European Neighbourhood Watch

LIBYA: THE STRATEGY THAT WASN'T
Editorial  |  Toby Vogel

A failed state in the European Union's immediate neighbourhood that serves as a base camp for terrorists and a conduit for irregular migration to Europe: one might think that Libya is precisely the kind of place for which the Union's foreign policy instruments were developed. Since the 2011 NATO intervention that helped oust Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi, the EU has deployed most of its crisis response approaches and instruments in the country, including new procedures set out in the 2013 review of the European External Action Service (EEAS), most notably a new Political Framework for a Crisis Approach (PFCA). Yet, almost nothing in Libya has followed the liberal peacebuilding playbook, which assumes an improving security situation followed by reconstruction and sustained democratic political transformation. Instead, the EU has been struggling to make an impact while the ongoing chaos in the country has deepened divisions among member states, with migration control emerging as the lowest common denominator for EU action.

Even with this narrower, migration-focused approach, however, EU action has bumped up against its limits. The Central Mediterranean route into Europe saw a record number of crossings in 2016, with more than 180,000 migrants intercepted. (This route is also by far the deadliest; last year also set a record for the number of deaths at sea, with more than 5,000.) Libya's national unity government under Fayez Serraj is seeking some 800 million euros in military equipment from the Europeans, ostensibly to curb migration. But as long as Serraj remains a figurehead with very limited authority, any foreign assistance is bound to be less than effective, and possibly counterproductive should military equipment fall into the wrong hands. For now, the EU has limited itself to training the Libyan coastguard as part of Operation Sophia – a maritime mission to intercept migrants on the Mediterranean.

A security vacuum

Following Gaddafi's ouster and the jostling for power among the various militias that sprung up during the civil war, the European powers that spearheaded the military intervention (France and the UK) and other outsiders faced a security vacuum but did little to stabilise the country. In 2014, the political process broke down and fighting erupted again, splitting the country in two and prompting the departure of most international actors, including the EU Delegation to Libya. At the end of 2015, the United Nations managed to broker a deal for a government of national unity. But the government
in Tripoli has failed to bring the west of the country under unified control and to co-opt or push aside a rival government in the east, propped up by Khalifa Haftar, a local military leader. As a result, recent weeks have witnessed the worst fighting in Libya since 2014.

In response, Italy has stepped up its crisis diplomacy. In particular, it is trying to find a role for Haftar (who is backed by Egypt and, somewhat half-heartedly, by Russia) in the UN-backed government in a bid to formalise but also restrain his power.

The events of 2014 forced the EU to rethink its approach. Italy, the former colonial power which held the rotating presidency of the EU's Council of Ministers in the second half of the year, led a policy shift that in effect abandoned institution-building efforts and replaced them with a policy of containment and conflict management, focused above all on border control – although the EU's Border Assistance Mission was unable to continue operating in the country. "As the crisis became increasingly complicated, and Islamic State terror seized terrain in Libya, the migration question captured much of the agenda on the European side," write the authors of a forthcoming study comparing the EU's crisis responses in Libya and Ukraine [www.eunpack.eu].

The Neighbourhood Policy

The crisis in Libya tracks, but also reinforces, tendencies in the EU that came to the fore in the November 2015 review of its European Neighbourhood Policy. The ENP was not supposed to be a crisis management policy but set out the EU's overall approach to the neighbourhood, which in the last several years has seen wars in Syria, Ukraine and Libya. As a result, the ENP's focus has now shifted. "The ENP is a long-term engagement with the EU's neighbours, but it also needs to take account of the most pressing needs," the Communication on the review stated. "In the next three to five years, the most urgent challenge in many parts of the neighbourhood is stabilisation."

While the review made a nod to broader concerns such as resilience, its main focus was on security and stabilisation. This seemed to mark a departure from the ENP's previous rhetoric about the transformative power of EU policies in the neighbourhood – but in reality may simply have been a case of stated policy catching up with implemented policy. "The EU has been consistent in prioritising its security interests over 'shared prosperity' and democracy promotion, and created structured, institutionalised and securitised relations with its southern neighbours, which are not easy to alter and are not conducive to supporting Arab reformers," the authors of a recent CEPS study on the ENP concluded. They pointed out that this comes with its own dangers: "The Arab Spring…has shown that a 'security and stability first' approach has not prevented the region from falling prey to political turmoil." There is no reason to believe that Libya will prove an exception.

Federica Mogherini, the EU's foreign policy chief, seems to recognise this in principle. "Today the message that comes out of the Foreign Affairs Council is that our work with Libya, for Libyans and with Libyans mainly is going much beyond the issue of migration and the main focus is our political work," she said at a news conference in February. "First of all, to guarantee inclusiveness, to support the Government of National Accord and the Libyan Political Agreement; the delivery of services to the Libyans starting with health and social measures." While all these are necessary ingredients for a solution to the Libyan crisis, they do not make up a strategy. And without a proper strategy, a solution will remain elusive.
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Federica Mogherini upon arrival at the Foreign Affairs Council, Brussels, 06 March 2017. Link

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Joint statement following the third Association Council meeting between the European Union and the Republic of Moldova, Brussels, 31 March 2017. Link

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The EU non-recognition policy for Crimea and Sevastopol: Fact Sheet, Brussels, 18 March 2017. Link

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Commission reports on progress under the migration partnership framework and increased action along the Central Mediterranean Route, Brussels, 02 March 2017. Link
HR/VP Mogherini launches pioneering 'Young Med Voices Plus' youth initiative in dialogue with young Mediterranean voices, Brussels, 23 March 2017. Link

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EU-Algeria: EU adopts €40 million projects to support Algeria's renewable energy, public finances reform and to facilitate trade, 13 March 2017. Link

Rapport sur l'état des relations UE-Algérie : vers plus de dialogue politique et de coopération, Brussels, 13 March 2017. Link

The European Union and Algeria adopt their Partnership Priorities, Brussels, 13 March 2017. Link

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EU, Germany, Kuwait, Norway, Qatar, the UK and the UN to co-chair the Brussels Conference on Supporting the future of Syria and the region on 5 April 2017. Link

The EU and the crisis in Syria, factsheet, Brussels, 14 March 2017. Link

Towards an even stronger EU role for Syria, reinforcing EU efforts to build peace, Strasbourg, 14 March 2017. Link

Questions and Answers: Joint Communication: Elements for an EU Strategy for Syria, 14 March 2017. Link

Use of chemical weapons in Syria: EU imposes sanctions against 4 high-ranking military officials, Brussels, 20 March 2017. Link

Statement by High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini on Syria, Brussels, 23 March 2017. Link

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CBC Serbia – BiH: EU continues assisting development of cross-border regions, 23 March 2017. Link

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Kocijančič: Authorities in Kosovo* to ensure conditions for people to attend meetings ahead of Serbian presidential elections, 29 March 2017.  [Link]

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High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini in Skopje, Skopje, 02 March 2017.  [Link]

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Joint statement by High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini and Commissioner Johannes Hahn on the Venice Commission’s Opinion on the amendments to the Constitution of Turkey and recent events, Brussels, 13 March 2017.  [Link]

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EEA EFTA Comment on proposal for new regulatory framework for fertilisers, 10 March 2017.  [Link]

EEA EFTA Comment on the proposal on a Body of European Regulators for Electronic Communications (BEREC), 27 March 2017.  [Link]
Iceland

Iceland lifts capital controls on individuals, firms and pension funds, 17 March 2017. Link

Donbas: the price of peace

This event, to be held at CEPS on 11 April, will feature two Ukrainian analysts who will explore new research data from Donbas: Iryna Bekeshkina, Director of the Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation (DIF), and Olexiy Haran, Professor Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, Research Director of DIF.

Sociological research shows that Russia’s attacks against Ukraine led to dramatic changes in the identity and geopolitical attitudes of Ukrainians. They strongly reject the ‘Eurasian vector’ and for the first time the number of NATO supporters in Ukraine prevails. Also, Ukrainians do not think that fulfilment of Russian demands will lead to peace. In March, Russia recognised ‘passports’ issued by the so-called ‘people’s republics’ of Luhansk and Donetsk which, in turn, ‘nationalised’ enterprises registered in Ukraine. The government in Kyiv responded with a trade blockade. Kyiv’s official logic follows the sequence defined in the Minsk agreements: political settlement in Donbas may come only after security preconditions are met. Until today, Western partners have backed this approach up with sanctions. But what is the view from the US under President Trump? And what might be the impact of the outcome of the forthcoming elections in France and Germany? Will Washington, Paris and Berlin pressure Kyiv to provide a ‘special status’ to and accept election results in the separatist areas before Russian troops leave Donbas? Will the Minsk process survive? These and other questions will be debated in view of new sociological research data gathered from respondents in Donbas and across Ukraine.

To register for the event, click the button below.

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New Book: Assessing the European Neighbourhood Policy

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Initiatives Foundation (DIF), and Olexiy Haran, Professor Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, Research Director of DIF.

Several events in the past few years have dramatically shown how the interests of European citizens are directly affected by the stability, security and prosperity of their neighbouring regions. At the same time, the European Union and its member states face many challenges and dilemmas in designing and pursuing policies that not only effectively promote these interests, but also build stronger partnerships with neighbouring countries based on the values on which the Union is founded.

A new book edited by Hrant Kostanyan, entitled Assessing European Neighbourhood Policy: Perspectives from the Literature and published with the support of the Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, identifies the factors that explain the (lack of) effectiveness and coherence of the ENP by deliberately focusing on the recent literature (since 2011). This exercise has resulted in a rich overview of and deep reflection on a wide variety of ENP-related themes, such as conditionality and leverage, the interests vs values dilemma and the role of third parties. The study identifies where there is consensus among scholars and where perspectives and judgements diverge. It also identifies important gaps in the literature where further research is needed. This book will be of interest to a wide audience of officials, diplomats, parliamentarians, researchers at think tanks, civil society organisations, university teachers, trainers, students and journalists who want to know more about the challenges and dilemmas arising from the ENP.

For more information and to download the book, click the button below.

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