

From Energy to Migration:

Surveying Italy's Position in Libya post-2011

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(Mustafa Yalçın - Anadolu Agency)

This policy outlook aims to analyse Italy's approach towards Libya post- 2011. Rome 's various interests in Libya are assessed and used to explain Italy's policy in the country and its effect on the Libyan conflict.

Italy's interests are varied, from dependency on Libyan oil and gas to migration, to security. Rome has always regarded Libya as a field of primary interest. Therefore, for Italy, a stable Libya is crucial to preserve these interests.

Introduction

Italy has significant historical and strategic interests in Libya ranging from dependence on Libyan hydrocarbons to migration-related issues. The country's location is likewise of significant interest to Italian policymakers. Libya is located south of the Italian coast, which gives a significant advantage to Libyan oil vis-à-vis other Middle Eastern oil producers. Libya has been Italy's main supplier of oil, as economic analyses [indicate](#), accounting for approximately one third of the country's energy consumption.

The 2011 [NATO-led operation in Libya](#) that ousted long-time Libyan ruler Muammar Gaddafi failed to subsequently build stable political institutions in the country. Libya steadily plunged into conflict inflamed both by internal contradictions underlying the competition of different political-military forces and interventions of regional and international players seeking to advance their own commercial and political interests.

In December 2015, [the Libyan Political Agreement](#) (LPA), also known as the Skhirat agreement, was signed with the purpose of forming a transitional government. Italy strongly supported the UN-led peace process that led to the creation of the internationally-recognised Government of National Accord (GNA). Rome has backed the GNA in order to end political divide and preserve its economic and political interests, particularly in Western Libya.

In April 2019, Libyan Warlord Khalifa Haftar and his self-declared Libyan National Army (LNA) began an offensive to capture the capital Tripoli from the UN-backed government. In the face of Haftar's offensive, the GNA requested help from Italy. Despite being a historical ally of the GNA, the Italian government has not managed to provide practical support for its ally. For some observers, this orientation has prevented Rome from playing a more active and dynamic player in the conflict.

In recent months, there has been a drastic shift on the ground in Libya, the UN-backed GNA, with considerable assistance from Turkey, has broken the siege of Tripoli by Haftar's LNA, backed by the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Egypt, Russia and France.

Most recently, Fayez Al Sarraj, the prime minister of Libya's UN-backed government, and Aguila Saleh, the speaker of a rival Tobruk based parliament (HoR) in eastern Libya, both announced a ceasefire across the country and the cessation of all hostilities.

What drives Italy's policies in Libya?

Rome's interests are varied, from dependency on Libyan oil and gas to migration, to security. Therefore, Italy has always regarded Libya as a field of primary interest. One of Italy's leading priorities in Libya is the oil sector. The Italian company ENI has been operating in the country [since 1959](#).



Oil facilities in Eastern Libya. (Mohammed Elshaiky - Anadolu Agency)

Federica Saini Fasanotti, Nonresident Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution, told TRT World Research Centre, that: "Italy has been historically connected to Libya and above all to Tripolitania where it has huge interests in energy since the discovery of the oil. Italy does not have internal energy sources and therefore relies completely on foreign suppliers. Libyan oil in this sense is perfect, one of the best in the world, and above all very close in geographical terms. Then there is the political issue of migration which should need a shared European strategy that at the moment is not on the table".

Libya has been a significant [producer](#) of crude oil since the 1960s. With a population of only six million and significant annual oil revenues, amounting to \$32 billion in 2010, Libya's potential is enormous. Libya has [unique advantages](#) as an oil producer, and its reserves remain significant: with over 48 billion barrels, or just under 3% of the world's total, the deposit is Africa's largest. The National Oil Corporation (NOC), the state oil company, [believes](#) further exploration will undoubtedly increase the recoverable reserves base.

Since the 1950s, Italy and Libya have [established](#) effective commercial relationships which prevented many moments of strain, global isolation and embargo during the 1980s and 1990s and, although seriously affected, survived the toppling of Gaddafi and the uncertainty following in the country.

Alessia Melcangi, Assistant Professor of Contemporary History of North Africa and the Middle East at the Sapienza University of Rome, and Non-resident Senior Fellow at Atlantic Council shared her thoughts with the TRT World Research Centre. According to her, "Italy strongly supported the UN process that led to the Skhirat agreement and the GNA creation. Wishes to preserve a united Libya, in line with historical, economic, and energy interests and the need for a centralised government, a government of national unity, to deal with facing its maritime borders".

Libya has the largest [proven crude oil reserves](#) in Africa at 48.4 billion barrels. When Gaddafi was in power, Libya produced some 1.6 million barrels per day, exported mostly to Italy, France, Spain and Germany.

"Historically, Italy is the European country most involved in Libya. The country is a former Italian colony, and it had always been a central focus of Rome's foreign politics. Italy has been investing political capital both officially and unofficially by hosting summits, conducting intense diplomacy, and trying to bypass the conflict between Tobruk and Tripoli by directly addressing municipal representatives, members of civil society, local actors, and tribal leaders. Rome aims to support the GNA by improving security conditions, especially in Tripoli. Rome has been pursuing this diplomatic course because of Italy's political, economic, commercial, and energy stakes in Libya, as shown by recent

investments by the Italian oil giant Eni in Libya, which are concentrated in Tripolitania". Giuseppe Dentice, Associate Research Fellow at ISPI, told TRT World Research Centre.

Dentice further observed that "Italy has become a major transit route for African migrants coming to Europe. In fact, since 2017, Italy and Tripoli collaborated to combat human trafficking and strengthen Libya's border controls to prevent migrants from departing from the coast of Libya".

The ongoing conflict has resulted in a steady flow of migrants and refugees to Italy. Rome wants to ensure stability and security on its southern frontiers in order to slow the flow of migrants coming from Africa via Libya.

Riccardo Fabian, Project Director, North Africa at the International Crisis Group, in an interview to TRT World Research Centre explains the factors underpinning Italy's strategy. For him, "There are short and long-term interests at stake for Italy in Libya, even though the short-term ones probably prevail at the moment. For Italy, there are two short-term priorities. Firstly, keeping migration flows from Libya under control, because they have been a major factor in domestic politics for the past years and one of the key concerns for voters. Secondly, protecting ENI's assets from the immediate risk of damage or interruption and the longer-term risk of expropriation or any type of loss for this strategic state-owned firm. In the long term, Italy is worried about protecting its role in the Mediterranean Sea and avoiding any hostile influence in a region so close to its interests and security".

Italy and Libya signed a Treaty on Friendship in Benghazi, known as [Benghazi treaty](#) in order to provide symbolic closure to disputes that date back to Italy's invasion of Libya in the early 20th century. The treaty has [led](#) to establishing a favourable climate for significant development in bilateral relations. The agreement [pledged](#) to move towards partnership in defence-industry projects and agreements to collaboration on immigration flows that for Italy are a crucial matter.

Umberto Profazio, Maghreb Analyst at the NATO foundation, told TRT World Research Centre, that: "Italy's policy on Libya has been mainly driven by interest explicitly included into the 2008 Benghazi Treaty signed by the former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi and former Libyan leader, Muammar Gaddafi. The treaty included provisions aimed at preserving and enhancing the special relationship between the two leaders but, more importantly, between Italy and its former colony. The prominence of the Italian national oil company ENI in the energy sector of Libya, the need to stem the flow of migrants towards the shores of Italy and concerns about the proliferation of terrorist groups in North Africa, highlight that Italy's main interests in Libya were concentrated in three main sectors: energy, migration and security".

Does Italy adopt a realistic approach in Libya?

Italy has specific interests in Libya as a former colony. Rome, therefore, wants to preserve and widen its economic interests. [ENI](#) has a long presence in Libya and is currently its largest international oil-producing company. Italy is also concerned about the influx of refugees from Libya. From 2015 and 2016, Italy officially backed the UN-led peace process and Rome has been one of the key supporters of the process that led to the LPA and the establishment of the UN-backed GNA.

According to Riccardo Fabian, "Italy is supportive of the GNA for three main reasons: West Libya's political and military fragmentation means that most migration routes from Libya start there, so dealing with the GNA is essential to control these flows; ENI's most important assets are also based in Western Libya, and, finally, Italy's centre-left government coalitions of the past years prefer to abide by what the UN and international law say and the GNA is still the only legitimate representative of the Libyan people, from that point of view. Nevertheless, Italy is also a weak player unable to impose its policy on other foreign players or protect its interests from other regional and international powers. This awareness means that the risk of getting caught out by a sudden reversal on the ground is too high for Italy, pushing Rome to hedge its bets when needed and rapidly adapt to changing circumstances".

However, Italy has also tried to establish a connection with Haftar, who is backed by the UAE, Egypt, Russia and France. This approach has been ineffective and has weakened Italy's relation with the UN-backed government.

As stated by Fasanotti, "Unfortunately, Italy seems to have more a series of tactics in Libya than a strategy. And that is a big problem. But on one thing I am sure: the support to the GNA government has always been clear".

In April 2019, when Haftar's LNA laid siege to Tripoli in a bid to oust the UN-backed GNA, the GNA reportedly requested military assistance from Italy, however, the Italian government did not respond. Ahmed Maiteeq, Vice-President of the Presidential Council of the UN-backed government, [reportedly](#) said that "Italy no longer knows what it wants in Libya, it no longer has a strategy".

Fabian explains the intricacies of Italy's position. For him, "At times, Italy seems to support Libya's UN-backed GNA, but there have been occasions when the Italian government seemed to tilt in favour of Khalifa Haftar. Italy's foreign policy needs to be looked at in its context. Historically, Italy is internally divided, with a weak and contested state,

an endless series of unstable governments, a delicate and precarious social contract that has been disputed by many actors for decades, very limited defence resources and a large section of the public opinion that tends to oppose any military intervention abroad. It is, therefore, no surprise that Italy's foreign policy often hesitates or makes U-turns and is difficult to read for foreign observers, which are more used to looking at international relations as a system of ties involving states acting as single-minded actors".



Italian Prime Minister, Giuseppe Conte (R) chats with Chairman of the Presidential Council of Libya's Government of National Accord (GNA), Fayez al-Sarraj (L) during their meeting after an official ceremony at Palazzo Chigi on January 11, 2020 in Rome, Italy. (Italian Prime Ministry - Anadolu Agency)

Diplomatic offensive

Over the past four years, efforts to find a political resolution to Libya's ongoing conflict have failed at various conferences in Palermo, Paris, Abu Dhabi and Berlin. However, the latest [ceasefire call](#) might act as a catalyst to a formal agreement between eastern Parliament (HoR) and the UN-backed GNA in the [5+5 Joint Military Commission](#) talks that are ongoing in Geneva as part of the Berlin Peace Process.

For Melcangi, "Despite its official support for the Al-Sarraj government, Italy has remained extremely passive both concerning his ineffectual administrative performance and active military confrontation with Haftar. Italy has also been too passive in supporting the UN peace effort and has not devised alternative policies or adapted its policy to the evolving scenarios—except for the intelligence sector, which created unofficial links with the Haftar camp".

Additionally, "Worried about backing the wrong horse, Italy, for a while, supported Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar who is also boosted by Russia, France, the UAE and Egypt, recognising him as a legitimate interlocutor, especially when he seemed ready to conquer Tripoli and definitely defeat

the GNA or maintained an equidistance behaviour in the conflict. This led the GNA to look at different, more reliable partners, such as Turkey and Italy, to lose its leverage on the Libyan theatre” Melcangi said.



Prime Minister of Italy Giuseppe Conte welcomes the guests for dinner ahead of the Libya Conference in Palermo, Italy on November 12, 2018. (Mustafa Kamacı - Anadolu Agency)

The Palermo Peace Conference

The International Conference on Libya took place in [Palermo](#), Italy, from November 11 to November 12, 2018. The Italian government organised the conference as an attempt to counter the Paris Summit organised by France in May 2018. Italy, for its part, sought to use the Palermo conference to reassert its role as the leading EU player in Libya. However, like most peace conferences, Palermo did not prove to be a watershed event for the stabilisation of Libya.

In Fasanotti’s opinion, “Referring to the Palermo Conference: the managing of the dynamics among all those actors has been a failure, but in the end, Italy has always been coherent assuring the full support to the UN-recognised government, without giving weapons to anyone, following the arms embargo. Observing the actions of other countries involved now in the conflict, I would say that this is not peanuts”.

Over the past few years, the Italian government has demonstrated a degree of ambiguity towards the Libyan conflict. Despite being an ally of the UN-backed GNA, Italy also recognised Haftar’s political role as was clearly demonstrated by his invitation to the Palermo Conference. The invitation by Italy boosted Haftar’s image as a key player. It lent him legitimacy, consequently undermining Al Sarraj’s credibility and role as Prime Minister as well as his negotiating leverage during any potential conference.

For Dentice, “Italy plays a central role in Libya and the Mediterranean space as a whole. At the same time, there is no doubt that Rome pursues a peculiar strategy. While this strategy is economically clear and harmonious, geopoliti-

cally, it could appear vague or extremely ambiguous. There are several reasons to explain the weaknesses and lack of a coherent strategy in Italian foreign policy, but one of the most important explications is related to geography. Indeed, Italy’s natural geographical projection is towards the south, in the Mediterranean space,” adding that “a bad error of evaluation can bring Italy to regional isolation”.

Even so, the Italian diplomacy made quite a few bad judgment calls. For instance, an incident took place in Palermo that could have impacted negatively the peace process in Libya. During the two-day conference, a side-meeting occurred, from which Turkey and some Libyan delegates, were excluded. This episode [caused](#) “deep disappointment” as per Turkish Vice President Fuat Oktay. While Turkey was hoping this conference could provide an inclusive regional platform that is conducive for peace, the diplomatic faux pas in Italy’s soil could have dented the bilateral relations. Ankara expressed its concerns but moved on for the sake of peace and stability in Libya. However, the incident left some doubts about the Italian diplomacy’s ability to handle large peace conferences such as these.

There were other consequences too. For example, in January 2020, Al-Sarraj was [expected](#) to meet Italian prime minister Giuseppe Conte in Rome, on the way back from a meeting with European Union authorities in Brussels. However, Al-Sarraj changed his plans at the last minute after learning that the Italian PM held a meeting with Haftar just prior to his scheduled arrival. What amounts to an Italian attempt to broker an unscheduled meeting between Libya’s two conflicting sides ultimately failed.

An Italian opposition senator [stated](#) that “the prime minister of Libya’s UN-backed Government Al-Sarraj, evaded meeting with Prime Minister, Giuseppe Conte in Rome, saying that it was a slap on the face for Conte and confirmed the ultimate failure of the Italian Government”.

Melcangi confirmed this view: “Over the past few years, Italy lost grounds and influence in Libya due to a plurality of reasons: lacking resources, determination, and clear political will, often caused by Italy’s domestic political and economic crises and by fragile governments with hardly any foreign policy experience and interest. For this reason, Rome lost its influence with the GNA and opened the door for more active regional and international players”.

France and Italy split on Libya

There has been a great division among two European member states, France and Italy, over Libya. The clash between Italy and France over Libya has contributed to the failure of EU efforts to develop a political solution for the ongoing conflict.

According to Profazio, "Following the height of tensions in early 2019 (when deteriorated relations led Paris to recall its ambassador to Rome) the rift between France and Italy seems now to be healing, also due to the reshuffle in the Italian government that led to the demise of the former Interior Minister Matteo Salvini. Despite differences in the positions of both countries vis-à-vis the crisis in Libya, it is clear that both Paris and Rome have lost ground to the more assertive powers, which have not been afraid of resorting to power politics or threatening military intervention in Libya".

According to Federica Saini Fasanotti, "Haftar is not the right horse on which you can bet. For many reasons, and this, sooner or later, will be clear to anyone, also to France. So, I think that the coherence of Italy, in this case, it is something not to be underestimated. Being aggressive does not necessarily lead to victory. I give good chances to Italy, if in the meantime, nothing changes in Tripoli".

France has a variety of strategic, geopolitical and ideological interests in Libya. Its interference in Libya is motivated mostly by the preservation of French economic interests and is in line with its ambition to strengthen French influence in North Africa. Security considerations also factor significantly into France's decision making in the region.

For Dentice, "Italy and France have similar interests in foreign policy, especially in their projection towards the Mediterranean region. Obviously, some political directions in Italian and French foreign policy should be identified with a wider view or strategy. In Paris' point of view, Libya and the Mediterranean region are crucial to stretch its influence from the Maghreb line to Sahara-Sahel and Africa's Western coasts. On the contrary, the Italian position about the Mediterranean region is based on stable relations with local actors. In this sense, Libya is a natural battleground between Rome and Paris. Current tensions date back to 2011 when France and the United Kingdom led a military intervention in Libya against Muammar Gaddafi's regime. However, Libyan stability does not depend solely on France and Italy. It depends on a large number of actors and complex factors. For all these reasons, France rethinks its Libyan strategy, while Italy can improve its policy proposing a coherent vision in accordance with the European Union to manage the Libya file. Italy and France can reach success in Libya only by cooperating towards a peaceful solution".

France has been politically aligned with the UAE in supporting Haftar for some time now. For a long time, the French approach towards the Libyan conflict was to give war a chance to see whether Haftar could secure a military solution to the conflict. Even after it became clear that seizing the capital by force is not feasible, but Paris backed Haftar diplomatically and militarily, which has given right to unprecedented foreign intervention in Libya and threatens to destabilise the region further.

According to Riccardo Fabian, "Italy has little interest in antagonising France, which remains a key partner within the European Union and the Mediterranean Sea. The division with France emerged in 2018 and 2019 and posed a major problem to diplomatic efforts to bring an end to the conflict in Libya. However, Rome and Paris have, to a large extent patched up their relationship since then, despite the remaining divergences between the two actors. Rome has interests in the East Mediterranean as well, where France also tends to play a leading role with Egypt and Greece in opposing Turkey, and in this complex scenario it seems that for the time being Rome is unwilling to challenge Paris again openly".

Can Italy lead the EU's efforts in Libya?

The EU formally supports GNA led by Fayeze Al Sarraj. Despite the EU's stand, France has established strong ties with Haftar, which has undermined the EU's influence in Libya. Italy has addressed this issue on numerous occasions. For instance, in January 2019, Matteo Salvini, former Deputy Prime Minister of Italy, [said](#) that France "has no interest in stabilising the situation in Libya, probably because it has oil interests that are opposed to those of Italy". As a result, the EU has not been able to take a strong position on Libya or advance significant policies for de-escalation given France's antithetical position to the majority of other European states.

For Fabian, "Italy has a key role in the Libyan crisis, but its resources and hard power are very limited, inevitably making it less incisive than other players. Rome has an active role in shaping the EU's foreign policy on this issue but needs France's collaboration to be truly effective. These two European powers are the most involved in this matter, along with Germany, and only by working together they can be effective vis-à-vis Egypt, the UAE, Russia and Turkey".

According to Giuseppe Dentice, "Italy has the opportunity to lead a European strategy in Libya, working with its allies (also France), and promoting a more relevant role for the United Nations to in the conflict and develop a comprehensive solution for the country. For example, in the recent past, the conferences that took place in Palermo, Paris or Berlin, aimed to strengthen international support and mechanisms and to create a roadmap for relaunching the UN-sponsored stabilisation process for Libya. All these failed due to the lack of a coherent European strategy. Cooperation and multilateralism among EU members are fundamental to pursue a peaceful solution in Libya".



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (R) and Prime Minister of Italy Giuseppe Conte (L) hold a press conference following their meeting at the Presidential Complex in Ankara, Turkey on January 13, 2020. (Murat Kula - Anadolu Agency)

Do Ankara and Rome share similar interests in Libya?

In the face of Haftar's [offensive](#) on Tripoli, the GNA [requested](#) help from the United States, Britain, Italy, Algeria and Turkey. In practical terms, it seems only Turkey has provided tangible support to the internationally-recognised government. Ankara has stepped up its efforts to provide considerable military assistance to Haftar's opponents, including armed drones and air defence systems, which have shifted the balance on the ground.

Italy's foreign minister, Luigi di Maio, [stated](#) that Italy had been slow to respond to the attack on Tripoli launched last April by Haftar. In December 2019, the Italian foreign minister [said](#) "in Libya, we have lost a role. We disappeared from Tripoli for eight months. They will have taken it badly. We must recover. I do not hide it, and we must do so with a concrete and more realistic approach to the situation on the ground".

Fabian has a nuanced standpoint. For him, "Italy and Turkey can cooperate, for example in relation to their support for the GNA and rejection of Haftar's attempted military takeover of Tripoli. What divides them is Ankara's willingness to use military force to oppose the Haftar-led coalition. However, if Turkey is ready to take concrete steps to de-escalate the conflict and facilitate a diplomatic solution, the two countries will be able to collaborate even more closely with each other than before".

For Profazio, "In promoting a new and diversified approach to the crisis in Libya that can gain momentum from the current peace initiatives, Italy should also try to bridge the gap with Turkey, now an ineluctable actor in western Libya. Despite both governments having a clear interest in supporting the GNA, Italy's oscillations have paved the way for Ankara to assume a predominant role in sustaining

the authorities in Tripoli. Moving on from here depends on several factors, including Italy's ability to heal the rift with Ankara, which is seen sometimes as competing with Italy's economic interest in Libya. Nevertheless, providing a linkage between the crisis in Libya and the rising tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean, Turkey's intervention and MoU with the GNA late last year has made such effort much more complicated".

As stated by Fasanotti, "the interests of Italy and Turkey are similar, especially at the economic level, so the collaboration between Turkey and Italy should be stimulated. Libya is a country with extraordinary potential, but which needs huge investments. Collaboration between investing countries would benefit everyone in this case. The first step towards economic collaboration lies precisely in a common strategy towards peace which is necessary to attract investments. Without political and social stability, there can be no economic development".

Dentice shares a similar view. "Italy has important relations with Turkey, like with Greece, Cyprus and all the Mediterranean coastal countries. To bring peace and stability is important as well as dialogue and cooperation among them, Italy cannot choose an alliance or a multilateral partnership. Italy can help both parties to favour dialogue in order to de-escalate tensions, such as that are happening in the Eastern Mediterranean".

The Turkish government helped the UN-backed government in a moment of need while Italy has largely failed to provide practical support for the GNA, despite their official position of support. As a result, Turkey has become a more reliable ally for GNA against Haftar and his backers. Consequently, Italy seems to have been marginalised in the Libyan conflict. If Rome cooperates with Ankara to support the GNA, it may increase its chance of taking a more leading role and regain some of its lost credibility in the Libyan theatre.

What are Italy's future intentions?

Until now, it seems that Italy has not been able to implement a coherent political strategy to provide more tangible support for the GNA. According to Federica Fasanotti, "In the near future, I see only tactical actions, certainly not strategic, regarding the usual problems: energy, migratory flows, terrorism. Besides, Italian foreign policy has never been particularly brilliant in the course of its contemporary history. There is a lack of coordination between ministries and between the different offices. There is no clear and well-defined guideline. Furthermore, in my opinion, it has been years since we have had a strong, visionary figure at the head of the Italian foreign ministry. The result is there for all to see".

Given the circumstances in Libya, Italy might provide support to the GNA under a NATO flag and in close coordination with Turkey in order to confront Russian and France's influence in the country. Considering geostrategic interests, the Italian government may not afford to be marginalised further from Libyan theatre.

Profazio argues that "the rivalry between France and Italy is partly to blame for Europe's loss of credibility on the Libyan file. Germany's diplomatic efforts came with considerable delay and the blatant violations of the arms embargo in Libya, confirmed by the UN Panel of Experts on Libya, showed the complete disregard for the conclusions agreed by the participants to the Berlin conference. Considered as biased actors, France and Italy seem marginalised. While Macron's frequent accusations against Turkey suggest an attempt to divert the attention from the failure of France's policy of support to Haftar in Libya, Italy still has some room to manoeuvre thanks to its close contacts with the authorities in Tripoli. Building upon the recent ceasefire announced by the GNA, Prime Minister Fayed Al-Sarraj and Aguilah Saleh, Italy should try to promote dialogue in the different forums, pending the incoming appointment of a new UN envoy to Libya that should coordinate the various initiatives taken so far".

For Riccardo Fabian, "Its domestic constraints mean that Italy cannot commit significant resources to this crisis. In addition, over the past years, the emergence of the migration crisis (combined with the economic downturn) has meant that Italian governments have had an almost obsessive focus on this issue, at the expense of anything else to the point that in the past there have been times when the interior ministry has ended up dictating Italy's policy towards Libya. These limitations mean that Rome remains a relatively ineffective actor in this crisis, compared with the other powers involved. The focus is unlikely to move away from its current stance of support for the GNA and for reviving diplomatic talks to put an end to the conflict. This position is in line with Italy's interests and its traditionally legalistic approach to international conflicts".

For his part, Dentice contends that "Italy needs a clear and harmonious strategy according to the evolving regional and international context. In this sense, a sensible step forward is the bolstering of the EU IRINI mission. It could be useful for Italy and its EU partners to enforce this mission with a clear political mandate. For example, Italy and the EU can promote a deep process to enforce the arms embargo, respect for human rights, and punishment for those who violate UN peace efforts. In this way, Italy and the EU can improve their leverage towards local partners and build a credible and effective policy to promote a comprehensive peace process".

Conclusion

The latest ceasefire call seems to be a significant development in Libya and opens a window of opportunity for renewed efforts to reach a political agreement. However, it is unlikely that the ceasefire will last long as Haftar's militias [reportedly](#) continue to violate the truce by firing grad rockets at GNA forces in Sirte and the eastern oil crescent, where much of Libya's oil infrastructure is located. Thus, the situation in Libya remains unstable.

Italy's approach towards Libya has been mainly driven by three main issues which dominate relations between Tripoli and Rome: preventing the flow of migrants coming from Africa via Libya, securing its energy contracts, and preserving and widening its economic interests, particularly in western Libya. However, until now, Italy has undertaken an approach to Libya that would see it become a significant player able to protect its interests in the face of interventions from regional and international players.

Although Italy strongly supported the UN-led peace process that led to the creation of the GNA, there have been occasions when the Italian government seems to have tilted towards Haftar and has recognised him as a legitimate actor. This policy has been ineffective and has weakened the relationship with the UN-backed government.

With significant Turkish support, the UN-backed government in Tripoli has managed to fend off and claw back territory from Haftar's LNA. Italy has, therefore, come to see Turkey as a vital player within the Libyan arena.

Turkey's growing presence in western Libya might encourage the Italian government to strengthen its partnership with Turkey in order to secure Italy's interests in western Libya. Both countries seem to have a clear interest in supporting the GNA to bring permanent peace and stability. Given this, the collaboration between Ankara and Rome must be stimulated.



People wave Libyan flags during protest against attacks by Warlord Khalifa Haftar's LNA troops in Tripoli, Libya on January 24, 2020. (Hazem Turkia - Anadolu Agency)