



EUNPACK A CONFLICT SENSITIVE UNPACKING OF
THE EU COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH
TO CONFLICT AND CRISES MECHANISM

POLICY BRIEF

Perceptions about the EU's Crisis Response in Libya

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Summary and Recommendations

Abstract

Within the EU's approach to crisis management, it is crucial to consider the point of view of all stakeholders to ensure that the crisis response is in line with European commitments towards local ownership and conflict sensitivity. This EUNPACK Policy Brief discusses the perceptions of those who have been exposed to the EU's responses to the crisis unfolding in Libya. It is based on the results of a survey completed in the summer of 2017 by 228 respondents. It highlights, on the one hand, that while the EU is the most widely-known international actor involved in crisis response in Libya, the impact of its initiatives is less visible, thereby prompting a certain degree of dissatisfaction, if not of scepticism. This reaction is particularly pronounced remarkable among ethnic minorities living in peripheral regions. On the other hand, the EU is particularly praised for its initiatives in the fields of humanitarian assistance and capacity building, targeting most notably the most vulnerable social groups. To make sure that the EU's crisis response in Libya achieves the highest degree of conflict sensitivity, appropriateness and effectiveness, the EU should:

1. Pay greater attention to security sector reform (SSR) as a pillar of crisis response in Libya.
2. Avoid undermining the positive image of the EU's humanitarian commitment by engaging in contradictory policies.
3. Ensure that crisis-response initiatives are coherent with the needs of all Libyan social groups, including ethnic minorities.
4. Improve the monitoring and evaluation of its crisis response towards achieving its stated goals.
5. Invest more resources in conflict-sensitive crisis response.

Introduction

Context

Libya has faced intense political and security turmoil for several years and, at the time of writing, is far from achieving any semblance of stability. Many international actors, including individual foreign countries and international organisations, have intervened in Libya in an effort to help bring a response to (their respective framings of) the ongoing crisis. Uncontestably, the European Union (EU) is among the most prominent to offer help, because of the significance of its political commitment and the magnitude of resources allocated as part of its crisis response initiatives in Libya. A previous paper prepared within this research project (Ivashchenko et al., 2017) provides an in-depth description of the EU's framing of the crisis in Libya, the strategic objectives of the EU's initiatives and the specific crisis response mechanisms and policy tools progressively adopted by the different EU institutions to pursue these ends. Building on these research results, a forthcoming EUNPACK Working Paper will discuss the outcome and impact of these measures. The present paper explores the perceptions that have accompanied EU crisis-response initiatives in Libya. In light of the EU's commitment to conflict sensitivity and local ownership, in fact, providing a bottom-up analysis of how EU's crisis response is received and perceived by different local actors throughout the conflict is a crucial component of the evaluation of the EU's crisis response initiatives. The data presented in this study are largely based on an exploratory survey of security perceptions in Libya carried out between July and September of 2017.

Methodology

Libya represents a very challenging research environment, and even more so when security-related topics are investigated. Given the volatile situation across most of the country, opportunities to engage in sustained fieldwork are severely constrained. And even if one were willing to take the risk, field research is increasingly regulated by a number of safety and security protocols to ensure compliance with research institutions' duty of care (Peter and Strazzari, 2016). Collaborative research projects such as EUNPACK raise further issues, as the room for manoeuvre granted by different institutions is influenced by changing – and sometimes contradictory – definitions of security and risk. As a result, authorisation to carry out field research in North Africa, and most notably in Libya, is particularly hard to obtain.¹

Moreover, past memories and present tensions exercise a twofold influence on the research dynamics. Firstly, Libyans – who in many cases have lived for decades under an authoritarian regime – are sometimes suspicious of a foreigner's affiliation with a national or an international state-sponsored institution. Secondly, the local population may still associate interviewing and surveys with a form of political control, and tend to be wary of sharing personal data and opinions with individuals trying to establish contact from afar. This has some relevant implications as closed-data survey research may lack the instruments to foster mutual trust between researcher and interviewees. Some of the most well-established research institutions conducting surveys in Africa have capitulated to these obstacles, and have abandoned their efforts to collect data and write reports on Libya (such as Afrobarometer),

¹ These observations are confirmed in the course of several informal exchanges with other scholars from different universities who work on Libya.

or have stopped doing so since 2013 (such as Gallup), before the security situation worsened significantly. It is hardly surprising, then, that there is a dearth of up-to-date polls and surveys on Libyans, with Libyans and about Libyans, and not only about security matters. One has to go several years back in time to find a serious security perception survey in/on Libya (see, for instance Small Arms Survey, 2014), when discussions about foreign actors' crisis response interventions were yet to come, or look at the surveys conducted in Tunisia among Libyans who were forced to leave their country.²

With a view to circumventing these obstacles, this Policy Brief has built a new dataset trying to combine creativity with realism. In order to foster cross-case comparability among different cases within EUNPACK, our survey has targeted individuals with "a certain degree of exposure" to EU crisis response initiatives in Libya, including beneficiaries, potential beneficiaries and implementers. Given the constraints of field access, we have focused on national and international civil society networks (of the kind described by Keck and Sikkink 1998), whose articulations by definition criss-cross and transcend Libya. Moreover, civil society represents a relatively persistent target of EU crisis response in spite of rapidly changing beneficiaries across the years. To identify and map these actors, we have relied on a number of different sources, including the review of both the scholarly and policy literature on the topic, the institutional expertise and regional outreach of the project partners, and the reliance the personal networks that the authors have developed over years of fieldwork. While in many cases the initial informants were outside Libya, further snowballing has helped to locate 'hidden' sub-networks within Libya, thereby ensuring a more fine-tuned degree of coverage. Moreover, by leveraging common acquaintances, the snowballing sampling technique has reduced the methodological and ethical challenges of the free flow of information. At the same time, the very diverse set of initial informants has contributed to compensating for the potential issues of community bias and 'wrong anchoring'.

Aiming to cope with security constraints on the ground, access to the respondents was ensured by a number of different techniques. Face-to-face direct interviews have been carried out with targets residing in (or provisionally moving to) Tunisia, as well as in Italy and Libya. To this end, the two principal investigators were flanked by two local interviewers, one based in Tripoli and one in Tunis. In some cases, questionnaires have been supplied intermediaries trusted by both the interviewers and the research targets to ensure a greater degree of confidentiality.³ Access to the respondents was ensured also by resorting to remote interviews (via Skype, telegram, etc.), and the supply of self-administered questionnaires (i.e. filled out by the respondent) via email (either directly or via undisclosed mailing lists of target groups).⁴ By alleviating potential positional biases, the reliance on 'proxy interviewing' (Cammett, 2013) – including local interviewers and intermediaries – has allowed

² In 2015 and 2016, IRMC (Institut de recherche sur le Maghreb contemporain) in Tunis supported research on the topics of Libyan migration and diaspora in Tunisia.

³ Local interviewers and civil society intermediaries have received from the principal investigators fundamental training on the purpose of the research, its theoretical framing, conceptual issues and ethical standards.

⁴ Given the remote nature of many interactions with the questionnaires' respondents, oral consent procedures have replaced the written forms of fully informed consent, in line with the highest ethical standards of the discipline (Wood, 2006). After all, oral consent represents an established practice within leading academic institutions such as the University of California-Berkeley, Stanford University and New York University. This is also in line with standard methodologies adopted by the local partner IRMC.

us to circumvent the security, linguistic and cultural obstacles that may have otherwise barred access to the questionnaire targets to outsiders, and namely to foreign security scholars.

Sample

The data presented in this Policy Brief rely on the responses received to 228 valid questionnaires completed by targeted individuals identified and joined reached as discussed above. Such a sample is obviously too limited to be statistically significant. Moreover, the short time-frame of the survey does not capture potential variations in respondents' perceptions that might have occurred since the beginning of the crisis. As a result, this paper does not aspire to offer an exhaustive overview of very complex issues, nor an estimate of general validity, but rather a snapshot providing insights into how the EU crisis response in Libya is currently perceived. Even a modest amount of data might still be better than no data as it could allow a sober assessment of the findings introduced here, which could orient future research projects by providing a preliminary baseline.

The profiles of the surveyed population mirror quite accurately some of the defining features of the Libyan population: the largest majority of the respondents are Libyan nationals (90.4%)⁵ and define themselves as Sunni Muslims (90%).⁶ In line with the country's high social standards (as compared to the rest of the region), less than a quarter of the respondents claim to be able to satisfy their basic needs only sometimes (17%),⁷ never or rarely (7.4% combined), while, when asked about their social status, 82.4% of them rank themselves average or higher. Some 91.3% of the respondents have spent at least 12 years in formal schooling, and only a small minority acknowledges having difficulties in reading (10.5%) or writing (8.4%). In terms of gender balance, the sample includes only 29.4% of women: while this is obviously not representative of Libya's gender proportions in absolute terms, it is likely to reflect the actual rates of the gender (im)balance in the public sphere, including within civil society. Some 49% of the respondents are adults (26-36 years old), one-third (32%) is 'mature' (40 or older), while youth (18-25 years old) account for 18.4%.

Slightly less than two-thirds (62.7%) of the respondents live in Tripolitania, and considerably less in the other historic regions of Libya, including 11.4% in Cyrenaica and 11% in Fezzan. Moreover, 8% of the respondents live out of Libya, including 5.7% in Tunisia. While Tripolitania is the most populated region of Libya, it makes little doubt that these figures mirror more the accessibility of the population than its actual regional distribution. In terms of self-identified ethnic belonging, the surveyed individuals include 70% of Arabs, 12.3% of Tuaregs, 7% of Amazigh/Berber, 2% Tawergha and 0.4% Tebu.⁸ In total,

⁵ Those who are not Libyan nationals include sub-Saharan African migrants present in Libya (3% of the sample) and foreign workers involved in different capacities in crisis response initiatives dealing with Libya, the majority of whom are Tunisians (1.7%) and Italians (1.7%).

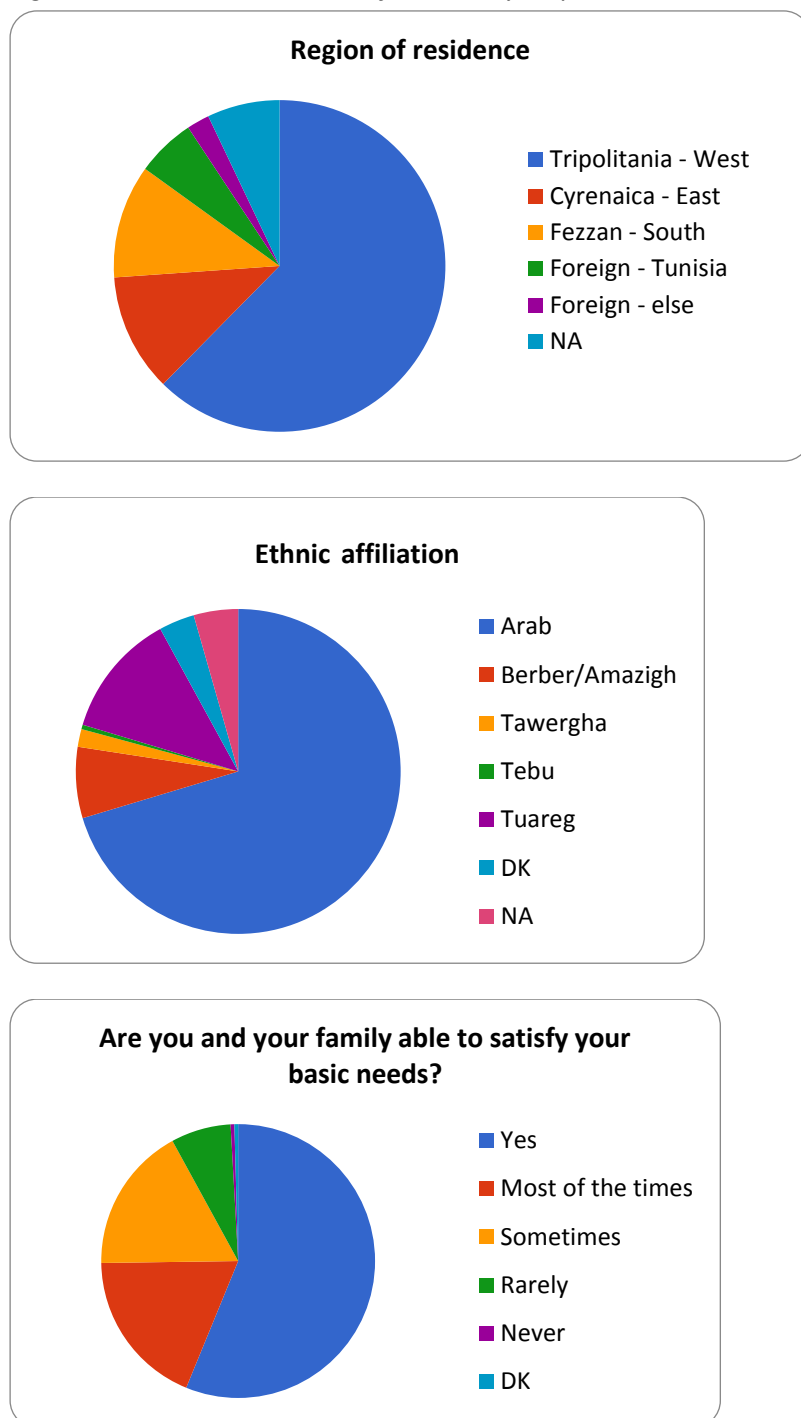
⁶ Most of those who do not define themselves as Sunni Muslim simply refused to identify with any other specific religious affiliation, thereby making religious minorities negligible within our sample.

⁷ For the sake of clarity and simplicity, all decimals .1, .2, .8 and .9 have been rounded off to the most proximate unit.

⁸ This categorisation is admittedly contentious. The Tuaregs are often seen as a sub-group of the Amazigh/Berber, just as much as the Tawergha can be considered as one of the many families within the Arab community. Gaddafi-era policies of nationality have complicated things further, and many Tebu have been denied either their ethnic recognition or their national status. It is also due to the sensitivity of ethnic labelling that a considerable fraction of respondents (8%) has refused to answer this question straightforwardly. In terms of quantitative proportions, however, these figures mirror rather accurately the reported dimensions of Libya's different ethnic groups.

about a half (48%) of the sample declares to be professionally involved in crisis response initiatives in Libya, the majority of whom are ethnic Arabs (52%) and reside in Tripolitania (51.7%).

Figure 1. Basic characteristics of the survey respondents



Although Tawergha and Tuaregs are probably over-represented, the overall proportions of the Arab+Tawergha and of the Amazigh/Berber+Tuaregs seem reasonable (see Kohl, 2014). In the subsequent discussion, potential correlations involving the Tawergha or the Tebu will be dismissed, because the small size of the sample makes them highly subject to statistical error.

Main findings

Awareness of EU crisis response

Of the surveyed population, the vast majority (97%) is aware that international actors are involved in crisis response in Libya.⁹ The EU is by far the most well-known actor: 93% of the surveyed population is aware of its involvement in crisis-response initiatives in Libya, far more than is aware of any other national or international organisation. For instance, the aggregate level of awareness drops at 72.4% for UN agencies (including UNHCR, WFP, IOM, WHO) and at 55.7% for the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL, the ongoing UN peace-keeping operation in Libya). The highest-ranking individual countries, whose involvement in crisis response Libyans are aware of, include Italy (64.3%) and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) 50.7%). No other actor has been mentioned by at least half of the surveyed population.

The majority of the respondents seem to be aware of the EU's crisis response in three main fields of intervention: humanitarian action; capacity building; and policy initiatives and diplomacy. Conversely, another three fields of intervention are known by less than half of the sample: development aid; security sector reform (SSR); and rule of law. In particular, the most visible field of EU crisis response is the humanitarian action (74.2%), and the least visible is the rule of law (20.4%). The perceived beneficiaries of EU intervention mirror the visibility of these fields: vulnerable groups – potentially entitled to humanitarian aid – are the best-known beneficiaries of EU support, including most notably civil society organisations (mentioned by 58% of the respondents),¹⁰ migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) (mentioned in 56.6% of the cases in aggregate terms) and women (45.7%). Conversely, potential beneficiaries of SSR support are less frequently mentioned, including the military (identified as the target of EU support by 12.7% of respondents), the police and other security forces (mentioned in 16.7% of the cases in aggregate terms). Interestingly enough, and probably as an illustration of Libya's fragmented security environment, non-state armed actors (such as militias and armed groups) rank higher (19.5%) than formal security forces in the respondents' perceptions of the beneficiaries of EU support. Halfway between the high visibility of vulnerable groups and the low visibility of armed actors, one finds different sorts of public officials as perceived beneficiaries of EU crisis-response initiatives, including urban communities and their authorities (shura councils, municipalities, etc.) (39%), state officials and bureaucracies (35%), political elites (MPs, party leaders, etc.) (32%), and rural communities and their authorities (26%).

The aggregate results about the awareness of EU crisis response initiatives in Libya display some interesting variations, depending on the respondents' ethnic affiliation, regional origin and social status. The levels of awareness of the self-identified ethnic Tuareg diverge sharply from the average: only 56% of them mention the EU as a prominent actor in crisis response in Libya; 32% mention the different UN agencies combined; and 24% UNMSIL. Conversely, awareness of the crisis-response initiatives by individual states is higher among ethnic minorities than on average: 80% of the Tawergha and 80% of the Tuaregs are aware of the crisis-response initiatives taken by Egypt, UAE and Qatar; even more

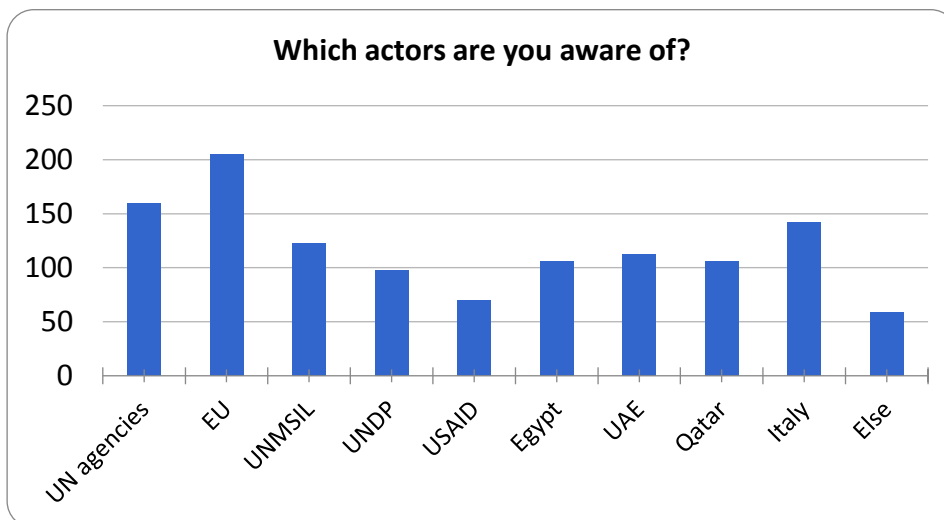
⁹ Only the respondents who claimed to be aware of international interventions of crisis response in Libya were given the opportunity to answer the subsequent questions. As a result, the analysis that follows is based upon this more limited sample (221 surveys out of 228).

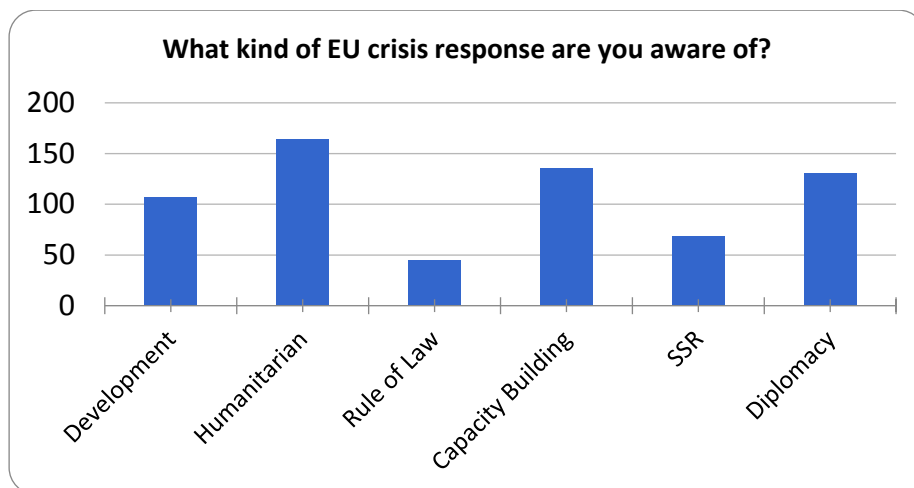
¹⁰ As the majority of the sample is composed of members of civil society organisations, this score can be biased. However, respondents were given the possibility to select multiple answers to this question.

strikingly, Italy is mentioned by 88% of the Tuaregs and 78.6% of the Amazigh/Berber. Interestingly, the recognition of the crisis-response initiatives by Egypt and the UAE is much lower among the respondents from Libya's eastern coastal region of Cyrenaica (19%) than from anywhere else. In general, one notices that the respondents' awareness of the involvement of different actors in crisis-response initiatives decreases with their social status, although the knowledge gap about individual countries is less marked. The same factor influences the respondents' perceptions of the main fields of EU crisis-response interventions, in combination also with the distance from decision-making centres. Not so surprisingly, the less well-known fields of EU crisis response – such as security sector reform and rule of law – feature higher-than-average levels of awareness among the Tunis-based respondents, where aid professionals and experts are more concentrated, while they are almost completely unknown among the less-wealthy social strata.

Similarly, but more surprisingly, the awareness about the humanitarian action of the EU is much more pronounced among those who are systematically able to satisfy their basic needs (83%), than among those who can rarely do so (50%) – and who would theoretically be more entitled to such aid. For instance, the awareness about the most visible fields of EU intervention – such as humanitarian action and capacity building – among marginalised communities such as the Tuaregs is less than half of the aggregate average. Among the Tuaregs, the visibility of EU aid recipients, too, is generally less than half the average, including for both the most and the least widely recognised beneficiaries (respectively: civil society, migrants and women, on the one hand; and different security forces, on the other).

Figure 2. Awareness of crisis-response actors and the purpose of their interventions





Satisfaction with EU crisis response

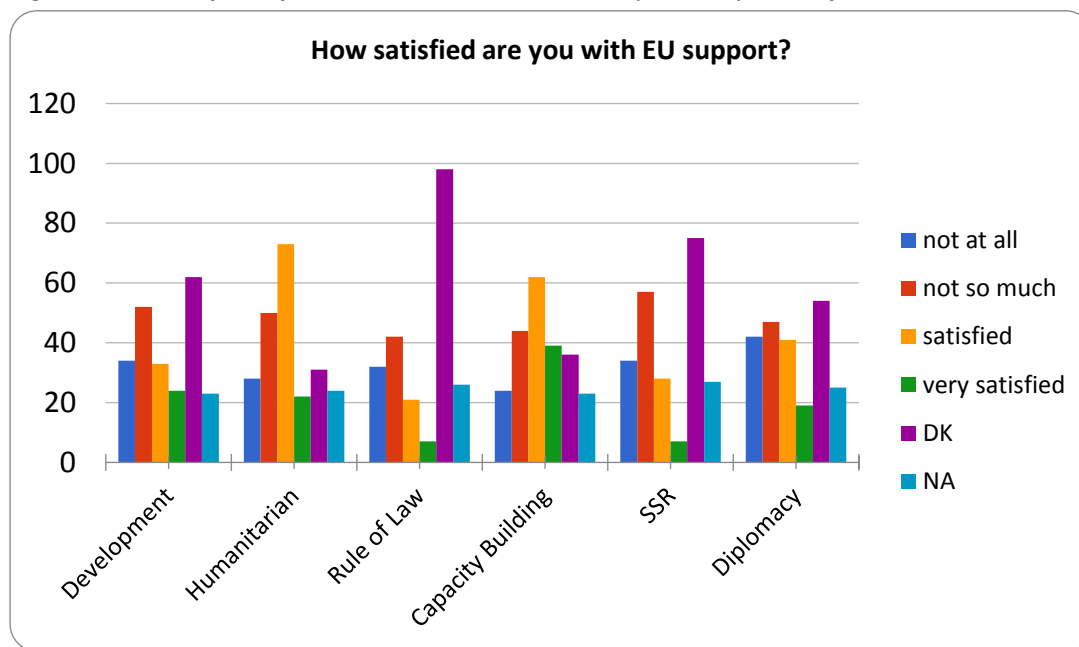
The degree of satisfaction with the EU crisis interventions in Libya varies from one respondent to another and does not allow for a straightforward assessment. In general, those who hold a very negative opinion of the EU crisis response in Libya form an unambiguous minority: only 14.5% of the respondents consider that the European intervention aggravated the crisis, and 15.4% claim to be “worse off” as a result of EU crisis response undertakings. However, those who have the opposite view are far from being the absolute majority: EU crisis intervention helped to alleviate the crisis according to 37.6% of the sample, while 30.3% thought they were “better off” as a result of it. A considerable amount of respondents seems quite sceptical about the impact of the EU’s crisis response: 29% consider that it had no appreciable effect, and 38.5% claim that it did not affect their personal situation. The disaggregation of the data reveals considerable variations of the satisfaction rates. Once more, the Tuaregs’ perceptions are particularly negative: only 12% of the Tuareg respondents consider that the EU intervention helped to alleviate the crisis (against an aggregate average of 37.6%), while 36% of them felt that it aggravated the crisis (against 14.5% on average). In Cyrenaica, only 7.7% of the respondents (against 30.3% on average) felt they were “better off” as a result of the EU’s crisis response, while about two-thirds of them (65.4%) responded that EU had no appreciable impact and felt “about the same”.

The respondents are generally more satisfied with EU crisis-response initiatives in the sectors they are most aware of. However, the same ambiguity remains: in no case do those who find EU action satisfying or very satisfying (combined) constitute the absolute majority: 43% in the field of humanitarian action, 45.7% in the field of capacity building (with a considerable 17.6% of respondents claiming to be “very satisfied”), and 27.6% in the field of policy initiatives and diplomacy. The respondents who are dissatisfied (“not so satisfied” and “not at all satisfied” answers combined) with EU crisis interventions are steadier, and oscillate between 30% and 40% across all fields. Humanitarian action and capacity building are the only fields in which those who are globally satisfied exceed those who are dissatisfied, while in the fields of rule of law and SSR those who are dissatisfied (33.5% and 41%, respectively) are more than twice as many of those who find the EU’s intervention satisfactory (12.7% and 16%, respectively). Again, the disaggregation of this data reveals considerable fluctuations across different sub-groups within the sample. The less wealthy among the respondents tend to be less satisfied than on average with EU interventions in the fields of humanitarian action and policy

initiatives and diplomacy. Another remarkable divergence emerged from the responses from residents of Cyrenaica, who tend to be particularly satisfied with EU humanitarian action (54% of them consider it satisfying or very satisfying), but less satisfied with EU capacity-building interventions (31%). In this last field, the respondents based in Tunisia indicated very high levels of satisfaction (69.3%).

Another source of ambiguity is the perception about the conflict sensitivity of the EU's crisis response. Some 40.3% of the respondents consider the EU's crisis response to be conflict sensitive, and 37% don't. The disaggregation of this data further illustrates the trends observed above, in which marginalised populations feature a less optimistic view: among ethnic minorities, only 28.6% of the Amazigh/Berber and 8% of the Tuaregs esteem EU crisis intervention to be conflict sensitive. This is in contrast with the views of the respondents based in Tunisia, 61.5% of whom esteem EU intervention to be conflict sensitive. The most remarkable data come from respondents from abroad, and notably Western countries, where 60% esteem that EU is not conflict sensitive.

Figure 3. Levels of satisfaction with the EU's crisis response, by area of intervention



Personal experience with the EU's crisis response

This section illustrates the respondents' personal experience with the EU crisis response. The analysis is based on the responses from individuals who have personally benefitted from programmes, projects and initiatives undertaken in the framework of an EU crisis response. These include about one-third (35%) of the sample. The largest majority of them are based in Tripolitania, while only 5% of the respondents are based in Fezzan and 1.3% in Cyrenaica. The majority are self-identified ethnic Arab (75.3%), followed by Amazigh/Berber and Tawargha minority (6.5%) and Tuareg (5.2%).

Among the beneficiaries of EU support, one finds a high representation of the less-affluent strata of the society, including the majority of the respondents who claim to be able to satisfy their basic needs only rarely, or never (although, in absolute terms, the majority of the beneficiaries are among the more affluent strata of the society, thereby mirroring the overall proportions of the sample, and of the Libyan population in general). The beneficiaries among the respondents have received EU support

most frequently in the fields of capacity building (72%), development aid (31%) and humanitarian assistance (27%), and only very seldom in the fields of diplomacy (4%), rule of law (4%) or SSR (1.3%). The disaggregation of data shows interesting divergences: the beneficiaries of capacity-building programmes include a remarkable 100% of the Amazigh/Berber respondents of the sample, while 75% of the Tuareg respondents have benefitted from EU-sponsored humanitarian assistance.

The largest majority of the self-identified beneficiaries (80.5%) claims to be satisfied overall with the assistance received, with no noticeable variation based on ethnic affiliation, regional origin or social status. EU support is praised in particular for targeting the right needs (agreed by 58.4% of aid recipients) and the right type of recipients (as only 28.6% of aid recipients consider the EU's intervention misplaced). However, the beneficiaries' assessments of the quantitative allocations of EU aid are less favourable: the views of those who consider the magnitude of European crisis intervention too low (44%) are about the same as those who find it sufficient (35%) or generous (9%). The proportion of negative views about the generosity of the EU's crisis response initiatives is comparatively even larger among ethnic minorities, such as the Tuaregs and the Berber/Amazigh, as well as – quite surprisingly – among the Libyan 'middle-class', who claim to be able to satisfy their basic needs "sometimes" or "most of the times".

Observations and conclusions

In spite of the limited size of the sample, the data presented above provide useful insights that permit us to sketch some interesting trends. The European Union is by far the best-known actor engaged in crisis response in Libya, not only among UN agencies and missions, but also individual countries with a well-known engagement in Libya, such as Italy, UAE or others. The degree of satisfaction with the EU's crisis response, however, is far less straightforward. While few expressed strongly negative perceptions, many respondents seem to consider the EU's crisis response as little impactful, which may explain a significant degree of ambiguity in the respondents' overall assessment of the EU's crisis response. The EU crisis response is particularly well known – and generally commended – for its contribution in the fields of humanitarian action and capacity-building. Security sector reform, however, is regarded as the most problematic area of European engagement: it is not very visible nor sufficiently connected to local actors, thereby prompting a generalised dissatisfaction. In view of the fragility of Libya's security environment, it would be advisable for the EU to devote more resources and more attention in this field.

The degree of awareness and satisfaction about EU crisis initiatives tends to show a parallel dynamic. EU actions are better known and appreciated in the proximity of decision-making centres, such as Tripolitania and Tunis. Conversely, the generalised level of dissatisfaction of social groups suffering from ethnic, geographical and social segregation, such as notably the Tuaregs, is alarmingly high and demands prompt action. Similarly, the respondents' views diverge sharply about the conflict sensitivity of shown in the EU's crisis response: this is recognised and praised in Tunisia and in Tripolitania, while the ethnic minorities in Libya largely dismiss this view. In Cyrenaica, the EU's crisis response is not deeply rooted, but its humanitarian action, most notably on behalf of migrants, IDPs and refugees, is highly valued and has earned the EU a greater visibility in the field of crisis response than that of foreign actors with a traditionally stronger local rooting, such as Egypt or the United Arab Emirates. Building on these observations, the EU is advised to improve its capacity to design, implement and

communicate crisis-response initiatives that are coherent with the needs of a broader set of stakeholders than those who reside in capital cities.

The direct beneficiaries of EU crisis response initiatives are largely satisfied with the support received. In their view, EU aid is targeting the right needs and the right recipients. Interestingly, in fact, very few respondents claimed that EU initiatives are biased or that the EU is not supporting the right stakeholders. However, the quantitative size of EU aid allocations raises concerns. While opportunistic motives may obviously explain these answers, such views are compatible with the assessment – largely shared among all respondents – of the limited impact of the EU’s crisis response. And indeed, the monetary value of EU-sponsored initiatives in Libya is comparatively lower than in many other crisis-torn countries. These observations may suggest the need for more accurate planning and a more realistic allocation of resources to make sure that European crisis response in Libya is appropriate, efficient and effective. However, considerations of conflict sensitivity should temper the disbursement of any additional funding. These observations lead us to formulate the following recommendations directed to the attention of EU policymakers:

1. Pay greater attention to the security sector reform, not least by making it clear how the EU is planning to support Libyan authorities and all stakeholders to build a centralised and accountable security apparatus. This could, incidentally, contribute to the policy initiatives that the EU is also promoting in Libya.
2. Avoid undermining the positive image of EU humanitarian commitment by eschewing initiatives that send ambiguous messages, notably in the field of migration policies.
3. Ensure the full participation of Libyan social groups that are subject to ethnic, geographical and social segregation in the design, implementation, evaluation and communication of all EU crisis-response initiatives;
4. Engage in more accurate planning and a more balanced allocation of resources to make sure that European crisis response pursues realistic objectives in an effective manner, and rigorously monitor the progress towards their achievement.
5. Continue to engage in conflict analysis and collect updated evidence to make sure that all decisions related to crisis response are conflict-sensitive.

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