

Mapping of existing reconciliation initiatives in Libya: Lessons learned, actors, challenges and way forward

By Virginie Collombier and Ahmed Khaled

I. Mediation, conflict-management and “reconciliation” in Libya since 2011

At the end of 2011, because of the civil war that followed the February revolution and in the absence of legitimate and capable central State authorities, a genuine and comprehensive project of reconciliation between the different Libyan communities (cities, regions, tribes and ethnic groups) was needed to help restoring trust, mitigating rivalries and ending conflicts, as well as forging a common sense of what the “new Libya” should be.

While Libya’s provisional authorities officially put national reconciliation on top of the agenda of the transition early on, no significant attention was given to it. Priority was given to providing legitimacy to the new political authorities through elections, and to the provision of short-term security in a context characterized by increasing rivalries between revolutionary groups, the collapse of the justice and security apparatus and the proliferation of weapons across the country.

Early electoral competition in the absence of accepted rules and common project contributed to increasing rivalries and tensions between cities, regions, and communities. The political institutions being too weak to manage such competition, this translated into a multiplication of local conflicts, most often of low intensity, among Libyan communities. Against such background, the (vague) project of national reconciliation promoted by the transitional authorities, mostly centered on transitional justice, was rapidly impeded by conflicting political and security priorities, as well as by political competition between the new political forces and their military backers. It also remained limited mostly to Libyan communities living inside Libya, and thus did not address to the important constituencies (often associated to the former regime) that had fled the country in the wake of the revolution and were established abroad. This constituted another serious flaw of the early national reconciliation project.

In 2014, the division of the country into two rival coalitions and their direct military confrontation over power and resources led to the collapse of the transitional political process envisioned in 2011-2012. Conflict renewed and intensified, as the national crisis reverberated at the local level.

The collapse of the political process and the serious deterioration of the security situation in 2014 have increased the interest in “reconciliation”, and has resulted in dozens of initiatives led by local structures and international organizations. Many so-called “reconciliation initiatives” have then been conducted, most of them launched and implemented at the local level, through traditional actors, structures and mechanisms of mediation (essentially elders,

notables and wisemen organized within new specialized bodies/councils established at the local/regional level on a community/identity basis).

The UN-led political dialogue initiated late 2014, because of the impact it had on the strategies of some of the most significant political and military actors, created a context more favorable to these initiatives, essentially in Western Libya. Yet more than “reconciliation” in the sense of restoring long-term peace and trust between communities, these initiatives mostly aimed at merely ending hostilities – a form of “negative peace”.

After the signing of the Libyan Political Agreement in December 2015, the political context changed again dramatically, resulting in renewed political deadlock and increased polarization between the Western and Eastern parts of the country. Against this new backdrop, the need for reconciliation was stressed again on all sides, as both Libyan and international actors were looking for ways to get out of the political crisis and the country’s division. Reconciliation, however, has taken then a much more explicitly political meaning.

This report provides a mapping of the reconciliation initiatives implemented by Libyan groups and local actors since 2011. Analysing these experiences and trying to understand their key determinants of success and failure, the challenges they faced and possible lessons to be learned from these processes, is crucial in Libya’s new political context marked by an increased polarization between Western and Eastern leaderships and constituencies. As shown indeed throughout this mapping exercise, local initiatives are limited insofar as, at some point, the State must be brought back in.

II. Actors of the reconciliation projects and initiatives

1. Main reconciliation bodies formed since 2011

Several bodies and institutions have been involved in reconciliation initiatives since 2011.

a) At the local level

The first project was elaborated as early as in 2011, with the National Transitional Council (NTC) asking the local councils part of the NTC to establish Wisemen and Shura Councils (*majalis hukama wa shura li fadh al nizaat*) to solve the local crises erupting as a result of the civil war and regime change. The civil war between opponents and supporters of the revolution had indeed reignited a multitude of localized conflicts opposing local communities, most often built upon historical disputes related to the ownership of land, the control of borders and the revenues it generates, and more broadly to the competition for power¹.

The establishment of the Wisemen and Shura Councils stemmed from the understanding that traditional social leaders like elders, notables and wisemen were the best positioned, because they are respected, influential and therefore perceived as more legitimate and efficient than any other authority, to mediate between conflicting parties and bring local conflicts to an end. They were thus meant to be “reconciliation” councils, in the sense that their aim was to mediate between parties to put an end to local conflicts and restore peace locally. Indeed, the context at the time was characterized by the collapse of the state apparatus and the lack of alternative institutions to deal with these crises.

The Wisemen and Shura Councils set up in the various regions and tribes, as well as in some of the urban areas and small cities, were formed in a classical way, on the model of the Social Popular Leaderships previously established under Qaddafi. Their members represented the different social components of the regions and cities, and the main families holding influence there. Overall, they were *elites-based* more than strictly *representatives*, and did not represent all the country’s cities and tribes either.

These councils sometimes coalesced into wider bodies gathering part of the local reconciliation councils on a local, regional or national basis. This was for instance the case of the Council of Wisemen of the Nafusa Mountains (*majlis hukama jabal nafusa*), which aimed at representing the Wisemen and Shura Councils of the whole Nafusa region; as well as the *Libya’s Council of Notables for Reconciliation* (*majlis ‘ayan libia li’l musalaha*), which was established late 2012 and composed by some members of reconciliation councils in their respective regions and tribes across Libya.

Since 2011, other structures established at the local level and playing a significant role in mediation and conflict resolution include the Local Councils (*majalis mahaliya*), born during

¹ For instance, in the Nafusa Mountains and Western Libya, from 2012, the most significant conflicts opposed the Mashahiya and Zintani tribes the towns of al-‘Asaba and Gharyan, Warshafana and al-Zawiya, Zuwara, Jmeil and Raqdalín. In Southern Libya, they opposed the Tebu and Awlad Sleiman in Sebha (from April 2012), or the Tebu and the Zway in Kufra (from June 2012).

the 2011 revolution, or formed afterwards on request of the NTC and the Social Councils (*majalis ijtimaiyya*). In general, Social Councils were an extension of the Local Councils, to the exception of some regions, communities and tribes that had both a Social Council and a Local Council.² This happened for two main reasons:

- The extension of the tribe beyond the limits of a single city, or the coexistence of various tribes in a single city, as in most of Southern Libya. This has led some tribes to form Social Councils that would represent them wherever their members were established. For instance, the Tuaregs have a Social Council which represents them from all across the country (Obari, Ghadames, Ghat, etc.)
- One tribe forming a Social Council could also mean its political refusal of the new State authorities, as happened in particular with the Warfalla and Qadhaffa tribes. In those cases, the Social Councils have often been completely detached from the local councils, and sometimes even strongly opposed them, like for instance in Bani Walid.

b) At the national level:

At the national level, however, the reconciliation efforts implemented through traditional social leaders, or bodies, have not been unified, as several structures were established that at times worked in isolation, at others competed or partnered in common efforts. For instance, Libya's Council of Elders for Reconciliation (*majlis shuyukh libia li'l musalaha*, headed by Zeidan Qallash) was created in 2015 with several former members of Libya's Council of Notables for Reconciliation (*majlis 'ayan libia li'l musalaha*, headed by Muhammad al-Mubasher). They formed a separate body and worked in a slightly different manner, with more clearly political objectives.

Efforts were undertaken during the summer 2016 in view of reunifying these various bodies and joining efforts to work more efficiently in view of national reconciliation. Yet such move was impeded by various factors, such as the competition for influence and leadership between various personalities of the existing bodies, as well as the political ambitions of some, the attempts by the different parties in conflict to gain support from the reconciliation bodies, or the attempts of some personalities involved in the reconciliation committees (prominent social figures, tribal elements or religious figures) to push the committees to support one of the warring factions.

At the government level, the idea of national reconciliation was born early on after the civil war, at the time of the NTC, with the establishment of the Fact-Finding and Reconciliation Commission (also referred to as the Truth-Seeking and Reconciliation Commission) by NTC Law n° 17/2012. Set up as a fully independent commission, with its own management, leadership, and budget, it was tasked with investigating cases of abuse – moral, physical or criminal – dating as far back as 1969. The Fact-Finding and Reconciliation Commission's investigations were also supposed to include a variety of human rights violations, such as

² In the cities and towns where municipal elections were held between 2012 and 2014, these local councils became municipal councils (*baladiyat*).

killing, torture, rape, imprisonment, disappearance, as well as cases of corruption, bribery, and money laundering. Yet, because of the complexity of the situation at the time, and due to conflicting priorities in the field of human rights and security, not much was achieved through this body.

In December 2013, the GNC passed a new law on transitional justice (GNC Law 29/2013), replacing the older law one passed by the NTC in 2012. It also focused on the issue of human rights and transitional justice, but implementation did not follow either³.

From 2011 onwards until recently, the approach to national reconciliation at the government level has therefore been mostly through transitional justice. Yet political and security developments, as well as the deficiencies of the judicial system have made concrete realizations in that field almost completely inexistent.

The idea of national dialogue as a tool for achieving reconciliation was also put forward early on in 2012, but it was also impeded by the increased polarization and confrontation between rival political camps, the politicization of the issue, and more generally the lack of genuine interest given to it. As a consequence, both the National Commission for Reconciliation and Transitional Justice (*al-ha'i al-wataniyya li'l-musalaha wa-l-'adala al'intiqaliyya*) formed upon decision of the GNC and headed by Muhammad al-Harari, and later the National Dialogue Preparatory Commission established in August 2013 by Ali Zeidan's government and headed by Fadeel Lamin, failed.

Simultaneously, the GNC passed a series of laws that hardly prioritized reconciliation, if not contradicting its principles altogether. In particular, the infamous Political Isolation Law (PIL) passed in May 2013 under the threat of force effectively constituted a huge block to national dialogue and reconciliation.

³ For more on the legal framework of national reconciliation, see the legal mapping provided by Azza Maghur, UNSMIL, 2016.

III. Main reconciliation initiatives since 2011

The local reconciliation initiatives implemented since 2011/2012 share a number of common features, and have essentially been built upon the same model: traditional social leaders from the region or neighboring communities played the role of mediator between warring groups and communities, with the stated objective of ending violence. The nature of the efforts they conducted (and the results achieved so far) therefore had more to do with crisis management and conflict resolution than with “reconciliation” as such: in that sense, their outcomes – when successful – mostly consisted in ending hostilities and restoring the *status quo*. This negative peace, most often, failed to address the underlying problems and roots causes of the conflict, nor could relationships of trust between conflicting groups and communities be re-established on the longer run.

This common pattern of traditional mediation has been implemented in slightly different ways depending on the context, in particular depending on the areas in which the conflict erupted, and on the type of communities and actors involved in the crisis.

1. Reconciliation efforts and achievements in Western Libya and the Nafusa Mountains

All the confrontations and crises in the Nafusa Mountains have their roots in historical conflicts (essentially for land and power) that have been instrumentalized politically for a long time. The division of the region between various political trends, as well as the mechanisms of alliances formed between cities and communities, has, in general, resulted into some form of balance between rival forces, and helped resolving the conflicts that did erupt.

Major conflicts in the Nafusa Mountains were between al-Mashashiya and Zintan, al-‘Asaba and Gharyan, and Kikla and Zintan in 2014. They did not turn into a bloody conflict or a major war, except on two occasions: in September 2011, between Zintan and al-Mashashiya, and the second in November 2014 between Zintan and Kikla. In 2014, the reverberation of the national conflict resulted in historical factional conflicts between towns and communities being reignited, the map of local alliances being redrawn, and a humanitarian crisis that lasted for months, with hundreds of families displaced and communication between towns and cities as well as the supply of basic goods (including fuel and medicine) rendered extremely difficult.

The first significant conflict-resolution initiative in Western Libya was conducted in 2012 under the supervision of the Wisemen and Shura Council. It intervened in the conflicts between Warshafana and al-Zawiya; Zuwara, Jmeil and Raqdalín; and in the Nafusa Mountains between al-‘Asaba and Gharyan, as well as between al-Riyayna, Yefren and Zintan, in a single initiative.

Shortly after the UNSMIL-brokered political dialogue was set on track in September 2014, some influential figures from local civil society started taking matters into their own hands to put an end to the military confrontation and the resulting humanitarian crisis, which had a direct impact on their daily lives. They considered themselves were capable of bringing about

positive results by acting at the local level, despite not being able to exert direct influence on the political dialogue. The major initiatives that have brought about positive results over the past years include the following:

a) The Peacemakers' (*suna'a al-salam*) Societal Dialogue initiative (January 2015 onwards)

A significant step took place in January 2015, with the organization, by a group of young Libyan activists from different cities and communities with no political affiliation⁴ of a wide meeting gathering influential social leaders from all across Libya (the “Societal Dialogue”, or “*al-hiwar al-mujtama'i*”). This initiative, fully conceived and implemented by Libyan activists, in partnership with a few figures from the local reconciliation committees, was made possible thanks to material and financial support provided by the Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Center (NOREF).

The objective of this gathering was to re-establish channels of communication between representatives of all Libyan major cities, regions and communities, and to send a clear message of support for a peaceful resolution of the conflict between the two main rival coalitions. During this meeting, it was decided that concrete steps were to be taken in support of this stance, and Libyan social leaders decided to focus on conflict-resolution in the Nafusa Mountains.

In March 2015, a “Dialogue for comprehensive peace and reconciliation in the Nafusa Mountains” gathered around 40 representatives from the main Nafusa Mountains cities and from Libya’s Council of Notables for Reconciliation (*majlis Ayan Libia li'l Musalaha*) in Djerba⁵. The meeting concluded on an agreement between all participants on the procedures for dialogue and mediation needed to put an end to the Nafusa Mountains’ major conflict (between the cities of Zintan and Kikla), and to establish concrete mechanisms for their implementation (especially the provision of humanitarian assistance to the people living in the Nafusa Mountains, as well as the return of displaced populations). Other practical decisions were to be implemented:

- Participants agreed to form a neutral working group made of representatives from cities of the Nafusa Mountains, to liaise with and between the parties as facilitators and moderators.
- They agreed that the task of mediating with parties in the conflict over Kikla and Zintan should be taken on by the cities of al-Asaba’, Yefren, Jadu, and al-Riyayna.

⁴ The original group, made of several young activists from Misrata and headed by Suleiman al-Bayoudi, rapidly widened and included other activists from other cities and communities across Libya (notably Musab El Gaed, Juma’ Kusa and Fawzi al-Obeidi in the first phases of the initiative).

⁵ This meeting was organized with material and financial support from NOREF and the German Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Yet the determination of the meeting’s agenda, the selection of the participants and the overall management of the meeting was fully taken care of by the Peacemakers team.

- They agreed to work and support the process of return for all displaced persons.
- The creation of specific committees in charge of dealing with the situation in Kikla/Al-Qawalish/Zintan; Mezdah; Jaafara / Bazr Al-‘Ajaj; Al-‘Ayouniya/Al-Mashashiya; Al-Asi’aan and Tashmal.
- The formation of a Council of Elders for the Nafusa Mountains.

Work on the Nafusa Mountains’ ceasefire initiative has been ongoing since the 2015 Djerba meeting. The discussions between Zintan and Kikla have focused in particular on:

- The withdrawal of Zintan and Rujban’s military forces from Kikla;
- The control over the city’s entrances;
- The conditions for the safe return to their homes of the displaced from Kikla.

While work has been on-going to implement this Peacemakers’ agreement, parallel efforts have been conducted to put an end to several conflicts in the Mountains and Western Libya. The first two Societal Dialogue meetings played a major role in re-establishing communication between influential and respected figures from the communities in conflict, and in building trust more generally. It therefore triggered a much wider and longer-run process of dialogue and local reconciliations in Western Libya, which notably included the following initiatives and agreements.

b) Truce between Zintan / Misrata (initiated late February 2015)

The first direct meeting between Misrata and Zintan took place in February 2015, after the Social Dialogue meeting in Tunis.

Participants to the meeting included the two parties who were represented by the Council of Zintan tribes (*majlis qaba’il al Zintan*) and the Shura Council of Misrata, respectively with Usama Juweili, Milad Al-Amin, Sh’aban Al-‘Amiani from Zintan and ‘Abdal-Qader al-Rueity, Ezzedin Al-Muntaser, Muhammad ‘Adb-al-‘Al from Misrata.

Mediation was conducted by notables from the city of al-‘Asaba (notably Sheikh Musa Baqr).

The terms of the truce included the following measures:

- Withdrawal of Misratan forces out of the Warshafana area and Tripoli’s surroundings.
- Gathering of Misrata’s al-Mahjub and al-Halbus brigades in the Western region, and their deployment as a buffer force to separate the area controlled by the Dignity Operations Room.
- Formation of a committee for dispute resolution between Warshafana, al-Zawiya and Janzur.
- Prisoners and bodies exchange under the supervision of the Red Crescent (section of Yefren, Nafusa Mountains).
- Withdrawal of all the forces to the administrative limits of their territories.

- Ceasefire, withdrawal of the social protection for the offenders.
- Formation of a joint committee to ensure the distribution of the fuel stocked in al-Zawiya, to be composed of the various municipalities of the Western region.

c) Dialogue between Misrata and Warshafana through the mediation of al-‘Asaba (April 2015)

The objective of this mediation exercise was the return of Warshafana to their lands, independently from an agreement with Zintan.

Participants included Misrata’s al-Halbus Brigade and Jadu’s Revolutionaries Brigades on the one hand; the chief of Nafusa Mountains’ Operations Room, Omar Tantush and others from Warshafana on the other hand.

d) Agreement between Al-Zawiya and Zintan (June 2015)

The objective was to find a way to the refined oil stocked in Zawiya to be exported, so that distribution of fuel in the Nafusa Mountains would be possible.

Participants included elders and notables as well as the leaders of the brigades from the two sides.

The agreement stated that both cities would have to exchange all of the detained prisoners and to pull out their fighters from the front lines; to guarantee the return of the displaced to Zintan, Al-Zawiya and the neighbouring cities; to end of identity-based arrests; and to allow gasoline into the city of Zintan.

On 9 June, a similar agreement was concluded between Gharyan and Zintan. Both sides agreed to reopen closed roads and withdraw their respective forces to their administrative borders.

e) UN-supported Joint Committee dealing with the Misrata / Tawergha dossier

The Tawergha / Misrata dossier has been given particular attention because of the nature of the violations committed during the conflict and the symbolic nature of a file that came to epitomize the deep divisions born out of the 2011 civil war. Both parties expressed their preference to negotiate without intermediary in order to avoid politicization of the process. The role played by the United Nations has therefore mostly consisted in dialogue-facilitation. Victims of the conflict were given full seats in the negotiations committee, thereby ensuring that their views would be taken into account.

Following the meeting of Libyan municipalities in Geneva in January 2015, an initial agreement was reached between the municipal council of Misrata and the local council of Tawergha. It stated the right of return of the Tawergha people into their land, including through reparation programs, and the need for mechanisms to guarantee the concrete implementation of these measures.

An agreement was finally reached on August 31st, 2016 after more than one and a half year of negotiations under the auspices of UNSMIL. The agreement included provisions for the return of displaced families, accountability, truth-seeking measures and the payment of compensations through the creation of a special fund and of a compensation committee to decide on their payments. Despite important flaws, including one that it makes return of displaced persons dependent upon compensations, the agreement is a major step in addressing one of the bitterest legacy of 2011. The political will and the participation of victims to the negotiations committee were strong assets, along with the support of public opinion and the international community.

However the agreement now requires the Libyan State to make an indispensable contribution in paying compensations and oversee the implementation of the other measures, including accountability and truth seeking. To some extent, the Misrata/Tawergha case illustrates the limitations of local agreements in the absence of a strong central State.

In contrast to these few cases, other reconciliation initiatives in Western Libya have proved less conclusive so far, such as the attempts to put an end to the conflict between Warshafana and al-Zawiya, where both sides were themselves divided between different rival factions⁶. Despite the conclusion of several fragile truces, conflict has been on-going.

f) Continuing conflict between Warshafana and al-Zawiya

The origins of the conflict between Warshafana and al-Zawiya are political and can be traced back to November 2011. The storming by an armed group from al-Zawiya (Abu Obeida) of Camp 27, located in the Warshafana area, triggered direct confrontation between Qaddafi's supporters and revolutionaries. The next stage of the conflict is related to the emergence of alliances based on identity. The two sides felt indeed the need to ally with regional forces on the basis of identity, as illustrated by the alliance between al-Zawiya and Zuwara on the one hand, or the alliance between Warshafana, al-Ajilat and Jmeil on the other. The third step of the conflict saw the re-activation of old tribal and historical alliances that had nothing to do with the revolution or the civil war, like the one between Warshafana and Zintan, or the alliance between al-Zawiya with the Amazigh cities of the Nafusa Mountains.

After 2014, wider political and military confrontations have further complicated the situation, with feuding politicians using the existing conflicts and manipulating them to serve their own interests: Warshafana pledged allegiance to the Dignity campaign, while al-Zawiya joined Libya Dawn.

While many agreements were concluded since 2011, there were more fragile ceasefires than comprehensive reconciliation accord, and no permanent solution has been found to the conflict so far or to address its root causes. The most significant agreement between the two parties was reached in November 2015. It was concluded between military leaders and city

⁶ Within the Warshafana camp, divisions mostly ran between the forces allied to the military leadership in Eastern Libya and armed groups involved in criminal activities. In al-Zawiya, the divisions were essentially between Libya Dawn and Dignity supporters.

mayors from the two sides, with notables from the cities of Rujban and al-‘Asaba acting as mediators. The agreement included the following measures:

- Ceasefire
- Prisoner exchanges (29 detained by Zawiya, 54 by Zintan, Rujban, Mashashiya, and Warshafana)
- Withdrawal of fighters from both camps
- Establishment of a buffer zone
- Inquiry on the 27 October 2015 downing of a Dawn helicopter West of Janzur
- Creation of a joint committee to oversee security along the coastal road and monitor the ceasefire.

Yet the pursuit of the conflict between al-Zawya and Warshafana can mostly be explained by the fact that various political factions have used and manipulated the conflict between the two rival camps: Islamists vs. supporters of the former regime; supporters of Dignity vs. supporters of Libya Dawn. Identity-based and tribal conflicts have been directly exploited by the warring parties to that end.

2. Reconciliation initiatives and agreements in Southern Libya

Historically, Southern Libya has never witnessed major conflict between the Qadhadhfa and Awlad Sleiman tribes. On the contrary, those tribes were historical allies. Similarly, the region never witnessed significant conflict between the Tuareg and the Tebu.

However, the large amount of weapons circulating in the region, as well as border trafficking and illegal immigration, all played a key role in the crises that destabilized Southern Libya after 2011.

The collapse of the Qaddafi regime and the disruption of the informal agreements put in place to manage the borders and the illegal sources of revenues they generate (mostly from trafficking and immigration), have led the various local tribes and communities to fight for control of the main strategic sites and communication axes. Control over the oil resources in the region also represented a means to exert pressure over the central authorities in return for money and privileges and, after 2014, a direct source of wealth and power for the armed groups controlling them.

Three main issues, often overlapping and feeding one another, characterize the conflict in the South:

- It is a conflict between supporters of the Qaddafi regime and supporters of the revolution, i.e. mostly a conflict between the Qadhadhfa and Magarha tribes on the one hand, and the Awlad Suleiman tribe on the other.
- It is a conflict to control the oil and trafficking resources, mainly opposing the Awlad

Suleiman and the Tebu, as well as the Tuareg and the Tebu.

- After 2014, it is also a wider political conflict building upon and exploiting the above-mentioned sources of tensions, as well as the historical tribal and revolutionary alliances.

Concretely, the conflict has led to the following major crises:

- i. A conflict between the Tebu and Awad Suleiman in Sebha (from early April 2012), whose root causes are mainly the competition for control over Southern Libya's borders and trafficking networks. Indeed, historically there has been no previous tribal conflict between these groups, and both communities were in the victors' camp after 2011. The conflict thus gradually evolved along political lines, especially after 2014, building upon the wider opposition between Dignity and Libya Dawn.
- ii. A conflict between the Tebu and the Tuareg in the South West, in particular in Obari and Sebha, which has essentially been a consequence of the war between the Dignity and Dawn coalitions in the North. It is also related to the Tripoli airport war in 2014, during which there were attempts to seize arms stocks from the South, as well as to hire militaries⁷ and take control over the oil fields in the region of Obari.

Since the outbreak of the war and fighting in the South, a number of reconciliation initiatives were conducted, most often uncoordinated, to the point that it sometimes seemed that there was a form of competition for reconciliation and mediation in the region. This high level of outside implication might be explained by the intensity of the conflict and the importance of the issues at stake, most notably economic ones.

Several agreements were concluded between the Tuareg and the Tebu in Obari and Sebha over the course of 2015, but all of them collapsed rapidly.

In 2016, ceasefire agreements were eventually implemented between the Tuareg and the Tebu on the one hand, and between the Awlad Suleiman and the Qadhadhfa on the other. A crucial factor here was certainly that, as time went by, the opposition between the Dignity and Dawn coalitions became less relevant and had a lesser impact on local conflicts. The supply of weapons by both sides to local fighters was also significantly reduced as a result of the change in this overall political dynamics, in particular when the Dawn coalition disaggregated in the North.

In Obari and Sebha, the agreement eventually reached and implemented starting in February 2016 represented a major achievement so far. The general perception in the South is that the three main reconciliation processes implemented throughout 2015-2016 eventually complemented one another⁸ (conversations of the author with activists from Southern Libya, June 2016).

⁷ Indeed, many former high-level militaries are Tebu and Tuareg from the South.

⁸ This assertion is based on conversations of the author with activists from Southern Libya in June 2016.

a) Implementation of the agreement between the Tuareg and Tebu in Obari and Sebha

On 20 July 2015, an agreement was signed to put an end to the fighting between the Tebu and the Tuareg, under the supervision of the city councils of the Nafusa Mountains. The agreement has been successful in ensuring the respect of the ceasefire, the return of the displaced, and the formation of a special committee of notables from the Nafusa Mountains to monitor the implementation and ensure good communication with the notables from the South.

The main figures representing the two warring parties in the agreement were Muhammad Shanqti from the Tuareg Council of Wisemen and Notables, and Abubakr ‘Uthman from the Tebu Council of Wisemen and Notables.

b) Efforts by the Council of Elders and Wisemen from the Nafusa Mountains

The Council of Notables of the Nafusa Mountains conducted several trips to the South and sent a delegation that entered in contact with all the Southern communities, in particular between the Tebu and Tuareg who were fighting violently in Obari and Sebha.

An agreement was reached that included:

- Unconditional and unlimited ceasefire
- Designation of a group of wisemen from the Nafusa Mountains to monitor the ceasefire
- Ending the propaganda and media war and respect silence between the parties; no announcement of any kind should be allowed
- Appointment of a committee of Amazigh notables in charge of prisoners and bodies exchange between the two parties
- Opening the roads and removing of checkpoints under the supervision of a neutral committee composed with notables from the South, to facilitate circulation and everyday movements
- Organizing a direct meeting between the parties in the city of Nalut
- Allowing the displaced families to come back to their homes immediately after the signing of agreement.

The mediation efforts and crisis resolution were mostly possible because of a real political will on both sides to solve the crisis, especially in the Tayouri neighborhood of Sebha.

The efforts conducted by notables from the Nafusa Mountains to mediate between the parties have been possible thanks to logistical support from the Magarha tribe, a historical ally of the Amazigh in the Libyan South. They established the link between all parties, including the Hawsana tribe.

The notables from the Nafusa Mountains dealt with the conflict on the social level, and through the specific lens of a bloody conflict between two minority groups. An additional military mediation was, however, necessary to ensure the full implementation of the agreement.

c) Reconciliation efforts by the Hasawna tribe and formation of a neutral force in Sebha and Obari

The major reason that led the Hasawna tribe to intervene in the conflict was the lack of capacity from the two warring parties to remove from their positions due to a serious lack of trust. An initiative to overcome this deadlock was led by a group of military from the South. In February 2016, all the contact points between the two parties in the conflict were handed over to a military force from the South, composed of military people placed under the leadership of the Hasawna tribe. The agreement included the following:

- Transferring the main checkpoints to a neutral force
- Gradually removing all armed presence from the street, especially heavy weapons
- Stopping to use non-military buildings for military purposes
- Pursuing for any individual using weapons to threaten civilians
- Withdrawing fighters from both sides out of the cities
- Paying reparations and compensations to those affected by the conflict.

d) The mixed role of external actors

These efforts mainly concentrated on Obari and allowed for the final signing of the reconciliation agreement between the Tebu and the Tuareg. In this initiative, the state of Qatar pledged to pay the compensations to both parties affected by the war in Obari.

Overall, external actors (most notably neighbouring and regional states like Chad and Sudan) played a significant role in fuelling the conflict, but have engaged in reconciliation initiatives. The Qatari initiative eventually took place when it became clear that there was an actual political will among all warring parties to end the conflict. The State of Qatar, together with some Libyan Islamist actors, then built upon the efforts initiated by the Nafusa Mountains elders and only played a role in finalizing it.

The Rome-based community of Sant'Egidio also got involved in the process of mediation, their efforts focusing mostly on securing an agreement between warring parties to ensure the re-launching of oil production in the region.

3. Reconciliation initiatives in Eastern Libya

The immediate post-2011 civil war period was overall less violent in Eastern Libya than it was in the West. However, a significant crisis erupted between the Tebu and the Zway tribe in the South Eastern city of Kufra in June 2012, which resulted from a conflict over the control of the border region with Sudan and Chad and the trafficking networks, including illegal immigration.

Despite the involvement of strong actors of reconciliation from across Libya, and the

conclusion of several temporary ceasefires, the situation remained tense in the city to that date. Kufra has indeed been divided into two municipalities in order to give both rival groups some kind of autonomy in governance, but no permanent solution to the conflict was reached.

Elsewhere in Eastern Libya, apart from rather limited disputes that were solved through traditional tribal mediation mechanisms, the nature of the conflicts is very different from those erupting in Western and Southern Libya after 2011. Indeed, in contrast to the pattern of historical communal conflicts being reignited by the 2011 civil war witnessed in Western Libya, the conflicts in Benghazi and Derna essentially took the form of an ideological conflict between Islamist forces on the one hand, and civil and tribal forces on the other.

The major crises took place in Benghazi and Derna starting in 2012, and were characterized by a dramatic and continuing wave of killings and politically motivated assassinations, targeting civil society activists as well as personnel from the judiciary and the security forces. As the central authorities in Tripoli did not take any meaningful initiative to address the situation, it was left to local activists to lead these efforts. Their aim was to engage in meaningful dialogue with the inhabitants, especially in Benghazi, and to put an end to the deterioration of the security situation.

One of these initiatives, called “*For You Benghazi We Talk... And For You We Reconcile*”, was conducted by the Libyan Humanitarian Aids Mission (LHAM), a local NGO. The roundtable sessions they organized for the first time at Benghazi’s Tibesti Hotel in October 2013 gathered a large number of representatives of the major actors in the city, including political parties, religious figures, tribal elders, civil society activists, rebels leaders, Ansar al-Sharia members, federalists, the Local Council, and various local security structures.

The roundtable sessions were held on a regular basis every two weeks to discuss the situation in the city and make concrete proposals for addressing the security problems. While these proposals were sent to the General National Congress and to the Interim Government, no support was later provided from the national authorities. This program lasted until April 2014, without any of the proposed solutions even being implemented.

The beginning of the Dignity Campaign in May 2014 changed the course of events in Benghazi, and marked a new phase in the conflict. Since 2014, the conflict in the city has mostly opposed Haftar’s military supporters and the Shura Council of Benghazi Revolutionaries. The conflict has thus become explicitly political, reverberating in Tripoli and all across Libya.

The intensity of the military conflict in Benghazi and Derna led reconciliation figures belonging to the different reconciliation committees to intervene and try to mediate between the parties. Yet General Haftar and the HoR’s insistence on the necessity of continuing the fight against what they labelled as “extremist groups”, as well as the significant support they enjoyed among the population and the tribal leadership in the East, have made mediation efforts particularly difficult in this region. As a consequence, main reconciliation figures from all across Libya, who were engaged in local mediation efforts, ended up concluding that the political leadership in Eastern Libya did not want the war to end until they considered the

terrorist threat as eliminated. Security concerns therefore seem to have trumped reconciliation efforts.

4. The 2016 attempts at reconciling Western and Eastern Libya

In 2016, after the signing of the LPA and the establishment of the Presidential Council headed by Fa'ez Seraj in Tripoli, the overall political context significantly changed in Libya. Despite a serious political deadlock due to the failure to gain the approval of the LPA and the GNA by the HoR, and despite increasing military tensions between Misratans, Ibrahim Jadhran's forces and Haftar's LNA in the Oil Crescent (Ajdabiya, Zweisatun), the issue of reconciliation has recently taken a new, more explicitly political, meaning.

One illustration of this evolution was the signing by HoR President Saleh and General Haftar of a "Coexistence Agreement in Confronting the State Division and Conflict in Libya" in June 2016. This little publicized and largely rhetorical agreement was supposed to lead to the implementation of a fifteen-day ceasefire in Benghazi, Ajdabiya and Derna, as well as to the formation of a nation-wide neutral committee to mediate for conflict-resolution across the country. The agreement was also meant to secure the safe return of refugees and ensure the rights of the inhabitants of Cyrenaica.

Promoted by Libyan politician Basit Igtet and supported by the political and military leadership in Eastern Libya, the agreement has a very wide focus, but an apparently limited operational dimension. Yet it contributed to highlight the fact that, for the main rival factions (the HoR and Haftar's forces on the one hand, and the GNA and Misrata's forces on the other), being perceived as acting in favour of national reconciliation is now considered a way to increase their legitimacy, and to widen their alliances.

The "reconciliation initiative" put forward late August 2016 by various representatives from the city of Misrata and from the Obeidat tribes also had a deep political meaning, in a context of evolving power balance in the country. The meeting, organized late August 2016, gathered several figures from the Obeidat tribe, notably from the cities of Tobruk and al-Quba, and several figures from Misrata, including Ali Dabiba, Abubakr Hreish and Mustafa Maitiq. It was followed by a communiqué from the Obeidat participants stating that they supported the GNA, and asking the UN to support their efforts of national reconciliation, the organization of early elections and the bringing of spoilers before international courts. According to them, the UN should reach out to the East and hold meetings there with tribal leaders, insisting on three conditions:

- Support to fighting terrorism;
- Support the unity of Libyan lands against division;
- Support to the LPA and a strong GNA that can deliver services to the people.

In the immediate aftermath of the meeting, the general leadership in Eastern Libya (General Haftar and the HOR leaders), as well as the tribes allied to them, expressed their opposition to

the agreement. The Obeidat tribes in Tobruk and Benghazi, in particular, opposed the agreement and eventually dissociated themselves from it.

However, this reconciliation initiative highlighted the willingness of some tribal leaders in the East to take a path different from that of the main tribal leadership. Those who called for reconciliation with Misrata and Derna were willing to put an end to the conflict. Yet this endeavour was strongly rejected and triggered harsh reaction by the tribal, political and military leadership in the East. Social pressure has grown significantly against the opponents to the political and military leadership since the start of the summer 2016, and those who support reconciliation in the East have now called for international support.

The meeting between Misrata and members of the Obeidat tribe also sent a positive signal to some actors in Eastern Libya who saw it as an apology by the Misratans, and therefore as an acknowledgement of their responsibility in the war in Benghazi and across Libya after 2014.

Because the situation is now very polarized and sensitive, voices from the East suggested the following⁹:

- A UN supervision such as the one that took place between Misrata and Tawergha, to exert pressure on the general leadership in the East and the tribes who support it until they accept the negotiations;
- Including reparations and accountability measures affecting all parties to the conflict;
- Starting the discussions with the humanitarian situation, including the opening of roads, the return of the displaced and the delivery of basic goods (food, medicine, fuel) to the besieged cities;
- Stopping the military operations and engaging in procedures to hand over the military bases and to agree on a security framework for these regions;
- Convincing the tribes supportive of the general leadership of the necessity to join these efforts.

Because of the very hostile reactions it has provoked in the East, this meeting is unlikely to result in any significant outcome in the short run. Yet it has shown that: 1) channels of communication and dialogue do exist between supporters of reconciliation in the West and in the East; 2) the political and military leadership in the East is increasingly restricting expression of divergent views among the people and communities from Eastern Libya; 3) the overall political context in 2016 has dramatically changed, resulting into new types of crises and new reconciliation needs.

From local “reconciliation” initiatives essentially aiming to put an end to severe, localized security and humanitarian crises in 2015 (and therefore to restore peace and security on the ground between warring local groups and communities), wider reconciliation initiatives are now intended as a way to reach an agreement on political rules and institutions between rival political camps that roughly correspond to a geographical divide between Western and Eastern Libya. The very nature (and objectives) of the reconciliation efforts has therefore changed, as a result of the change in the very nature of the crisis.

⁹ Conversations with the author in al-Bayda and Tobruk, late August 2016.

IV. Elements of analysis and comments

Three major phases can be distinguished in the many conflicts and crises that have destabilized Libya since 2011:

- The period between 2011 and 2014 was characterized by a multitude of localized conflicts opposing local communities, building upon historical rivalries and disputes or fuelled by the civil war between opponents and supporters of the revolution.
- 2014 constituted a turning point and took an explicitly political dimension, dividing the country into two main rival camps and triggering military confrontations in several areas, sometimes politicizing and intensifying previous conflicts between local communities.
- The signing of the Libyan Political Accord in December 2015 and the attempts to establish a Government of National Accord at the beginning of 2016 marked the entry into a new phase, characterized less by localized military confrontations between neighbouring communities and more by a major political deadlock resulting into the actual division of the country into two main camps, roughly corresponding to the divide between Western and Eastern Libya.

The various reconciliation initiatives implemented since 2011 have been more or less successful, depending mostly on the nature of the crises to be addressed and the instruments available to do so.

Overall, this analysis of these reconciliation efforts has highlighted the continuing relevancy and efficiency of traditional mechanisms of conflict resolution to put an end, at least provisionally, to local crises, as illustrated in particular by the agreements reached in Western and Southern Libya in 2015 and early 2016. However, the many local agreements reached since 2012 have also highlighted the limits of traditional mechanisms and actors in the absence of longer-run objectives and strategy for reconciliation, and most importantly in the absence of State institutions to oversee the implementation of the agreements.

The agreements successfully reached after 2014 have also shed light on a number of conditions for success, among which the actual will of the parties to end the fighting, an overall conducive political context at the national level, and the involvement of the major military actors in the negotiations.

a) The relevancy and limits of the traditional mechanisms and actors of conflict-resolution

To address the communal conflicts that erupted after 2011, very classical and traditional forms of mediation and conflict-resolution were set mobilized, that included mostly elders and notables from the conflict or neighbouring regions and communities. Most efforts have

therefore been conducted through the Shura and Elders councils of these regions, cities and tribes, and with the direct involvement of “third parties” perceived as neutral by the parties in conflict such as, for instance, the Awlad Bu Seif tribe in the Nafusa Mountains, or the Mahamid tribe in the coastal area.

Most of these efforts were *reactions* to situations of severe crisis, however, and aimed at ending violence and restoring the *status quo* between communities in conflict, without really addressing issues in a longer-term perspective. In almost all cases, what has been framed as “reconciliation initiatives” were, in fact, responses to crisis situations on the ground more than actual efforts to rebuild trust and relationships between communities by addressing the root causes of historical conflicts. These initiatives have therefore remained mostly short-term or mid-term objectives, and have never been able to impulse a more comprehensive reconciliation effort. Indeed, while many cases of local reconciliation have shown that traditional mediation structures and mechanisms could bring about positive results in terms of crisis management and stability, no real effort has been made so far to consider how these specific actors and procedures could support a longer-term reconciliation project, in which different objectives would be set for gradual achievement over a specific timespan.

In the Nafusa Mountains, for instance, no permanent solution has been found to the outstanding problems, and major issues still require resolution in view of progressing towards comprehensive peace in the region. These root causes include:

- The exiled and displaced from the villages of the Nafusa Mountains;
- Tribal lands and pastures;
- Problems between individual and collective (state) property;
- Administrative problems, including relationship of the municipalities and governorates with armed forces.

b) Reasons explaining the limited scope of reconciliation

- Even the most successful examples of “reconciliation” or, sometimes, “crisis resolution”, have been singularly limited in scope and depth. This can be explained by several reasons:
- Most of the initiatives have dealt with “reconciliation” in a classical / traditional way inherited from the times of the tribal conflicts on land (property, ploughing and grazing), while the problems faced today are much more complex and require complex solutions of another kind, using more technical skills.
- Reconciliation initiatives have constituted reactions to immediate problems and crises, but there is no strategy to deal with the conflicts on the middle and long term.
- None of these reconciliation initiatives have been funded externally, apart from the Misrata/Tawergha mediation, and the groups involved therefore had to rely on a local donor, making them more easily subjected to political exploitation, or partisan

instrumentalization.

- The interference of religious and political authorities within the projects and initiatives of reconciliation, making it a bone of contention.
- The absence of a central State and the rule of law, meaning that there is no authority to supervise the implementation of the agreements.
- As a consequence, the substitution of the rule of law by customary law, which increases the sense of ownership of tribal actors, but also reinforces local identity and ethnic relations, with the risk of further fragmentation and conflict.
- The absence of the judiciary and transitional justice mechanism, resulting in a sense of impunity and marginalization.
- The absence of a national project, which would make reconciliation an issue before public opinion and build ownership and support over the process.

c) The impact of politics on reconciliation

While the crisis resolution efforts were conducted through very traditional channels (Shura and Wisemen councils, elders councils, etc.), from the beginning they also had political aspects, requiring the involvement of political figures and decision-makers for their implementation, as well as of people having influence and control over the armed groups. Concretely, in Western Libya, this meant the need for an agreement between Zintan and Misrata over a ceasefire, or between the main political factions – Dawn and Dignity – and their allies in the region.

The UN-led political dialogue and its impact on Libya's political scene therefore proved crucial, as well as the internal developments within each camp. Local crisis resolution and reconciliation initiatives conducted by traditional leaders from the Nafusa Mountains, in particular, would probably not have been successful if Misrata and its main allies in the Dawn coalition had not decided to participate in the political dialogue in 2015, and if Zintan and Warshafana had not felt weakened militarily. Misrata's participation in the UN-led talks was indeed followed by the city leadership's decision to withdraw its forces from Western Libya and cease supporting its local allies, leading to a significant modification of the balance of power between local forces in the region.

While most reconciliation initiatives after 2014 started as bilateral initiatives, they have eventually been part of a wider, comprehensive political process directly related to the UN-led dialogue. While mediation efforts initially involved two warring or conflicting communities (for instance Janzur and Warshafana; or Warshafana and the Amazigh cities of the Nafusa Mountains), they gradually widened as it became clear that no significant result could be achieved without direct involvement in the talks of the forces actually capable of controlling or influencing the armed groups on the ground, within both the Dignity and Dawn coalitions.

d) Military forces as key actors of reconciliation

As a matter of fact, at the end of 2014, as the Nafusa Mountains and Western Libya in general were divided between two camps, only the small Amazigh towns and the coastal cities located West of al-Zawiya had the relative capacity to control their people in the armed groups. The actual implementation of any agreement in the region therefore required involvement and support from Misrata (more specifically the Zawiyat al-Mahjub and Halbus brigades) within the Dawn coalition. In the Dignity camp, Zintan was the force that mattered most, in the sense that it was capable of controlling its forces and allies on the ground.

Overall, Western and Southern Libya have witnessed more successful attempts to conduct reconciliation over the last five years. This can probably be explained by the nature of local conflicts that erupted in these regions, as well as by the type of the social and power relations that structure local communities there.

As illustrated by the latest developments in Eastern Libya, it is much more difficult to deal with the issue of reconciliation in the East, in comparison to the West and South. In Western Libya, the dispersion and diversity of the military forces has resulted in a sort of balance of forces between factions and communities, which has been favourable so far to the success of the various reconciliation initiatives. The situation is very different in the East, where one single force dominates militarily, while there is a diversity of views regarding reconciliation.

V. Conclusion: Political agreement and social reconciliation are two different objectives, that require different tools

In the current context, after the signing of the LPA and the establishment of the GNA Presidential Council in Tripoli, the issue of reconciliation has taken a new meaning: from a previous focus on ending local and localized conflicts and restoring stability (understood as maintaining the *status quo*), it has now shifted into a much wider project in which local efforts and successes should converge and be used as the basis for a national reconciliation process that now seems indispensable to get out of the political deadlock.

For many stakeholders (domestic and international), supporting a national reconciliation project is now considered a priority, as it is seen as the instrument that could allow for bridging the great divide between rival political leaders and increasingly polarized communities: between supporters and opponents of the GNA, and between Western and Eastern Libya. This shift was illustrated by the failed attempt, in August 2016, to conclude an “reconciliation agreement” between representatives of the city of Misrata and the Obeidat tribe.

Yet, as rival factions have now understood the legitimacy and political gains that they could make out of supporting “national reconciliation”, there is also a risk that the wider, longer-run objective of reconciling Libyan society would be rendered more complicated. In the new 2016 context, national reconciliation has become more explicitly intended to serve political objectives. National reconciliation represents a tool to build new (wider) coalitions that may change the political balance in favour of some Libyan parties to the detriment of others, and increase their legitimacy inside and outside Libya. For this reason, many of the traditional leaders who have played a role in successful crisis management and resolution at the local level are now reluctant to get organized in a more formal structure, and to establish a specialized unified body dealing with reconciliation, fearing that this project might be instrumentalized to serve specific political or partisan interests.

While reaching a political settlement of the Libyan conflict undoubtedly requires restoring communication and trust between rival parties, and therefore some form of “reconciliation” between the current adversaries, there is a major risk in mingling and confusing political agreement with wider, and longer-run, social reconciliation.

A national reconciliation process among Libyan communities (a “social” reconciliation, including the elements of the national community that fled the country in 2011) would have probably played a significant role to restore trust and provide the legitimacy basis for the new Libyan authorities in the first phases of the transition process (2012-2014). Now, while such a “social reconciliation” remains indispensable between all different components of the Libyan people, inside and outside Libya, to restore trust and peaceful coexistence, it will be harder to fully detach from political strategies and short-term arrangements. Indeed, competition for political power has constituted the major threat to social cohesion since 2012, and efforts to

restore it should be conducted in a way that protects it as much as possible from political manipulation and instrumentalization.

Pursuing the long-term objective of social reconciliation might indeed be best done by focusing on preparing the Libyan society for reconciliation on the ground, and by locally building the “infrastructure of reconciliation”. This should first and foremost be done through building awareness in the public opinion, showing that national reconciliation is a national cause and concretely supporting wide-scale rapprochement between respected and influential figures from different communities, starting at the local level and gradually widening the circles of communication, experience-sharing and common work: from the communities, to the regional level, between regions and across Libya. Concretely, this means helping establish a space for dialogue and team work between different types of influential actors at the local level (traditional social leaders, rights activists, professionals and technicians with specific skills, businessmen and military people). While the nature of the crises that have an impact on daily life has changed, local actors need to understand that they have a common interest in working together, and that their capacities and skills complement each other. Working together to solve concrete problems affecting local communities has probably become the best way to support national reconciliation at the social level.

As for the major political objective of finding a basis for consensus between rival camps and bridging the widening gap between Western and Eastern leaderships and constituencies, it might now be better served by opening new channels for political dialogue, that would communicate with the existing ones, to be used to establish links between Libya’s main political leaders and the Libyan local communities and influential figures among them. The main objective, here, is to widen the circle of those involved in political negotiations and consultations, by establishing channels of communication and consultation with local communities through actors enjoying influence and legitimacy because of what they bring to their communities, be it protection, services, or representation. Depending on the regions or communities, this might mean tribal leaders, elders, businessmen, members of municipal councils, or military figures, which means that a body singling out and gathering one particular category of actors (for instance tribal leaders or municipal council leaders) would not be the best fit to ensure participation of the genuinely influential or representative people at the local level.

One key issue here is to avoid establishing a new institution or formal body, which would trigger new legitimacy disputes, competition and eventually lead to increased fragmentation and conflict at both the national and local levels. Another key issue is to privilege as much as possible informal channels instead of formal structures, and to focus on communication and consultations in view of arousing support for a political agreement among influential local figures, as well as to exert pressure on the members the formal Political Dialogue.

Parallel to this process, serious efforts to revitalize the constitutional process (i.e. find a way out of the internal conflicts that have impeded the work of the Constitution Drafting Assembly) are necessary, as it would probably have a positive impact on national reconciliation. Indeed, a focus on rights and the way to secure them would probably prove less divisive than the design of new political arrangements of institutions.

