



**PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY OF THE MEDITERRANEAN**

**ASSEMBLEE PARLEMENTAIRE DE LA MEDITERRANEE**

الجمعية البرلمانية للبحر الأبيض المتوسط

## **1<sup>st</sup> Standing Committee on Political and Security related Cooperation**

“Political and Security developments in the MENA region”

Rapporteur: Sen. Simon Sutour (France)

### **Report**

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

1. Over the past year, many areas of the Mediterranean region continued to face conflicts and tensions, creating geopolitical instability. The war in Syria remained the most intense conflict. The civil war and political crisis in Libya, while less intense, however has continued to be a major source of instability and regional concern. Finally, the de facto end of progress in the Oslo Accords peace process between Israel and Palestine, also contributed to a rise in tensions in the region. This report provides the parliamentarians of PAM with a substantive update of political and security developments in the region, with a focus on the three conflicts mentioned above.
2. Throughout 2017, PAM has continued to monitor the situation, and continued to engage with the relevant political, diplomatic, religious and non-governmental actors with the aim of fostering conflict resolution and peace in the region. Most notably in July 2017, PAM conducted a mission to the Middle East, travelling successively to Amman, Ramallah, and Jerusalem. The objective of the mission was to get familiar, on the ground, with the status of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations and also the humanitarian consequences of the conflict in Syria.
3. PAM remains a key and effective platform for regional parliamentary diplomacy, a tool that is critical to sustain peace efforts, provide alternative channels for political dialogue, and to foster ties among parliamentarians, particularly in times of conflict and humanitarian crises in the region.

## **II. SYRIA**

4. The year 2017 was characterized by important developments in the Syrian conflict. Most notably, ISIS lost the vast majority of the territories it controlled until now, including its de-facto capital Raqqa. Many elements contributed to the military defeat of the Islamic State: the fight against this terrorist group was carried out on the western front by the government army

supported by Russian Air Force, and on the northern-eastern front, the so-called Syrian Democratic Forces, which are comprised by both Kurdish and Arabic fighters and supported by an international US-led coalition,.

5. Both Russian and US leaderships have declared a military victory over the Islamic State, this military defeat involves not only Syria, but also Iraq. However, this does not mean that ISIS will cease to exist. This is due to the fact that the organization has expanded in other territories. Jihadists are present in Libya, Sinai, Afghanistan, and even in Asia. They have been seen in the Philippines and now in Bangladesh, where they exploit the tragedy of Rohingya refugees. In addition, the Islamic State can survive, in Syria and Iraq, in another form: that of guerrilla warfare conducted clandestinely. In this case, every tension, as is the case between Shiites and Sunnis, or between the Iraqi government and the Kurds at the moment, opens a fracture in which terrorism can proliferate.
6. This military defeat opens a door to the political settlement of the Syrian conflict. The political reconciliation between the government and opposition groups, and the need for constitutional reform in the country are now part of these objectives.
7. There are a number of distinct dialogue processes underway. Kazakhstan continued to host the Astana talks, brokered by the Russian Federation, Iran, and Turkey, and aimed at bringing together the Syrian government and armed opposition groups for the creation of de-escalation zones in Syria. In November 2017, Saudi Arabia held the Riyadh conference to unite the various fractions from the broad spectrum of the Syrian opposition.
8. The latest round of UN brokered peace talks in Geneva, held at the end of 2017, produced no concrete results, however the negotiations are set to continue in 2018. The Arab League expressed its support for the Geneva track of talks, as the only viable route.

### **III. LIBYA**

9. Over the past year, Libya has remained one of the main hotspots of instability and conflict in the Mediterranean region. There is lack of national unity, and state institutions remained largely fractured, although some progress towards reconciliation has been made.
10. On the ground, the situation has remained very volatile, with ongoing armed clashes between rival factions. However, it must be noted, that the Islamic State has lost its controlled territory in Libya<sup>1</sup>, notably the cities of Sirte and Derna have been liberated. However, ISIS terrorists continue to have a presence in the country, taking advantage of less populated areas to the south in order to hide and organise attacks, as well as by disrupting the export of oil.
11. In particular, Instability in Libya has led to the flourishing of organized crime in the country. Human trafficking networks are taking advantage of the flow of migrants hoping to reach European shores. In November 2017, video showing slave auctions shocked the international

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<sup>1</sup> <https://unsmil.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unsmil-srsg-kobler-UNSC-19-april-2017.pdf>

community. This information, among many others that illustrate the failure of reestablished effective state structures in Libya highlighted the dire situation in which the country is plunged, and the urgent need for a sustainable solution both in terms of political reconciliation and the management and coordinated response to the migration flows from sub-Saharan Africa to Europe.

12. In 2017, Libyan oil production had increased, reaching in August a million barrels per day<sup>2</sup>. However, the economic situation, especially for the State-Budget remains very difficult. This in turn results in serious dysfunction in the public services sector. Especially affected is the health sector, where only a fraction of hospitals are functioning, thereby putting the country at a risk of epidemics<sup>3</sup>.
13. The Libyan Political Agreement (also known as the Skhirat agreement) that was signed in December 2015, by the key rival factions, as a roadmap for national reconciliation and unification, is still the key achievement in the peace process. The plan, which was endorsed also by the UN and the international community, remains considered as the only viable pathway to stability in Libya. However, the implementation of the agreement has been stalled over the past year.
14. The internationally-backed Presidency Council, which has been established in Tripoli to unite rival contenders and legitimate ruling institutions, has had mixed success. While not having enough real power throughout the territory of Libyan to govern effectively, it remains the primary institution through which political reconciliation can occur. Most relevant actors, inside and outside Libya, also recognize the authority of the council.
15. As of December 2017, there have been talks between Tobruk and Tripoli on making the necessary amendments to the Skhirat agreement, so that its implementation may go forward. Never-the-less, in December 2017, General Haftar Khalifa, whose forces control most of Eastern Libya, criticized the Skhirat Agreement, saying that it has failed<sup>4</sup>. In spite of these developments, the international community continues to consider this process as the only viable way forward for reconciliation in Libya, and advises to amend it if necessary rather than discarded entirely.
16. On 26 June 2017, Mr Ghassan Salame replaced Mr Martin Cobler as the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Libya. Upon taking on his role, he began implementing an Action Plan which is focused on amending the Libyan Political Agreement, organizing a National Conference, preparing for elections and providing humanitarian assistance to the victims of the conflict<sup>5</sup>. The plan is to hold elections in 2018, however, many fear that the election results might further fragment the current government institutions and

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-10-04/libyan-oil-output-is-set-to-rebound-as-biggest-field-restarts>

<sup>3</sup> <https://unsmil.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/srsg-ghassan-salame-briefing-to-unsc-16nov2017.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/12/haftar-libya-backed-government-mandate-obsolete-171218064242570.html>

<sup>5</sup> <https://unsmil.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/srsg-ghassan-salame-briefing-to-unsc-16nov2017.pdf>

generate rivalling institutions across the country, as illustrated in the past by the opposition occurring between Tobruk and Tripoli and the coexistence of two different parliaments.

#### **IV. ISRAEL – PALESTINE**

17. In July 2017, PAM conducted a mission to the Middle East. Delegates spent 16 and 17 July in Amman, where they held meetings with representatives of UNRWA, the Government, the Senate and the Royal Court of Jordan, and visited the Za'atari refugee camp. On 18 July, the delegation met with representatives of the Palestinian Authority and the PLC in Ramallah. On 19 July, the delegation held meetings in Jerusalem with senior officials from UN agencies, the Israeli Government and the Knesset.
18. Throughout the mission, the two main topics of discussion were the humanitarian crisis in the region as the result of the Syrian civil war, and the current state of Israeli-Palestinian peace process. The delegates found out first hand that on both of those issues, the situation was very worrisome. PAM is at present following up, with its partners in Amman, Ramallah and Jerusalem, a series of dedicated actions aimed at supporting, through parliamentary diplomacy, the resumption of direct talks among key politicians committed to peace efforts and to achieve the two state solution.
19. Tensions in the region escalated in July 2017, when a shooting incident prompted Israel to install metal detectors at the esplanade of the Mosques, which lead to widespread protests and unrest, resulting in multiple deaths. The PAM mission was in Jerusalem when these events occurred.
20. Furthermore, in December 2017, US President Donald Trump announced the unilateral decision for the US to officially recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and to move there its embassy.
21. The US decision received widespread criticism across the international community, notably from the UN General Assembly, the European Union, and the majority of the United Nations Member states. Turkey hosted an emergency Summit of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), where the leaders of Islamic countries presented a united voice in condemning the US decision to recognise Jerusalem as Israel's capital. On the same occasion, OIC recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine.
22. At the UN Security Council, a resolution which was put forward reaffirming the UN stance on Jerusalem was vetoed by the US. In response, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution condemning the US move, with the vote having 128 countries in favour, 35 abstentions, and only 9 against.
23. Shortly following the vote at the United Nations General Assembly, US introduced massive cuts in its contributions to the budget of the United Nations. Additionally, the US President also indicated that future aid to Palestine was under question due to his divergences between his government and the Palestinian leadership. Added to this is a drastic reduction in UNRWA

funding by the United States of America, raising the question of the management of Palestinian refugees, particularly those living in Lebanon and Jordan.

## **V. THE ROLE OF PARILAMENTARIANS AND PAM STRATEGY**

24. The role of parliamentary diplomacy remains crucial to encourage actions and dialogue aimed at a climate of stability and peace in the region. It is the duty of MPs, both on an individual and collective bases, to support the efforts of the international community towards reconciliation in conflict situations. Parliamentary diplomacy is especially valuable when the traditional diplomatic efforts are met with obstacles due to an uncondusive environment at the inter-governmental level. Through parliamentary dialogue, countries have an alternative framework to keep the door for talks open and activate new strategies to work towards peace and regional stability.
25. PAM continues to play a unique role of facilitator and platform of parliamentary diplomacy in the Mediterranean region, with a mandate to promote dialogue and to promote peace support initiatives. PAM remains at the disposal of its member states, and invites member parliaments to utilise this unique platform to engage in constructive dialogue, and collectively work together to find solutions to the region's most intractable problems.
26. In 2018 PAM will continue to follow all the developments in the region, and engage with all of its member parliaments, as well as with the UN and other key actors in the international community involved in conflict resolution. PAM will continue to strive to remove bottlenecks and identify opportunities for cooperation and engagement among the different actors.