

German interests in Libya

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4 March 2011

The revolutionary uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt and now in Libya have moved the German government to take rapid diplomatic and military action. As the first Western politician on the scene, Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle rushed to Tunis to assure the then-prime minister, Mohamed Ghannouchi, of German support.

According to a report from the Foreign Office, the foreign minister held intensive discussions with “representatives from the economy and civil society”. Westerwelle suggested forming a “transformation-partnership” and offered generous financial support. Later on, the high representative for foreign affairs of the EU, Catherine Ashton, announced that the European Union would contribute €258 million to the emergency relief aid for Tunisia.

But only a few days later, Ghannouchi, who had served for over a decade as head of government for the fallen President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali, resigned following renewed mass demonstrations.

The German government is putting on a brave face and hoping that its close relationship with the dictatorial regime will be forgotten. Officially, it speaks of its support for the “joyous democratic movement”. At every opportunity, Westerwelle praises the “beginning of a democratic reformation” in the Middle East. In reality, however, the government is extremely concerned and determined to use all its power to defend its interests.

More than anything, this applies to the events in Libya. The country between Tunisia and Egypt lies at the heart of German interests: it has been one of the most crucial exporters of oil to Germany for decades. German corporations have millions invested there, and the Gaddafi regime played a central role in the exclusion of poverty-stricken asylum seekers from the EU.

Germany’s close collaboration with the Gaddafi regime is based on a long tradition. A year ago, the Foreign Office published the following: “The political relationship between Libya and Germany has been cemented. A consolidation, particularly through personal contacts by high-ranking officials, was made possible due to the

compensation payments made by Libya to the German victims of the assassination attempt on the Berlin nightclub ‘La Belle’ in 1986.”

Immediately after Gaddafi had signed a compensation agreement in September 2004, then-Chancellor Gerhard Schröder (Social Democratic Party, SPD) set off for Tripoli and introduced a new stage in economic collaboration. Since then, there has been the strong cultivation of an annual German-Libyan business gathering and German participation in the Tripoli International Fair at the beginning of each April.

Libya is Germany’s third most important supplier of crude oil and provides approximately 11 percent of its total demand. As a purchaser of Libyan crude oil, Germany takes second place only to Italy. Libya enjoys a heavy excess of funds from its income from the oil industry. In the past year, the oil industry contributed 16.7 percent of the country’s gross domestic product, enabling considerable investments in large infrastructure projects in which German corporations were heavily involved.

Siemens, for example, played an important role in the construction of the huge water supply project, “Great Man-Made River”. This involves the biggest project in the provision of drinking water worldwide. All in all, German businesses were able to increase their exports to Libya considerably—by around 23 percent in 2009.

BASF subsidiary Wintershall has already been active in Libya since 1958 and currently operates eight oil fields in the Libyan desert. According to its own accounts, its capital expenditure exceeds US\$2 billion. As such, it is the biggest foreign producer of oil in Libya. The oil and gas subsidiary Dea of the Essen corporation RWE owns licences for oil and gas extraction over an area of 40,000 square kilometres. Libya has control of the largest detected crude oil reserve in Africa and is one of the most important suppliers of both oil and gas to Europe.

The German construction and services company Bilfinger Berger builds Libyan motorways and carried out the engineering work for a large gas turbine power station in the industrial town of Zawia, 40 kilometres west of the

capital Tripoli. The contract included the foundation work for the installation of generators and turbines for the cooling tower and water tanks.

In April 2009, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* published a long report about the efforts of then-Minister of Economics Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg to obtain a “share of the Libyan economic wonder” for the German economy. Under the headline “Canvassing at Gaddafi’s”, the *FAZ* wrote: “Even in the crisis, there is more than enough money in Libya and, in the meantime the intention to use it for the benefit of the country—if only to stabilise the relationships between the existing power groups.”

The newspaper reported how the Libyan leadership wanted to put thousands of millions “into the maximising of energy production, including the use of solar energy”. It was striving for a renewal of the entire infrastructure, the building of schools and hospitals and rapid industrialisation of the country. Foreign investments and consequent expertise would therefore be “highly welcome—so long as everything remains under the control of the Gaddafi clan.”

France had already ensured itself “a big piece of the Libyan cake”. Likewise the Americans, who now treated the “mad dog” (so labeled by Ronald Reagan) “more like a prince’s poodle.” Berlusconi had not “invited the dictator to the G8 summit in July” without ulterior motive, and the Russians were always at hand “whenever their monopoly on gas was threatened”.

“It was therefore high time for Berlin to show its colours”, remarked the *FAZ*. It reported how Guttenberg had waited a whole day for an audience with Gaddafi, only then to be fobbed off with a “brother-in-law of the colonel”.

The alliance with the Gaddafi regime also existed in matters of internal security and military armament. According to press reports, there were security-political partnerships going back to the 1960s. Between 1965 and 1983, with a few gaps, Libyan soldiers were trained by the Federal Armed Forces, while Libyan police officers attended courses arranged by the Federal Criminal Police Office.

Following the formal lifting of UN sanctions in September 2003, Germany intensified its training of the Libyan police and army. On a number of occasions, members of the Gaddafi clan asked the German government for assistance with the training of Libyan police. Such collaboration was officially rejected but, in fact, stepped up behind the scenes. For example, in April

2008, the *Berliner Zeitung* reported that a German private security company had instructed hundreds of Libyan officers and NCOs from Gaddafi’s protection force in close combat, sniper shooting, mine laying, urban warfare and the arrest of suspects. These special forces were then deployed both to suppress the Libyan population and for the so-called repulsion of refugees. Along with the training went the supply of armaments and police equipment. In just the past three years, Libya received “German exports requiring authorisation” to the tune of more than €80 million—mainly communications and police equipment, and helicopters.

The orgies of violence and massacres conducted in recent days against Libyan demonstrators have long been a stock in trade of the regime’s campaign against refugees. Human rights organisations have issued many reports dealing with the brutal treatment of impoverished refugees from African countries south of Sahara by the Gaddafi regime. Such measures include the cramming of hundreds of people into containers and their transportation to desert camps where they are locked up in completely overcrowded cells with barely enough to eat or drink.

The close cooperation between Gaddafi and the German government on economic and security issues makes clear the extent to which German business was able to benefit from the repression in Tripoli. It also demonstrates that the struggle against Gaddafi’s corrupt regime must also be directed at the imperialist powers in Europe and the United States. The main allies of the Libyan rebels in this struggle are the European and American working class.



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