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# The Agreement on The Port of Misrata Is The Mirror of Italy's Policy in Libya

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On 21 July 1970, in the city of Misrata, the Revolutionary Command Council promulgated a series of laws aimed at confiscating the assets and properties belonging to the Italian community in Libya. These measures marked the beginning of a process of systematic expulsion of the Italian community from the country and were part of the new regime's broader anti-colonial and anti-imperialist stance.

In this perspective, Colonel Mu‘ammar Gaddafi interpreted the Italian presence as a material remnant of the colonial experience. However, the expropriation process was conducted selectively: despite the radical rhetoric, the assets of large Italian companies, such as ENI and FIAT, were not confiscated, reflecting an awareness of their strategic value in terms of technological contribution and development for revolutionary Libya.

Emblematic in this sense is the role played by ENI in the energy extraction and production sector, as well as that of FIAT, whose contribution has had a significant impact on the country's trade and industrialisation. It is no coincidence that, six years after the adoption of the laws on the confiscation of Italian assets, Colonel Mu‘ammar Gaddafi himself acquired 10% of the shares in the FIAT group, demonstrating the strategic centrality of Italian industry to the Libyan economy<sup>1</sup>.

These two companies have long represented a structural component of Libya's economic development; over time, they have been joined by major financial institutions, infrastructure companies, and a broad ecosystem of small and medium-sized enterprises, which collectively have made a significant contribution to the country's development. Beyond the contingent historical dimension, this link highlights, on the one hand, Libya's persistent dependence on Italian and international technological know-how and, on the other, the depth of Italy's presence in the country, which has historically gone beyond the boundaries of a mere industrial and commercial partnership.

With the end of the Gaddafi regime, not only did a political structure come to an end, but also the Libyan state model that emerged during the colonial and post-colonial periods. The country is now experiencing profound internal instability and institutional fragmentation, which has led to the coexistence of two opposing political entities, albeit within a substantially continuous territory<sup>2</sup>.

This instability has encouraged the growing penetration of external actors, which have influenced not only military dynamics – as in the case of Turkey and Russia – but also the functioning and orientation of Libyan political institutions<sup>3</sup>. This process has fuelled, within the analytical debate, the perception of a progressive marginalisation of the European and Italian role, a reading that does not exclusively concern the Libyan case, but extends to the entire Mediterranean and Middle Eastern area.

In recent years, partly in response to the global systemic crisis, European powers have adopted positioning strategies increasingly marked by a realist approach, both at national level and within the European Union, often accompanied by a narrative that emphasises competition with alleged rival actors. While the risk of an expansion of the influence of international powers – such as Russia and China or, in the case of Libya, Turkey – in the region is real, this narrative sometimes tends to overestimate the actual projection capacity of these actors.

The case of Italy's presence in Libya and the potential risks to its interests linked to Turkish or Russian activism is emblematic in this sense. However, as demonstrated by the recent agreement on the port of Misrata, which sees Italy, together with Qatar, among the main protagonists of the expansion

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<sup>1</sup> Gagliano, G. "History of cooperation between Italy and Libya", StartMag, 17 January 2021, at: <https://www.startmag.it/mondo/i-rapporti-di-cooperazione-tra-italia-e-libia-negli-ultimi-decenni/>; for further information, see: Varvelli A. (2016) *Libya and Italy. From the war of conquest in 1911 to today*, Edizioni del Capricorno, Turin.

<sup>2</sup> Giampaolo M. 'How Italy was marginalised in Libya', Commentary, ECFR, 2020, at: [https://ecfr.eu/article/commentary\\_how\\_italy\\_was\\_marginalised\\_in\\_libya/](https://ecfr.eu/article/commentary_how_italy_was_marginalised_in_libya/)

<sup>3</sup> Megerisi T. 'Libya's global civil war', Policy Brief, ECFR, 2019, at: [https://ecfr.eu/publication/libyas\\_global\\_civil\\_war1/](https://ecfr.eu/publication/libyas_global_civil_war1/)

project, Rome continues to occupy a significant position in the country's strategic sectors<sup>4</sup>. The planned investment of \$2.7 billion is not only of strategic importance for Italy, but also confirms that some key infrastructure in the central Mediterranean remains firmly anchored to Western circuits.

The agreement signed in Misrata took place in the presence of the Italian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Antonio Tajani, the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Qatar, Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, and the Prime Minister of the Libyan Government of National Unity, Abd al-Hamid Dbaiba. Diego Aponte, chairman of the MSC Group and a key figure in the global container transport sector, participated on behalf of the MSC Group<sup>5</sup>.

Italy is entering into this agreement through the activities and partnerships envisaged in the Mattei Plan for Africa, an approach that aims to strengthen Italy's presence on the continent according to a logic that, at least in its stated intentions, is horizontal and non-predatory. Qatar's presence in the Mediterranean, through Maha Capital Partners, also confirms the strengthening of relations between Italy and the small Gulf state within the framework of the Mattei Plan, with a view to triangulation between the two countries and their African partners.

The question that naturally arises in this dynamic concerns the points of contact of the partnership between Italy and Qatar in Libya. The agreement for the expansion and modernisation of the port of Misrata allows to identify some key elements for understanding Italy's role in the country. Italy's so-called 'victory' in winning the contract can be attributed to two main factors: on the one hand, Italy's political and diplomatic weight in the Libyan context; on the other, the involvement of relevant economic and industrial players.

### *Navigating Libyan instability, Italy and external actors*

Although Turkey now plays a leading role in Libya, particularly in the west of the country governed by Abd al-Hamid Dbaiba, Italy has managed to maintain solid relations with Libyan institutions. With the exception of a brief period between 2017 and 2020, Rome has been able to navigate the country's instability and protect its economic interests. At the same time, especially in the post-pandemic period, Italy has maintained dialogue with various Libyan institutional actors, both in the east and west, adopting a pragmatic approach aimed at safeguarding its position. This approach has been made possible by a regional rebalancing that has initiated a slow process of thawing relations between various regional actors, previously protagonists of strong political and ideological polarisation. These actors had identified Libya as fertile ground for conflict and had contributed to sustaining and exacerbating the country's internal division<sup>6</sup>.

Officially, Italy recognises the western government in Tripoli and its institutions, in line with the position of the international community and the United Nations. However, in recent years, it has also managed to strengthen diplomatic, political and commercial relations with the east of the country. The reopening of the Italian consulate in Benghazi in 2021, despite criticism from the Tripoli government, was a significant first step in this direction. This has made it possible to relaunch a series of initiatives that have led to the resumption of economic and trade agreements in a region traditionally at odds with Tripoli's official political line. In this context, the Italian-Libyan economic

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<sup>4</sup> Zaptia S. "Qatari, Italian and Swiss US\$ 2.7 billion investment in Misrata Free Zone to increase its capacity to 4 million containers annually", LibyaHerald, 18 January 2026. Available at: <https://libyaherald.com/2026/01/qatari-italian-and-swiss-us-2-7-billion-investment-in-misrata-free-zone-to-increase-its-capacity-to-4-million-containers-annually/>

<sup>5</sup> "Italy and Qatar anchor major port expansion in Libya's Misrata", Decode39, 20 January 2026. At: <https://decode39.com/13156/italy-and-qatar-anchor-major-port-expansion-in-libyas-misurata/>

<sup>6</sup> Megerisi, "Libya's global civil war", *op. cit.*

forum held in Benghazi marked a formal reopening of relations, strengthening Italy's action in Libya on both the economic and political fronts<sup>7</sup>.

However, the resumption of relations with eastern Libya and with the political-military system led by Khalifa Haftar presents several critical issues. While Italy's presence may help to contain Russian influence in the eastern region, it also risks strengthening the political power of Haftar, who is not officially recognised by the international community and who embodies a system of power capable of further stiffening the prospects for the country's reunification<sup>8</sup>.

Khalifa Haftar's rise in Libya has been strongly supported by external actors. His hostile approach towards the Muslim Brotherhood and political Islam has secured him decisive support from countries such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, along with significant political backing from Russia. This support has enabled him to consolidate his power and, taking advantage of the fragmentation of political forces in the west, to create a parallel system based on widespread military control and a network of economic-military relations aimed at strengthening his position.

Russian interference has played a crucial role, providing not only political backing but also military support that has contributed to further destabilising the country.

While recognising the predominant role of Russia and other regional actors in legitimising Haftar, Italy has been able to use significant economic and commercial leverage to influence the parallel government in Benghazi, creating a counterweight and preserving room for mediation.

The centrality of energy resources and the export of high value-added goods and technologies once again served as leverage to secure the resumption of relations with eastern Libya and demonstrated how, contrary to what one might think, Italy has much more to offer than Russia and the Gulf States in terms of energy supply and production and technology exports. Added to this is Italy's ability to manage internal dynamics within the country with an approach that aims to engage in dialogue with all 'Libyan parties', a stance that is often highlighted within the new government but which has much deeper roots in the position of the Conte II and Draghi administrations.

The Meloni government's recent cooperation agreements on development and security, touted by Haftar's 'government' as a revival of the 2008 Italian-Libyan Friendship Treaty, suggest that Italy wants to pragmatically recalibrate its position in Libya, on the other hand, as we will see in the last section of this article, demonstrate the absence of a long-term strategy within a unified Libyan framework.

### ***The Mattei Plan in Libya and Italian economic actors can limit competition from Russia and China***

When the agreement on the port of Misrata was signed, Italy was able to mobilise leading industrial players. The participation of the Italian-Swiss group MSC, a global leader in port infrastructure and maritime logistics, highlights how large Italian industry, in specific strategic sectors, continues to represent a significant lever of economic and political influence.

According to the latest data provided by Alphaliner, MSC controls approximately 21% of global container transport capacity and, together with the main maritime alliances comprising operators such as Maersk, CMA CGM and COSCO, contributes to a concentration of over 80% of global capacity in the sector<sup>9</sup>. This dominant position has been a decisive factor in Italy's success in securing a

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<sup>7</sup> "Libyan-Italian Economic Forum in Benghazi (24–26 June 2025) A strategic bridge between Italy and Libya for reconstruction and shared development", Italian-Libyan Chamber of Commerce. At: <https://www.cameraitalolibica.it/forum-economico-libico-italiano-a-bengasi-24-26-giugno-2025/>

<sup>8</sup> Giampaolo M. 'General Haftar and the Risks of Authoritarian "Stability" in Libya', IAI commentaries, 3 February 2020. Available at: <https://www.iai.it/en/publications/c05/general-haftar-and-risks-authoritarian-stability-libya>

<sup>9</sup> "Alphaliner: MSC widens its lead of the global container market", Safety4Sea, 7 January 2026. Available at: <https://safety4sea.com/alphaliner-msc-widens-its-lead-of-the-global-container-market/>

contract of strategic importance, not only from an economic and commercial point of view, but also because of its significant geopolitical value in the Mediterranean context.

The agreement also demonstrates that, although regional players such as the Gulf countries have considerable financial resources and are able to play a significant role in large infrastructure projects, they are not yet able to independently provide advanced technologies and operational capabilities comparable to those of the major European industries, limiting themselves mainly to financing initiatives. This is the context for the participation of Maha Capital Partners, a Qatari company included in the agreement as a financial partner, in line with the Mattei Plan for Africa, which also provides for the involvement of the Arab Gulf countries in the economic support of projects<sup>10</sup>.

This structure highlights how, in the absence of sufficient internal financial resources, Italy has resorted to regional and international partnerships. While this may raise questions about the degree of strategic autonomy of the Mattei Plan, it also confirms that the country is able to offer, in certain sectors, advanced technological know-how and industrial expertise that many regional competitors lack. This consideration appears particularly valid in the Libyan context, where the Russian and Turkish presence, although significant in military and political terms, does not translate into a comparable capacity for technological supply.

In the port infrastructure sector, the only player capable of competing in a structured manner with Italy and the European Union is China, which, through state-owned companies such as COSCO and China Merchants Ports (CMP), controls approximately 12.6% of global maritime trade and also plays a growing role in the construction and management of port infrastructure. In terms of technological and managerial capacity, the Asian giant is currently the only significant systemic competitor in the Mediterranean region.

However, the agreement on the port of Misrata seems to indicate a clear preference, at least at this stage, on the part of the Tripoli government for the involvement of Western companies and the use of funding from Arab partners. This appears particularly significant considering that, in November 2023, the government led by Abd al-Hamid Dbaiba signed an important Memorandum of Understanding with China concerning cooperation between the Misrata Free Zone and the China Harbour Engineering Company. This agreement provided for the development and modernisation of areas A and B of the port of Misrata, constituting a strategic project for the upgrading of Libyan port infrastructure.

This suggests that Tripoli not only prefers agreements with allied countries, but also sees them as a way to strengthen itself politically in an international context of rebalancing (see next section).

Added to this picture is a latent tension, never officially acknowledged, between Tripoli and Beijing, linked to China's gradual repositioning in favour of Haftar. Beijing tends to consider the Libyan National Army administration in Benghazi as a more stable interlocutor and sees Haftar as a potential actor capable of promoting the reunification of the country. This dynamic has had concrete consequences on an operational level, resulting, on the one hand, in the abandonment of Huawei's projects with the Tripoli government and, on the other, in the launch of technological cooperation between the Chinese telecommunications giant and the Benghazi authorities<sup>11</sup>.

In addition to economic and industrial capacity, another piece has been added to the Libyan mosaic and to the European and Italian role: the return of the United States to the country. Massad Boulus' recent visits to the region demonstrate a renewed US interest in the region (also dictated by tensions

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<sup>10</sup> For further information on the Mattei Plan, see: Stocchiero A. "What is the Mattei Plan? Investigation into the consistency of the Mattei Plan for sustainable development", CeSPI, January 2026. At: <https://www.cespi.it/en/ricerche/cose-il-piano-mattei-indagine-sulla-coerenza-del-piano-mattei-lo-sviluppo-sostenibile>

<sup>11</sup> Bruni L.; Pasquier B. "China and the Libyan Crisis: Maintaining a Foot in the Door in a Changing Region", ChinaMed, 30 January 2026. At the website: <https://www.chinamed.it/observer/china-and-the-libyan-crisis-maintaining-a-foot-in-the-door-in-a-changing-region>



in the eastern Middle East). Energy and trade agreements between Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt and Libya are intertwined with political dynamics aimed at re-establishing American order in the Middle East.

### *The US in Libya: between pragmatism and stability*

Parallel to the announcement of the agreement on the port of Misrata, reports emerged about the Middle East tour of U.S. envoy Massad Boulos, a mission marked by both economic and political objectives<sup>12</sup>. Within this framework, several developments stand out as particularly significant. These include the signing of an agreement valued at approximately \$8 billion for oil and gas extraction by a U.S. company, as well as a joint initiative with France aimed at launching an intra-Libyan dialogue between eastern and western actors. This dialogue reportedly took place in a private meeting in Paris on 29 January and was supported by France through talks between Saddam Haftar and Ibrahim Dbaiba, alongside the killing of Saif al-Islam Gaddafi's son, the former president's heir.

The agreement between Libya and the United States for new concessions in the oil and gas sector is a significant part of the American regional strategy. Although Washington has achieved substantial energy self-sufficiency with respect to the Middle East for over a decade, this initiative is part of a broader geopolitical framework aimed both at containing Russian influence in the country and at preventing a strengthening of China's presence. The \$8 billion agreement signed by ConocoPhillips is part of a larger package, estimated at around \$20 billion, which also involves France's Total.

These developments come in the context of the Libyan government's recent opening of new exploration blocks (11 onshore and 11 offshore), in which leading European operators such as BP, ENI and Shell have also participated. However, the allocation of concessions shows a clear prevalence of US companies in quantitative terms, as it is in line with the £70 billion investment plan presented in 2025 by the Libyan Government of National Unity to Boulos during his visit in Benghazi, focused on infrastructure, energy and telecommunications.

The Tripoli stage was followed by Benghazi, where General Khalifa Haftar's sons, Belqasem and Saddam, outlined an investment programme dedicated to the reconstruction and infrastructural development of Cyrenaica. Belqasem Haftar, as head of the Libyan Reconstruction Committee, participated directly in the Libyan-American Forum, during which several memoranda of understanding were signed<sup>13</sup>.

US activism therefore appears to be an integral part of a strategy aimed at reducing Russia's influence in Libya, particularly the network of relations built by Moscow with the eastern part of the country. This context also includes the historically positive relations between Haftar and the Trump administration, which considers the general a key player in the fight against regional jihadism.

It is no coincidence that the economic agreements are accompanied by an American political initiative aimed at national reconciliation, based on a rapprochement between East and West. With this in mind, a confidential meeting between Ibrahim Dbaiba and Saddam Haftar was held in Rome in September 2025, followed by a further meeting in Paris in January 2026, dedicated to the reunification of the country and the definition of a shared political path. According to statements by the US envoy to North Africa and the Middle East, Massad Boulos, the meeting between the two representatives was described as highly positive. Boulos's announcement was shortly followed by reports of the killing of Saif al-Islam Gaddafi, son of the former Libyan leader, in the city of Zintan. Although only

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<sup>12</sup> "Trump envoy to meet rival Libya governments as part of Maghreb tour", The New Arab, 23 July 2025. Available at: <https://www.newarab.com/news/trump-envoy-meet-rival-libya-governments-maghreb-tour>; Keravouri R.; Farrel M. "The US is reengaging with Libya—and it's the right call", Atlantic Council, 15 January 2026. Available at: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/africasource/the-us-is-re-engaging-with-libya-and-its-the-right-call/>

<sup>13</sup> "Belqasim Haftar discusses preparations for the Libyan-American Forum in Benghazi, scheduled for May, with Trump Advisor Massad Boulos", al-wasat, 2 January 2026. At: <https://en.alwasat.ly/news/libya/506112>

moderately popular, Saif al-Islam had managed to build a degree of political consensus when he ran in the 2021 elections.

His assassination is viewed by many observers as the removal of the final obstacle to the current political roadmap, effectively sidelining the so-called “Green Movement” and clearing the way for post-2011 political actors to consolidate their positions – most notably Haftar, who in recent years has made sustained efforts to co-opt Gaddafi’s former support base. Although the motives and perpetrators behind the killing remain unclear, the elimination of such a politically inconvenient figure as Saif al-Islam effectively opens a new chapter in Libya’s political landscape. Should the masterminds ultimately prove to be linked to the Haftar camp, this would likely trigger significant political turbulence in eastern Libya, potentially weakening the Field Marshal. Conversely, if western Libyan militias were found to be involved, this could both strengthen Haftar’s position and contribute to the re-emergence of a solid alliance between Tripoli and Misrata—the latter historically hostile to Gaddafi and a key driver of the 2011 revolution.

At European and Italian level, recent US moves do not currently appear to compromise established energy interests. ENI maintains a prominent position thanks to an investment portfolio of approximately \$24 billion distributed between Libya, Egypt and Algeria. Gas remains at the heart of the group's strategy, supported by the Greenstream infrastructure and a long-standing presence in the country. This demonstrates that, while Italy’s role appears to be central from an economic perspective, on the political level—despite Italy’s various diplomatic efforts—it remains closely tied to the role played by the United States and to the situation on the ground, as outlined in the last section.

Another key factor is the cooperative relationship built up over time with the National Oil Corporation (NOC), which continues to give ENI a competitive advantage in the central Mediterranean, despite the growing activism of non-European players.

Challenges persist at the political level, particularly regarding the legitimacy of the actors involved in major development projects. In an increasingly volatile political climate following the killing of Saif al-Islam, Libya’s internal stability is being severely tested.

### ***Criticism from below: in instability and without reconciliation, there can be no development projects***

While welcoming trade agreements and international investment, Libyan institutions are faced with deep internal divisions. The structured dialogue promoted by the United Nations, aimed at calling new elections and defining a path for economic reconstruction and strengthening public services, together with initiatives by neighbouring Arab countries – in particular Egypt, Algeria and Tunisia – supported by the United States, are meeting significant resistance from various local political forces.

Abd al-Hamid Dbaiba's government is facing an unprecedented crisis of legitimacy. Recent agreements concluded with foreign oil companies relating to the port of Misrata have catalysed internal political debate, highlighting the country's institutional fragility<sup>14</sup>. For years, in fact, the management of energy sector revenues has been one of the most controversial issues in the Libyan political landscape, profoundly influencing government actions and generating tensions within the institutions responsible for their administration. Libya can be defined as a rentier state, in which most of the state's resources derive from oil and gas revenues; their distribution, essential for the

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<sup>14</sup> Al-Hajazi: Al-Dibia uses major infrastructure projects as a means of survival and to present himself as a reliable “partner” Al-Marsad, 22/01/2026. Available at: <https://almarsad.co/2026/01/22/%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%ad%d8%ac%d8%a7%d8%b2%d9%8a-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%af%d8%a8%d9%8a%d9%8a%d8%a9-%d9%8a%d8%b3%d8%aa%d8%ae%d8%af%d9%85-%d9%85%d8%b4%d8%a7%d8%b1%d9%8a%d8%b9-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a8%d9%86%d9%8a%d8%a9/>

functioning of the public system, has historically been used as a political tool to consolidate central power.

Weak internally and unable to guarantee lasting stability, the Dbaiba government has sought, through agreements with international actors, to strengthen its control over institutions, causing tensions both with rival authorities in the east and internally, among once-close political actors, such as former State Council President Khalid al-Mishri. The government maintains its stability thanks to the support of Turkey and Qatar and its ability to attract investment and large infrastructure projects. However, these dynamics have not mitigated internal criticism.

In particular, the agreement on the port of Misrata has sparked protests by the Misrata Revolutionary Brigades, a group that emerged during the 2011 revolution and played a leading role in the fight against Islamic State and Haftar's invasion (2019-2020). The demonstrations denounce the lack of consultation with local civil society and leading business families, highlighting how the Tripoli government favours top-down decisions without taking into account delicate social balances. The agreement also coincided with tensions following the death of General Mohammed al-Haddad in a plane crash in Turkey, an event that fuelled unconfirmed accusations of Dbaiba's political responsibility<sup>15</sup>.

The agreement on the port is therefore a further indicator of internal fragmentation, which goes beyond the traditional East-West divide and reflects the persistent weakness of the post-Gaddafi unitary state, in which autonomous local powers have developed independent political paths, sometimes strengthening and sometimes weakening themselves.

This dynamic has not only made internal reunification of the country unfeasible at present, but has also produced further fractures in the Libyan political landscape, whose recomposition appears particularly complex today. Although the approach based on economic investment and infrastructure improvement is often presented as a possible lever for future stabilisation, it is clear that, in order to be effectively implemented, such projects must necessarily deal with the multiplicity of actors in the field and not with a unified state authority. This approach, which also seems to characterise the renewed US strategy in the region, ends up reproducing dynamics of internal instability, indirectly contributing to the progressive strengthening of non-state actors.

This is a short-term vision that does not exclusively concern the United States, but is also shared by several European powers. While presenting themselves as promoters of modernisation and infrastructural development, these powers are in fact contributing to the dismantling of what remains of Libyan unity, favouring sectoral agreements and selective dialogue at the expense of an overall political project.

### ***Economic development and stability: Libya's challenges and European pragmatism***

In this context, economic development and stability continue to be a problematic combination. Faced with a structurally unstable political scenario, the Italian and European strategy in Libya does not seem to differ significantly from the approaches adopted in previous years. While stability often remains confined to rhetoric, economic and commercial pragmatism is once again being used as the main tool to promote the country's supposed normalisation.

European economic and trade policies in Libya, as well as the implementation of the Mattei Plan for Africa, seem to be reviving short-term approaches that risk replicating predatory and post-colonial logics. Economic, energy and development cooperation agreements appear to be disconnected from a genuine inclusive political process, as they do not take adequate account of either the social realities in Libya or the political aspirations expressed by the population.

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<sup>15</sup> See: <https://x.com/Libyapress2020/status/2013315180902392205>



This contradiction is particularly evident when analysing both the agreements – especially in the energy sector – and the internal political debate and the persistent economic crisis. Faced with increasingly pressing demands from civil society for structural reforms in the management of oil revenues, Libyan institutions, both in the east and west, seem to favour strengthening their political position through agreements with large energy companies.

Nor do international initiatives seem to adequately address the need to initiate a truly inclusive political process. The renewed involvement of the United States in the Libyan dossier is not moving in the desired direction, while European countries, although strongly interested in the Libyan context, appear to be uncritically aligning themselves with Washington's priorities.

This raises a key question: under these conditions, can Libya embark on a truly unified and inclusive path to address the economic, social and political challenges? In light of current dynamics, a positive answer seems difficult to sustain. The main issue remains the political power that has consolidated over years of institutional division: without a real challenge to the ruling elites, Libya risks remaining in a state of structural instability, continuing to be exposed to internal and external pressures.

This presupposes not only a more active role by the international community in fostering inclusive dialogue with all segments of civil society – as the United Nations Special Envoy Hanna Tettah has sought to do – but also a credible and sustained commitment by the European Union to support such initiatives. A first step toward a genuinely inclusive dialogue should involve limiting the influence of external actors within Libya, who not only provide political, military, and economic support to the ruling elites, but also contribute to consolidating their power, despite their low levels of public legitimacy, as indicated by recent surveys<sup>16</sup>.

Taking all this factors into account, economic assistance and investment alone result insufficient. They actually risk further entrenching a power system that not only perpetuates the country's fragmentation but also undermines the prospects for future political reorganization and national reunification. This proves particularly challenging in a deeply divided and highly fragmented context such as Libya; nevertheless, it represents a fundamental demand articulated by Libyans themselves, one that has so far failed to receive adequate attention. The widespread wave of nostalgia that emerged in the aftermath of Gaddafi's death should not be interpreted as a call for the restoration of the former leader's widely resented regime, but rather as a powerful expression of longing for stability, something Libya has lacked for at least the past fifteen years.

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<sup>16</sup> "How Libyans See Seif al-Islam Gaddafi — and What Comes Next for Libya's Politics", Arab Barometer, 04 February 2026. Al sito: <https://www.arabbarometer.org/2026/02/how-libyans-see-seif-al-islam-gaddafi-and-what-his-death-means-for-politics/>