

# The OSCE and the Libyan Crisis

## *Challenges and Opportunities for Comprehensive Security in the Mediterranean*

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### Abstract

This article examines the role played by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and other external actors in tackling security issues that have emerged in Libya since the outbreak of the Arab Spring. Uncontrolled migration, human trafficking, radicalization and energy security are still at stake within the comprehensive and indivisible security that the OSCE strives to bring across its area. Although security in the Mediterranean is linked to that of OSCE participating States, Libya's fragmentation has highlighted the challenges in adopting joint policies in the country. Therefore, the OSCE still faces the challenge to effectively engage with Libya in its ongoing debate on common security in the Mediterranean.

### Keywords

Libya – OSCE – mediterranean partnership for co-operation – security

## 1 Introduction

Over the last years, Libya's relevance in managing security challenges within the Mediterranean has become increasingly relevant throughout Europe. Since the outbreak of the "Arab Spring" in 2011, the escalation of the hostilities in Libya have led the country to a situation of socio-political instability, that

further weakened its security apparatus.<sup>1</sup> Uncontrolled migration flows to and from the country, as well as the proliferation of trafficking networks and armed groups have given rise to problematic spill-over effects. These have affected not only the neighbouring countries such as Tunisia, Algeria and Egypt but the entire northern and southern Mediterranean. At the same time, Libya's progressive decline as a sovereign state has demanded the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) to promote a tighter co-operation for the sake of enhancing stability, peace and democracy across the territories of its participating States (PS). After Colonel Muammar al-Gaddafi's fall, the turbulent alternation of governments has posed a serious issue of security governance, hindering the OSCE's long-term quest for security in the Mediterranean.<sup>2</sup> The current fragmentation of executives in Libya not only undermines the diplomatic efforts of the OSCE but divides the PS about the decision on whether accepting it as a member of the OSCE Mediterranean Partnership for Co-operation (Mediterranean Partnership). Through this framework of co-operation, the OSCE aims to share expertise with its Asian and Mediterranean partners on current security issues and matters on which the Partnership can be further strengthened.<sup>3</sup>

Although Libya is not an OSCE PS, the 1975 Helsinki Final Act establishes some major principles, according to which the goal of security in the country is strictly linked with stability in the Mediterranean area. *First*, the Helsinki Final Act promotes a comprehensive vision of security in Europe, therefore engaging the organization to encompass these goals under three complimentary politico-military, economic and environmental, and human dimensions. *Second*, security in Europe is recognized as indivisible by the OSCE because, as the Libyan crisis is demonstrating, «the insecurity in and/or of one State can affect the well-being of all».<sup>4</sup>

The contrast between OSCE's mission to establish security in the Mediterranean and the divergences on the external management of the Libyan crisis

1 B. Bhardwaj, 'Development of Conflict in Arab Spring Libya and Syria: From Revolution to Civil War', Washington University International Review, Washington, 2012, pp. 76–96.

2 M. Eljarh, 'The Libyan Crisis: Internal Barriers to Conflict Resolution and the Role of Multilateral Cooperation', in 'The Search for Stability in Libya: OSCE's Role between Internal Obstacles and External Challenges', Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) / Nuova Cultura, Rome, 2017, pp. 47–66.

3 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 'Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation'. Retrieved 22 November 2018, <https://www.osce.org/partners-for-co-operation/mediterranean>.

4 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 'The OSCE Concept of Comprehensive and Co-operative Security. An Overview of Major Milestones', OSCE Secretariat, Conflict Prevention Centre, Vienna, 2009, p. 1.

represents the core of this article. Following such perspective, the next section seeks to provide the reader with an overview of Arab Spring's repercussions in Libya and its effects on the stability of the entire Mediterranean area. After providing an analysis on the main security quests faced by the OSCE, the article will expand the field of analysis to the external actors directly involved in addressing the conflict in Libya. Focus will be given on the efforts made by the United Nations Support Mission to Libya (UNSMIL), as well as on the ongoing debate between some of the most influential OSCE PS. Finally, the last section provides a recommendation for the OSCE to keep Libya and its complex socio-political scenario central within the dialogue mechanisms promoted by the Mediterranean Conference. Therefore, this article highlights not only the importance of establishing an inclusive executive to provide security in Libya but also the potential role of the OSCE and its Mediterranean Partnership in upholding Libya's role within the ongoing debate on Mediterranean security.

## 2 Political Instability in Libya

In the wake of the outbreaks in Tunisia and Egypt in February 2011, the so-called "Arab Spring" also took place in Libya, where the clashes between pro-government militias and rebels opened a series of widespread violence throughout the country. Initially limited in Benghazi and Tripoli, this internal conflict escalated progressively into a proper civil war that paved the way for the fall, in August, of long-lasting Gaddafi's power. One of the most evident consequences of the sudden end of the regime has been the exaltation of local expressions and ideologies. This not only revealed the intricate local networks of tribes and militias (previously subject to the central power) that had been composing the economic, political and social fabric of the country, but also turned them into several "partial" public spheres.<sup>5</sup> As a further consequence, the erosion of the monopoly of power has led to the proliferation and dispersal of weaponry, endangering the security of the local population as well as that of its neighbours and the entire Mediterranean.<sup>6</sup>

Severe tribal tensions have kept mounting and emerged violently ahead of the 2012 General Assembly Elections, as Berbers and Arabs clashed for the

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5 N. Schnelzer, 'Libya in the Arab Spring: The Constitutional Discourse since the Fall of Gaddafi', Springer, Erlangen, 2016, p. 8.

6 E. Inbar, 'The Arab Spring, Democracy and Security: Domestic and International Ramifications', Routledge, Oxon, 2013, p. 93.

control of local resources.<sup>7</sup> These first security challenges anticipated further tensions within the 2014 Constitutional Drafting Assembly (CDA) elections, during which 115 polling stations closed due to attacks and community resistance. In particular, Amazigh and Tebu tribes boycotted the polls after repeatedly expressing concern and scepticism over their representation within the CDA. Overall, 13 seats in the Assembly remained unelected, severely affecting not only the inclusiveness of the newly formed Assembly, but also the stability of Libya in this phase of political transition.<sup>8</sup>

Together with security issues, a lack of representativity in Libya has been a breeding ground where traditional and ideological expressions have competed for representation at parliamentary and military level.<sup>9</sup> Although the general elections held in August 2014 saw the triumph of the House of Representative (HoR), the leading Salafist-backed General National Congress (GNC) did not concede the win to the opponents, pushing the new executive to the eastern city of Tobruk. Here, the armed forces loyal to the HoR appointed General Khalifa Haftar of the Libyan National Army (LNA) as their commander. Through the so-called “Operation Dignity”, Haftar had been conducting several offensives in Eastern Libya against Islamist militias and managed to achieve control of Cyrenaica and Benghazi. This, eventually, has resulted in an expansion of his influence on territory and local tribes.<sup>10</sup>

In response to Libyan authorities’ requests to support the country in their post-conflict efforts, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) deployed, in September 2011, the UNSMIL. The goal of this mission has been to enhance public security and favouring dialogue between political and military spheres ahead of the election process. Guided by the principle of national ownership, the UNSMIL has focused its activity on providing assistance on democratic transition and public security to Libyan institutions and stakeholders.<sup>11</sup> Since

7 House of Commons Library, ‘Libya’s General Assembly election 2012’, International Affairs and Defence Section, p. 6.

8 The Carter Center, ‘The 2014 Constitutional Drafting Assembly Elections in Libya’, Election Report, Atlanta, 2014, p. 3.

9 E. Marques, ‘The Prospect of Leveraging Local Dialogues into National Dialogue in Libya’, in ‘The Third Conference National Dialogues’, The House of the Estates, Helsinki, 2017, p. 90.

10 M. Toaldo, ‘A Quick Guide To Libya’s Main Players: Political Actors’, European Council on Foreign Relations. Retrieved 23 January 2019, [https://www.ecfr.eu/mena/mapping\\_libya\\_conflict](https://www.ecfr.eu/mena/mapping_libya_conflict).

11 United Nations Security Council, ‘United Nations Should Support Efforts in Libya “Where and When Needed”, but Avoid Heavy International Presence, Special Representative Tells Security Council’, March 2012. Retrieved 28 November 2018, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2012/sc10570.doc.htm>.

the beginning of its mission, the UNSMIL has conducted intensive negotiation in Libya, seeking to favour peace talks between HoR and GNC until achieving, in December 2015, the Libyan Political Agreement (LPA), or “Shikhrat Agreement”. Besides providing a comprehensive transitional framework with a view to a unity Government of National Accord (GNA) led by the prime minister-designated Fayez al-Sarraj, the LPA appeals also to construct national security structures and forces, «including effective command and control arrangements».<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless, the HoR has rejected the “Shikhrat Agreement”, highlighting its main weakness of being rather a product of Western pressure, in the wake of the urge to stem a security vacuum, than the outcome of an inclusive dialogue between political sphere and militias. The increasing support granted by armed forces and tribes in the southeast of the country has led Haftar to strive for a higher role in the new executive than that of transitional legislative authority and endorser to the GNA.<sup>13</sup>

Although today the GNC does not control any relevant institution, overcoming such stalemate seems still far from happening as Libya is *de facto* in a situation of fragmentation typical of a failed state.<sup>14</sup> This outcome can be attributed to specific socio-political causes: the aversion that General Haftar shows towards the Presidency Council in Tripoli,<sup>15</sup> the relevant portion of territory firmly under the control of LNA in the East of the country and a progressive decentralisation of power by tribes, city-states and militias. A study conducted by the Clingendael Institute in 2018 shows that, in most municipalities, local armed forces (including tribal forces) are perceived as the real security providers in the territory rather than the “official” governments, whereas armed groups are perceived as the main threats.<sup>16</sup>

12 Libyan Political Agreement, as signed on 17 December 2015. Retrieved on 25 November 2018, <https://unsmil.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/Libyan%20Political%20Agreement%20-%20ENG%20.pdf>.

13 International Crisis Group, ‘The Libyan Political Agreement: Time for a Reset’, November 2016. Retrieved 1 February 2019, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/libya/libyan-political-agreement-time-reset>.

14 Emma Whiteacre, a specialist in political risk assessment at Beazley, defines Libya a failed state, as «The country is broadly lawless and violent attacks are carried out with impunity». See: C. Fingar, ‘Libya enters fourth year of near investment blackout’, Financial Times, March 2018. Retrieved 14 February 2019, <https://app.ft.com/content/5a93e7a-260f-11e8-b27e-cc62a39d57a0>.

15 House of Commons Library, ‘Libya’s General Assembly election 2012’, International Affairs and Defence Section, p. 6.

16 Clingendael Institute of International Relations, ‘Local security governance in Libya. Perceptions of security and protection in a fragmented country’, CRU Report, The Hague, 2018, pp. 27–28.

Extremism and radicalization have coincided with power fragmentation, letting local and external supporters converge mainly to derivatives of Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).<sup>17</sup> Specifically referring to the establishment of numerous armed groups in Libya, Abdul Rahman Alageli of Chatham House talks about a «hybrid approach» to security, according to which non-State and quasi-state security forces have a competitive «and sometimes hostile relationship with regular security forces», favouring «overlapping responsibilities, competition, parallelism and redundancy».<sup>18</sup> For this reason, the introduction of a holistic Security Sector Reform (SSR) in Libya represents still an urgent goal to be achieved from the UNSMIL. This not only would represent – Filípková and Kužvart of the Prague Security Institute note – «the key to gaining trust and respect for the state from alienated local communities»<sup>19</sup> but, more generally, it would provide the OSCE with a stable interlocutor in its mission of granting security in the Mediterranean. Actually – the Centre for Security Governance argues in a 2014 policy paper – «the formal security sector's ability to address underlying insecurity and establish a monopoly over the use of force is essential for other elements of Libya's state-building process [...]. A stable Libya will also contribute to regional security».<sup>20</sup>

### 2.1 *Principal Security Challenges in Libya*

Thoroughly following an «indivisible and comprehensive concept of security» as introduced in the Helsinki Final Act, the PS have been reiterating that «the security of the OSCE area is inextricably linked to that of its neighbours».<sup>21</sup> In

17 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 'Investigation, Prosecution and Adjudication of Foreign Terrorist Fighter Cases for South and South-East Asia', United Nations, Vienna, 2018, p. 5.

18 Centre for Security Governance, 'Libya: Dealing with the Militias and Advancing Security Sector Reform', eSeminar Summary Report n° 1, Kitchener, 2014, p. 3.

19 L. Filípková, J. Kužvart. 'Security Sector Reform (SSR) In Libya: Assessment of the Situation and Evaluation of Perspectives for the Czech Republic and NATO', Prague Security Studies Institute, Prague, 2013, pp. 4–5.

20 Centre for Security Governance, 'Libya: Dealing with the Militias and Advancing Security Sector Reform', eSeminar Summary Report n° 1, Kitchener, 2014, p. 2.

21 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Factsheet, osce.org. Retrieved 26 November 2018, <https://www.osce.org/partners-for-cooperation/77951?download=true>. This concept was introduced at the 2010 'Astana Commemorative Declaration', with the formula: «The security of each participating State is inseparably linked to that of all others». See: 'Astana Commemorative Declaration Towards A Security Community', SUM(10) Journal No. 2, Agenda item 4, Astana, 2010, p. 1. Stephanie Liechtenstein of Security and Human Rights Monitor defines it «a mantra that is repeated in virtually every OSCE consensus document». See: S. Liechtenstein, 'OSCE Mediterranean Conference highlights the

accordance with this principle, the OSCE has identified a co-operative security agenda between the PS and the Mediterranean partners as a strategy to prevent and counter the existing challenges coming from the Mediterranean. The spill-over effects deriving from the MENA region prove the interdependence between European and Mediterranean security, not only on the base of traditional threats such as arms control, but also on transnational dynamics. Among these, violent extremism, uncontrolled migration trends and energy security have the highest priority in the OSCE Mediterranean agenda. Therefore, as it has emerged over the years following the Arab Spring, the role of Libya has assumed increasing importance within a stronger co-operation in the Mediterranean.<sup>22</sup>

Concerning the phenomenon of radicalization, the 2017 OSCE Chairperson in Office's Special Representative on Countering Radicalisation and Violent Extremism, Peter R. Neumann, identifies in Libya the presence of «cultures of conflict» that, nowadays, attract a relevant number of civilians.<sup>23</sup> Since 2011, Libya, once considered a mere transit territory for *jihadists* travelling to Syria and Iraq, has become a popular destination for some 1,350 to 3,400 Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs).<sup>24</sup> Weak government and security structure have made Libya an attractive hub for ISIL headquarters in the Middle East to delocalize its facilities in co-operation with local affiliated groups. Recruitment and training of new militants represent relevant counterterrorism challenges that relate to northern African Mediterranean Partners and Libya.<sup>25</sup>

According to the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Committee, approximately 40,000 FTFs have joined ISIL by 2015, mostly from OSCE Partners such as Tunisia, Egypt and Algeria.<sup>26</sup> For this reason, although radicalization seems to be losing ground in Libya after ISIL was deprived of its stronghold in Sirte in 2016, the OSCE carefully monitors extremism and radicalization across the

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important role of Libya in managing common security challenges', Security and Human Rights Monitor, 10 October 2016. Retrieved 26 November 2018, <https://www.shrmonitor.org/libya-applies-become-osce-partner-co-operation/>.

- 22 Istituto Affari Internazionali, 'Towards "Helsinki +40": The OSCE, the Global Mediterranean, and the Future of Cooperative Security', Document IAI 14 | 08, IAI, Rome, 2014, p. 3.
- 23 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 'Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalisation that Lead to Terrorism: Ideas, Recommendations, and Good Practices from the OSCE Region', Report by Professor P. R. Neumann, September 2017, p. 24.
- 24 L. Watanabe, *The Next Steps of North Africa's Foreign Fighters*, CSS.
- 25 *Ibidem*.
- 26 UN News Service, 'Returning foreign terrorist fighters pose 'enormous challenge with no easy solution', Security Council told', 28 November 2017. Retrieved 9 August 2019, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5a1e8336o.html>.

territories of its Mediterranean Partners.<sup>27</sup> Whereas through the Mediterranean Partnership, the OSCE regularly shares its expertise on this topic, the Ad Hoc Committee of Migration and Refugee flows and the Ad Hoc Committee on Countering Terrorism carry out research, outreach and debate activities that have often granted Libya's security reasonable attention from the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA) and other institutions involved in addressing these challenges.

Another priority on the OSCE agenda in the Mediterranean concerns the fight against human trafficking and smuggling of migrants. The relevance of this challenge for establishing common security has been highlighted during the 2018 OSCE Forum for Security Co-operation and the Permanent Council and its urgency was confirmed in December 2018 "Libya Migration Report", jointly drafted and presented by the UNSMIL and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).<sup>28</sup> The climate of «lawlessness» in Libya – the report indicates – «leaves migrant and refugee men, women and children at the mercy of countless predators who view them as commodities to be exploited and extorted for maximum financial gain».<sup>29</sup> Not only smugglers but also State officials have been reported to repeatedly commit human rights violations against migrants, refugees and asylum seekers within an arbitrary detention trend that, currently, seems allowed by the absence of a national security system.<sup>30</sup> The decreasing migratory flow from Libya towards Europe since mid-2017 reveals also a worrying reversal of the medal. According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the chances of dying in waters off Libyan coasts have increased significantly in 2018.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, by virtue of the 2017 Italy-Libya Memorandum of Understanding,<sup>32</sup> the Libyan Coast Guard

27 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 'Empowering youth at all levels key to countering violent extremism, conclude participants at OSCE-supported discussion in Tunis', May 2016. Retrieved 18 January 2019, <https://www.osce.org/secretariat/238191>.

28 Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, United Nations Support Mission in Libya, 'Desperate and Dangerous: Report on the human rights situation of migrants and refugees in Libya', December 2018. Retrieved 7 February 2019, <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/LY/LibyaMigrationReport.pdf>.

29 Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, United Nations Support Mission in Libya, 'Desperate and Dangerous: Report on the human rights situation of migrants and refugees in Libya', December 2018. Retrieved 7 February 2019, <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/LY/LibyaMigrationReport.pdf>.

30 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 'Desperate Journeys. Refugees and migrants arriving in Europe and at Europe's borders', January-December 2018, p. 10.

31 *Ibidem*.

32 The 2017 Memorandum of Understanding reiterates the basis for co-operation on illegal immigration between Italy and Libya, primarily introduced in the 2009 Treaty of

has gradually taken over the responsibility of conducting search and rescue operations from European vessels, with Italy in charge to provide «technical and technological support to the Libyan institutions». Over the last years, this has caused further episodes of human rights violations once migrants disembark on Libyan territory.<sup>33</sup>

Apart from politico-military and human security, economic and environmental security challenges are also at stake in Libya. The OSCE strives to achieve this third dimension of comprehensive security in the Mediterranean, not only to fulfil its commitment towards a comprehensive vision of security but also to meet the goals provided by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.<sup>34</sup> In particular, the 2018 Mediterranean Conference focused its discussion panels on the importance of energy security for economic growth and co-operation, thanks also to the contribution of OSCE institutions, PA and other key economic and financial stakeholders. In this regard, the OSCE is opening its dialogue on the Mediterranean, traditionally the centre of the world's fuel fossil market, to improve co-operation on sustainable forms of energy, which can grant more jobs for its citizens and effective growth for the regional economy.<sup>35</sup> In the words of the Co-ordinator for OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities, Vuk Žugić, «guaranteeing sustainable and reliable energy at affordable prices is an indispensable condition for prospering economies, peace and security, throughout the OSCE area and beyond».<sup>36</sup>

Currently, Libya depends massively on its gas and oil sources, both to meet its internal electricity demand and for the foreign – especially European – market.<sup>37</sup> Libya's extensive pipeline network, although physically divided between the territories of the two governments, is owned by the Libyan National

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Friendship, Partnership and Co-operation. In the 2017 Memorandum of Understanding, it is highlighted «the importance of Libyan land and sea borders' control and security, in order to ensure the reduction of illegal migratory fluxes, the fight against human trafficking and fuel contraband». See: 'Italy-Libya Agreement: The Memorandum text', February 2017. Retrieved 6 May 2019, <https://www.asgi.it/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/ITALY-LIBYA-MEMORANDUM-02.02.2017.pdf>.

33 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 'Desperate Journeys. Refugees and migrants arriving in Europe and at Europe's borders', January-December 2018, p. 9.

34 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 'Sustainable Development Goals and the OSCE'. Retrieved 4 February 2019, <https://www.osce.org/sustainable-development-goals>.

35 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, '2018 OSCE Mediterranean Conference', October 2018. Retrieved 23 January 2019, <https://www.osce.org/event/2018-osce-mediterranean-conference>.

36 *Ibidem*.

37 European Commission, 'Energy: Supplier Countries'. Retrieved 7 February 2019, <https://ec.europa.eu/energy/en/topics/imports-and-secure-supplies/supplier-countries>.

Oil Corporation (NOC), officially overseen by the GNA. Hence, over the last years, the distribution of revenues from oil exports has further fuelled the existing tensions between Tripoli and Tobruk,<sup>38</sup> as well as protests and disruptive actions from local tribes.<sup>39</sup>

In view of the role played by Libya within the above-described security dimensions in its Mediterranean agenda, the OSCE is currently facing the challenge to include the country in its Mediterranean Partnership or to enhance the dialogue with its representatives. Ekaterina Stepanova of the Primakov Institute of World Economy and International Relations argues that «the OSCE is the only regionalized institutional format [...] potentially capable of ensuring a functional link between the regional dimension and the European track on Libya» but also «provides an inclusive venue for discussing and coordinating Russian and European positions on Libya».<sup>40</sup> Stepanova refers to the role played by those State actors involved in the Libyan conflict until today, in so far as this has been addressed in line with their specific interests and strategies. The next section will provide an overview of these positions.

### 3 Obstacles of Libya's Inclusion in the Mediterranean Partnership

Through the framework of the Mediterranean Partnership, the OSCE Mediterranean Contact Group provides six Partners (Algeria, Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia) with panels and joint activities in which professionals and policy-makers can debate over the main security-related common topics and benefit from OSCE's expertise. Among them, the OSCE identifies confidence-building, threats to security and stability, human as well as economic and environmental dimension commitments, migration and integration policies.<sup>41</sup>

38 Sputnik news, 'Russian Exploration Company Discusses Geological Exploration with Libya's NOC', October 2018. Retrieved 23 January 2019, <https://sputniknews.com/business/201810061068649411-russia-libya-exploration-company-noc/>.

39 C. Widdershins, 'Libyan Oil in Jeopardy as Peace Talks Fail', Oilprice.com, December 2018. Retrieved 31 January 2019, <https://oilprice.com/Energy/Crude-Oil/Libyan-Oil-In-Jeopardy-As-Peace-Talks-Fail.html>.

40 E. Stepanova, 'Russia's Approach to the Conflict in Libya, the East-West Dimension and the Role of the OSCE', in 'The Search for Stability in Libya: OSCE's Role between Internal Obstacles and External Challenges', Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) / Nuova Cultura, Rome, 2017, p. 107.

41 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 'Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation'. Retrieved 22 November 2018, <https://www.osce.org/partners-for-co-operation/mediterranean>.

Although Libyan authorities have presented formal applications to the OSCE Mediterranean Partnership in 2013, 2016 and 2017, Russia's veto, supported by other countries, has not allowed the consensus that is necessary to find among the 57 OSCE PS, which all hold equal weight and voting rights.

In particular, the different positions that emerged within the OSCE towards Libya's applications inevitably led to some considerations about the East–West antagonism (and, to a certain extent, within the West itself). On one hand, Russia is giving high relevance to General Haftar's anti-Islam quest, to the extent that the Kremlin considers both lack of unity and inclusiveness from the UN-backed GNA insurmountable barriers on the way to Libya's Partnership. «In essence» – says Andrea Dessì of *Istituto Affari Internazionali* – «Russia and other states [are] worried that by accepting the Libyan application, the OSCE would effectively be siding with one Libyan party, the GNA, against its rivals».<sup>42</sup> It is not hazardous to mention that Russia's position is rooted even deeper into the contrast with the 2011 UNSC Resolutions 1970 and 1973 that authorized the use of force in the country, within the responsibility to protect civilians.<sup>43</sup> This position was reiterated by Russian Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, in occasion of recent Haftar's advance towards Tripoli in March 2019: «The reason for the Libyan crisis lies in NATO's actions in 2011. Precisely since that time, Libya has turned into a failed state and a black hole, through which terrorists, the smuggling of weapons, go south, and to the north, flows of illegal migrants».<sup>44</sup> In a few words, Moscow considers the actions pursued by the West in Libya (as well as in other scenarios, such as Iraq and Afghanistan) as a further attempt to destabilise a legitimised power, with the effect of hindering, eventually, international peace and security.<sup>45</sup> In support to the line followed by the Kremlin, non-PS Egypt and the United Arab Emirates have repeatedly challenged the ongoing UN arms embargo on Libya and provided weaponry to their ally, show-

42 A. Dessì, 'The OSCE Mediterranean Partnership, Libya and the MENA Crisis: Potential, Limits and Prospects', in 'The Search for Stability in Libya: OSCE's Role between Internal Obstacles and External Challenges', *Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) / Nuova Cultura*, Rome, 2017, pp. 21–22.

43 United Nations Security Council, 'Resolution 1970 (2011) Adopted by the Security Council at its 6491st meeting, on 26 February 2011', S/RES/1970 (2011), 26 February 2011.

44 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 'Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's opening remarks and answers to media questions at a joint news conference following talks with Foreign Minister of the Arab Republic of Egypt Sameh Shoukry', 6 April 2019. Retrieved 6 May 2019, [http://www.mid.ru/ru/press\\_service/minister\\_speeches/asset\\_publisher/7OvQR5KJWVMR/content/id/3603049](http://www.mid.ru/ru/press_service/minister_speeches/asset_publisher/7OvQR5KJWVMR/content/id/3603049).

45 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 'Final Report and Recommendations of the Panel of Eminent Persons on European Security as a Common Project', November 2015, p. 25.

ing strong support to Haftar and LNA's role in a unity government. The same violations were also committed by the Turkish government which, on its end, has actively provided support to Islamic political groups in Libya.<sup>46</sup>

On the other hand, a wide "Western" cluster mainly represented by the PS to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has, instead, set itself as the guarantor of the UNSMIL's reconciliation and transition efforts in Libya.<sup>47</sup> OSCE PS from northern and southern Europe, as well as the United States, have welcomed and supported Libya's applications by virtue of the fact that transnational security threats can be addressed only partially if a major origin and transit country for such threats remains excluded from the Mediterranean Partnership. As evidence of this common will, the governments of France, Italy, the US, and Great Britain have been making use of joint communications to support international efforts towards a unified executive in Libya or in response to facts undermining the balance in the country.<sup>48</sup> However, even within this common front, the positions of France and Italy emerge as distinct expressions of their interests in Libya, mainly in the fields of security and energy. On one hand, Italy has been at the forefront to link Libyan to Mediterranean security and *Farnesina's* support to the GNA has strengthened the co-operation with Tripoli on border control and management of illegal migration.<sup>49</sup> On the other hand, France's "pragmatic approach" to security has granted Haftar active military support and legitimacy in the event that a government of national unity is formed.<sup>50</sup>

Despite the divisions that are hampering Libya's membership to the OSCE, the need to address security challenges in the country has been central within recent Mediterranean Conferences, particularly held in Vienna in 2016. It is important to underline the relevance of this conference within the debate on

46 M. Eljarh, 'The Libyan Crisis: Internal Barriers to Conflict Resolution and the Role of Multilateral Cooperation', in 'The Search for Stability in Libya: OSCE's Role between Internal Obstacles and External Challenges', Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) / Nuova Cultura, Rome, 2017, pp. 57–58.

47 European Parliament Directorate-General for External Policies, 'EU-led security sector reform and disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration cases: challenges, lessons learnt and ways forward', July 2016, p. 19.

48 These joint statements on Libya have been released since 2015 and aim mostly at supporting a non-military transition, counting also on the occasional participation of other countries.

49 The principles of such co-operation are included in the aforementioned 2017 Memorandum of Understanding.

50 M. Ilardo, 'The Rivalry between France and Italy over Libya and its Southwest Theatre', in 'Austria Institut Für *Europa und-Sicherheitspolitik*', Fokus | Hainburg/Donau, May 2018, p. 2.

Libya, not only because it saw the presence of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the GNA Mohamed Siala (who also attended the 2017 edition of the Conference in Palermo) but also because it brought the Libyan challenges into focus, promoting a cross-dimensional approach, aimed at linking security to youth empowerment.<sup>51</sup> Youth organizations from northern and southern Mediterranean had the chance to participate actively in the Conference, strengthening the general conviction – highlighted in the final summary – that empowerment creates perspectives for young people to foster critical dialogue and co-operation against extremism and radicalization in the Mediterranean.<sup>52</sup> The role of youth in enhancing the OSCE Mediterranean dialogue has been a focal point of the 2018 Italian Chairmanship, which has made significant efforts to promote a stronger co-operation between the PS and the Mediterranean Partners, as evidenced in the OSCE Milan Declaration on Security and Co-operation in the Mediterranean (Milan Declaration).<sup>53</sup> To this regard, keeping up a dialogue on topics of common interest (such as migration, economic growth and, energy security) seems to be the way forward to ensure Libya's security a high relevance in the OSCE Mediterranean agenda. The 2019 Autumn Meeting of the OSCE PA was the first taking place in Morocco, a Mediterranean Partner, showing that the debate on security within the OSCE area is inevitably following this direction.

#### 4 Towards Common Security in the Mediterranean

Persistent instability and insecurity in Libya represent the outcomes of inadequate actions pursued by the International Community, not only in managing the local crisis but also in addressing the overall high-level dialogue on the growing threats to common security coming from the Mediterranean. This resulted in diverging external strategies upon the management of Libyan civil conflict, which have exacerbated the existing fragmentation of power and failed to provide the country with an internally and internationally recognised executive. Currently, socio-political divisions characterise the Libyan scenario to the extent that a transition process in the country would need to take local

51 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, '2016 OSCE Mediterranean Conference', Consolidated Summary, Vienna, October 2016, p. 3.

52 *Ivi*, p. 4.

53 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 'Declaration on Security and Co-operation in the Mediterranean', Ministerial Council, MC.DOC/4/18, 7 December 2018.

powers into careful account in order to be implemented successfully.<sup>54</sup> UN-SMIL's Chief Ghassan Salamé, along the lines of the UN Action Plan that he had personally proposed in 2017 to compensate the scarce representativity envisaged by the LPA,<sup>55</sup> is now looking forward to providing Libya with a wide National Conference before new elections are held. Allowing Libyan-owned and led elections through the implementation of the UN Action Plan would not only facilitate an agreement on a comprehensive reconciliation but also overcome the counterproductive top-down approach adopted in the past.

Compatibly with the view, expressed by OSCE former Secretary-General, Lamberto Zannier, of the Mediterranean Partnership as a source of common opportunities,<sup>56</sup> the presence of a stable executive in Libya needs to go hand in hand with an effective multilateral dialogue on security throughout the entire Mediterranean. Initiatives such as the "New-Med Track II Network" have stimulated innovating expert dialogue aimed at informing the works at the Mediterranean Partnership.<sup>57</sup> Nonetheless, the lack of involvement of Libya's officials in the 2018 and 2019 Mediterranean Conferences has shown that further progress needs to be done in order to keep the Libyan crisis high in the OSCE Mediterranean agenda. To this regard, intensifying the relations between the OSCE and Libya, strengthening the role of the Mediterranean Partnership and enhancing OSCE's role as a neutral venue for West–East multilateral cooperation are the main recommendations hereby provided.

First, notwithstanding Libya's exclusion from the Mediterranean Partnership, the OSCE can keep up the dialogue with the country, either with a view to presidential and parliamentary elections or within the persistence of the current *status quo*. Should the first scenario occur,<sup>58</sup> the OSCE, through the Office

54 In the words of the representatives of Zintan and Misrata, local administrators are «the only effective guarantors of the territory». See: F. Semprini, 'Palermo conference on Libya in disarray', *La Stampa*, November 2018. Retrieved 26 November 2018, <https://www.lastampa.it/2018/11/15/esteri/palermo-conference-on-libya-in-disarray-FyoqAQasgcdeTyCi6pUBVN/pagina.html>.

55 M. Eljarh, 'The Libyan Crisis: Internal Barriers to Conflict Resolution and the Role of Multilateral Cooperation', in 'The Search for Stability in Libya: OSCE's Role between Internal Obstacles and External Challenges', Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) / Nuova Cultura, Rome, 2017, p. 56.

56 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, '2016 OSCE Mediterranean Conference', Consolidated Summary, Vienna, October 2016, p. 28.

57 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 'Annual Report 2017', Vienna, 2018, p. 92.

58 United Nations Support Mission in Libya, 'Remarks of SRSG Ghassan Salamé to the United Nations Security Council on the Situation in Libya, 20 March 2019'. Retrieved 13 April 2019, <https://unsmil.unmissions.org/remarks-srsg-ghassan-salam%C3%A9-united-nations-security-council-situation-libya-20-march-2019>.

for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), could be involved to implement elections observation activities, in the wake of previous successful cases of co-operation with non-PS. As it happened in Tunisia, which has likewise experienced severe migration and extremism challenges since 2011, ODIHR could use its expertise to provide recommendations on drafting elections reports to local observers on the basis of international standards.<sup>59</sup> Instead, should the elections be further postponed, the Contact Group is called to act as a conduit between Libyan State representatives and the OSCE. This can happen not only by regularly inviting Libyan delegations to the Mediterranean Conferences as observers but also by engaging more often Libyan professionals in the trainings that the OSCE provides to strengthen co-operation between the border security and management agencies of the PS and the Mediterranean Partners. This would allow different actors from Libyan civil society to benefit from knowledge on good practices and to be equally updated on new developments in the field of security management.<sup>60</sup> Looking at innovative ways to enhance connectivity among representatives from the OSCE region and beyond would possibly help lessening the distinction between potential and existing Partners within a shared idea of security, likewise facilitating the reciprocal enrichment that the OSCE seeks from its participating States.<sup>61</sup>

Furthermore, strengthening the role of the Mediterranean Partners in addressing the OSCE PA agenda would be useful to uphold the co-operation between PS and Mediterranean Partners sought by the Italian Chairmanship. In

59 In addition, as it happened also in other Mediterranean countries, ODIHR could provide Tunisian representatives with expertise on political party regulation to institutionalize gender equality within a choral work with other European fora, civil society organisations, and OSCE member States. See: Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 'OSCE/ODIHR shares expertise with citizen election observer groups in Tunisia', May 2013. Retrieved 26 January 2019, <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/101668>.

60 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 'OSCE organizes intensive training course on border management for its Mediterranean Points of Contact Network in Malta', June 2018. Retrieved 13 April 2019, <https://www.osce.org/secretariat/386259>.

61 Positive cases can be identified – among the others – in the 2016 OSCE "border loosening" experiment on connectivity between political institutions and business, as well as in the OSCE youth conferences to promote dialogue and co-operation on regional level. About the first case, see: Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 'An Experiment in Connectivity', October 2016. Retrieved 6 August 2019, <https://www.osce.org/magazine/271931>. About the second case see, for instance, the conference held in Belgrade in December 2017 within the OSCE Mission to Serbia, with the scope to connect Serbian and Albanian youth actors: Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, '#OSCEyouth: Regional Connectivity & Millennials, Conference on Youth Connectivity in the Western Balkans', January 2018. Retrieved 6 August 2019, <https://www.osce.org/mission-to-serbia/368681>.

a context where growing challenges and opportunities for European security come from the Mediterranean, this would allow the PS to be more aware not only of the opportunities for development brought by energy security but also of best practices for preventing and countering radicalization and uncontrolled migration. The action-oriented dialogue supported by the Milan Declaration to ensure the continuity and the sustainability of the Partnership's achievements might serve this scope in the foreseeable future. In the case of Libya, energy security might become an increasingly relevant point of contact between the OSCE and the country through the work of the Mediterranean Partnership. Considering Libya's impressive solar energy resources and the current tribal tensions on the management of fossil fuel reserves, an inclusive dialogue on energy security cannot leave out the central role played by the country in the Mediterranean. Notably, a future co-operation between the Mediterranean Partnership and Libya can offer a fair compromise between EU Members' research into alternative sources of energy and Libya's need for improved and sustainable electricity supply nationwide.

In the end, the needs of common security and an inclusive government in Libya ought to be determining factors in overcoming the existing divisions among the PS and urging co-operative security. The "regionalized" format of the OSCE, as described by Stepanova, can provide a common ground for West–East peace-making and anti-terrorism efforts that is apart from new and traditional diplomatic tensions.<sup>62</sup> In this respect, Russia's main ambition of establishing itself as a security guarantor on regional level, Europe's concerns on common security and the US' disinterest on a direct involvement in the conflict are likely to bring about a constructive multilateral dialogue on these matters. Looking at OSCE's well-established capacity in bringing together its different souls on several opportunities of compromise about the Mediterranean, the goal of a common strategy for tackling Libya's security challenges seems, in the long run, not impossible to achieve.

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62 E. Stepanova, 'Russia's Approach to the Conflict in Libya, the East–West Dimension and the Role of the OSCE', in 'The Search for Stability in Libya: OSCE's Role between Internal Obstacles and External Challenges', Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) / Nuova Cultura, Rome, 2017, pp. 89–111.