governmental authority which aims to keep Libya together, must be legitimately recognized by all the warring parties.

The picture is further complicated by the fact that finding a synthesis in the rivalry among the different Libyan militias would not be sufficient. Now, as before, the ambitions of the foreign powers pull the strings of the crisis and their presence cannot be disregarded.

Russia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt are directly involved with men and means in favour of Cyrenaica, while Tripolitania holds on thanks to Turkey and Qatar.

Despite the seeming good will, Libya's political stalemate is evidently not a priority for those countries that, at the first opportunity, do not miss a chance to act following their own interests. As a result of this line of action, a scenario of

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.libyaherald.com/2020/02/03/the-55-hafter-Sarraj-joint-military-commission-meets-in-geneva/>



disintegration materializes day after day in Libya's future. A future that would sanction the definitive failure of every peace talk, along with that of the United Nations as a fundamental forum for the international negotiations.