European External Action Service (EEAS)

Libya: Speech by High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell at the European Parliament plenary debate on the situation in Libya

2020-01-14 · Strasbourg

Check against delivery!

Gracias Señora Presidenta, Señores miembros, las cosas en Libia están yendo de lo malo a lo peor. Quizás en los próximos días podemos tener algún rayo de esperanza, pero desde las Navidades los ataques de las fuerzas de Haftar y los bombardeos sobre áreas civiles se han intensificado, como la matanza de 30 militares cadetes en la escuela militar de Trípoli. Condenamos este ataque, pero nos pasamos el día condenando ataques y el coste humano de esta guerra por delegación está empezando a ser insoportable para el pueblo libio. Hace tiempo que es insoportable. Hay 350.000 personas desplazadas en el entorno de Trípoli, miles de combatientes, 300 civiles muertos, ataques a hospitales, incluyendo personal sanitario y ambulancias, y más de 200 escuelas cerradas.

The war has been fueled by several external spoilers sending in more weapons and mercenaries every day. It is no longer "the war without warriors" that it was called at the beginning. Now there are lots of warriors coming from many different countries. It has become an expanding and escalating proxy war that is augmenting the risk of terrorism, regional instability and migration towards our borders.

Special Envoy by United Nations Mr [Ghassan] Salamé came on Friday to the Foreign Affairs Council and he said that no other conflict ever saw a gap between nice words and unhelpful actions so wide as in Libya. Since April, the United Nations Security Council met 15 times to discuss Libya and failed 15 times to call for a ceasefire.

But, as I said, there is hope. A ceasefire maybe can enter into force. We hoped it was going to enter into force yesterday, but this morning we knew that there was not agreement in Moscow and that General Haftar [Khalifa Haftar, Commander of the Libyan National Army] left Moscow without leaving his agreement to this ceasefire.

We have been repeating many times that we Europeans have to overcome our divisions, our rivalries and that we have to be more united in order to face this situation.

Germany is about to announce that there is a formal call for the Berlin conference for next Sunday (19 January), after months of preparations in which we have actively taken part. It

should give way to a roadmap for a consolidation of the ceasefire, de-escalation and a return to political negotiations.

Special Envoy [Ghassan Salamé] came here on Friday, Prime Minister Sarraj of the internationally recognised government [Fayez Al-Sarraj, Chairman of the Presidential Council of Libya and Prime Minister of the Government of National Accord] was in Brussels. He visited President Sassoli [David Sassoli, President of the European Parliament] and President Michel [Charles Michel, President of the European Council] and we all passed the same message. It was impossible to have a meeting with the other part, with General Haftar [Khalifa Haftar, Commander of the Libyan National Army]. We have been talking with several regional colleagues: Egyptians, Russians and Turkish counterparts. Everyone seems to be at least a bit concerned that things in Libya are getting out of control, but I cannot assure you that the ceasefire will take place and that the Berlin conference will take place next Sunday.

On the last Foreign Affairs Council I called to talk about Libya and Iran. We strongly supported the Berlin process. We tried to travel to Libya, but it was not possible due to security reasons. I wonder if it was really about security reasons or due to a lack of will to receive us. We had to meet here in Brussels, where we had the visit of Sarraj [Fayez Al-Sarraj, Chairman of the Presidential Council of Libya and Prime Minister of the Government of National Accord], but not the one of Haftar [Khalifa Haftar, Commander of the Libyan National Army].

Now I have a mandate, from the Foreign Affairs Council, to strongly engage with all parts. If there is a ceasefire and if there is an agreement on the framework of the Berlin process, then we will have to deal with the monitoring of the ceasefire and we will have to effectively control the arms embargo. But I wonder who is going to do that seriously.

We are spending a lot of money in Libya. More than €630 million in cooperation in the last 5 years. The African Union and United Nations agencies have been able to evacuate more than 5,000 people needing international protection, and to send over 50,000 migrants back home, voluntarily and with reintegration support. But Mr Salamé told us there are 700,000 sub-Saharan people in Libya. Not all of them want to go to Europe. Most of them have a job and a livelihood and they pretend to stay in Libya, as far as the conditions allow them to do so. But if the situation becomes worse and it is impossible for them to stay in Libya, maybe they can try to go to Europe. So, there is another threat of a push of illegal migration through the Central Mediterranean, where the Turks and the Russians are taking the lead. Six months ago, these two actors were not present in the Central Mediterranean, but today they take the lead. This is a big change on the geopolitical structure of the Mediterranean. Six months ago, we, Europeans, were more or less active, but we were alone. Now, we are still more or less active, more active today than 6 months ago, but in fact, the Russians and the Turks are having a strong leverage because they have engaged militarily on the ground. Not directly, not through a regular army, but everybody knows that the flow of arms is increasing and Libya is a kind of a cancer that has been metastasizing to Sahel. What is happening in Sahel

has a lot to do with the fact that the big amount of arms and the fighters in Libya are contaminating the whole area. Now, intelligence reports tell us that many Sudanese, Syrians and people coming from the Middle East are arriving to Libya to fight for one side or the other.

This is the situation. Maybe we will have good news in the next 24 hours, maybe not. Maybe the Germans will call for the conference [the Berlin conference], maybe not. Maybe we are going to have a ceasefire, maybe not. I really do not know. I hope that we will have a window of opportunity.

Libya is a rich country, one of the richest countries in Africa despite years of civil strife. Rich and with a small population, only 6 million people that could and should live a secure and prosperous life. Instead, it is entering the ninth year of an immensely destructive and disruptive political crisis. It was never going to be easy for Libya to emerge from 40 years of an annihilating dictatorship and miraculously become a stable democracy. It was going to be difficult, we knew, but no one ever imagined a catastrophe like this. And yet, it could become even worse, for the Libyans and for us. If we do not try our very best to halt this conflict and to find a political solution. With the support of our Member States and of the Parliament [the European Parliament] for sure, I will intend to do just that, hoping that this strong engagement can be part of the solution to keep Libya united and to look for a peaceful solution to this conflict.

We are saying that there is no military solution, but we have been repeating this mantra for the Syrian war. And at the end, it has been a military solution. So, maybe here the same thing can happen. Since we, Europeans, do not want to participate in a military solution, we barricade ourselves on the belief that there is no military solution. In Syria, it has been a military solution brought by the Turks and the Russians. This has changed the equilibrium in the Eastern part of the Mediterranean. I cannot prevent that such a thing can happen, and this is something that should be of very much worry to all of us. I am sure that nobody will be happy if at the Libyan coast there is a set of military vessels from the Russian and the Turkish navy in front of the Italian coast controlling both ways of illegal migration towards Europe. On the Eastern Mediterranean and now, maybe, on the Central Mediterranean. Let us hope that we are going to have good news in the next hours.

Closing remarks

I may share some of the comments you have been making, others are wishful thinking. [Some of you were saying] “You have to…” You have to do what? “You have to ask President Erdogan to cancel his agreement with Prime Minister Sarraj?” I can ask it, and then what? The problem is that we have not been united on Libya. Let us tell the truth. We, Europeans, we have been having different positions with respect to Libya. Now, maybe, we are paying the price of the fact that we have not been able to represent a political approach

shared by all Member States. It is true that someone [a Member of the European Parliament] regrets that Turkey has a role. But Turkey has a role. And Russia has a role too.

The last news I have, is that after not signing the ceasefire, there is a man who refuses to sign this ceasefire because it seems that it would require them to agree with the head of the internationally recognized government headed by [Chairman of the Presidential Council of Libya and Prime Minister Fayez] Al-Sarraj and Turkey. But he will commit himself to stay in Berlin [at the conference] next Sunday.

So, bad news, no ceasefire, but also good news, because it seems that in spite of not having a ceasefire, they will be at the conference in Berlin. There, maybe, we can have the first step toward a political agreement. Maybe you have been following all the statements that we have been delivering about Libya from the Foreign Affairs Council and by the High Representative himself. Let us hope that in Berlin [at the conference] there is a possibility of reaching an agreement between the parties. Then, we will have to deal with the implementation of this agreement, which will require two things: first, to monitor this ceasefire; second: to control the arms embargo.

I will present to the Foreign Affairs Council concrete proposals for the Europeans to be more engaged on fulfilling these two duties. Let us see if we have enough will in order to act all together and start a new period of engagement with Libya.

That is what I can say right now. Many of you have dealt with other aspects, but I cannot answer one by one all your questions. I think I can summarize it saying that if there is an agreement in Berlin, subsequently there will be a ceasefire, and then it will test the political will of the European Union to be more engaged on the Libyan issue.

Thank you for your comments.

Link to the closing remarks: https://audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/video/I-182773

Source: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/libya-speech-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-european-parliament-plenary-debate_en