

## Reconsidering EU policy options in Somalia

### Discussion paper

The following document suggests a new course of action for the EU in Somalia, based on long-term observation of the situation of that country. Its point of view is firmly rooted in ground realities and the authors know that many other Somali experts, from both within and without the country, agree at least partially with our recommendations. These are radical from the point of view of currently existing policy options for the EU and its member states, however we are convinced that their outcome would be positive for both Somalia and for EU relations with Somali people.

### Analysis of the current EU policies in Somalia

In budgetary terms, the EU involvement is by far the greatest in **security**. Beyond the payments to AMISOM troop contributing countries (20,000 soldiers from five countries), 80% of the costs of which are paid by the EU, come contributions to UNSOS, which supports AMISOM logistically and organizationally, international organizations involved in security sector reform and direct EU training programs directed at Somali security forces (EUTM mission).

The results of these efforts, according to all observers, have been dismal. AMISOM has not progressed since 2014 in increasing the area of Somalia under government control and for years efforts have been directed at an 'exit strategy' based on improved capacity of Somali security forces. With the exception of a few elite forces, the state of Somalia's national army, its police, custodial and intelligence services has not significantly improved from the very low level they stood at when such capacity building projects started around 2008 [Paul Williams' report 2020]. As a result, there is no realistic exit strategy and AMISOM or a similar arrangement will probably be upheld for many years to come.

A certain success has been booked in the war against piracy, to which the EU and its member states contributed through several channels. However, to most observers the decrease in piracy is due to local developments quite independent from EU counter-piracy objectives, rather than dissuasive and Rule-of-Law supporting EU-funded activities.

The global war on terror is booking no success in Somalia, and the dramatic increase in drone strikes by the Trump administration (with its attendant civilian casualties) is not tipping the balance in favor of the Somali government, maybe even achieving the reverse: increasing popular support for the insurgent Al Shabaab. Counter-Violent Extremism programming, in which the EU and its member states have assumed a leading role (alongside the opaque counter-terrorism activities of its member states) has had no success in reversing this trend.

The main **political** effort of the EU in Somalia, support to the Somali Federal State alongside the UN, the IMF and other institutions, has not succeeded in removing Somalia from the top of the world's lists of failed and corrupt states. Improvements applauded by international partners are circumscribed to paper only, such as improved financial management systems and new laws. It is clear to all Somalis that the federal government's writ cannot compete with that of Al Shabaab, even in the capital city. Governments of the member states have fallen out with the federal state in the two key regions of

Puntland and Jubaland, while in the other states the federal government is imposing itself with complicated political manipulation and occasionally violence. This leads the federal government to be increasingly compared to that of the hated Siad Barre regime, whose collapse in 1990-91 provoked the international intervention.

Meanwhile, Al Shabaab, with its fiercely anti-Western stance, is firmly in control of many populated areas of South and Central Somalia, and it appears to out-govern the federal state and the member states, even though this does not make them popular.

Somaliland, which seceded from the rest of Somalia in 1991, has long remained a stable, orderly, relatively democratic or participative society, with a steadily growing economy and no overt terrorist activity since 2008. Although it conforms to all definitions of a working state, it is not recognized by the international community, including the EU, which has therefore not been able to engage it politically. A worrying trend toward authoritarianism as a response to socio-economic stagnation is threatening the successful Somaliland model. The disenchantment of Somaliland's youth and minorities with the hybrid traditional/modern governance model is growing and leading many of its citizens to seek better opportunities abroad.

**Humanitarian** activities, another area to which the EU, through the Commission, contributes significantly, have not delivered the Somali population from stress. This is not only due to the political quagmire, but also to increasing inefficiency of the humanitarian effort globally, in part due to security and access constraints, and in part to increasing bureaucratic complexity, such as compliance with counter-terrorism financing rules and the wish by donors to pre-determine outcomes. Climate change seriously threatens the Somali population, yet basic infrastructural works in e.g. water management or ecosystem protection are not undertaken.

For Somalis, EU policies are indistinguishable from those of the UN and other international organizations. The EU's efforts to project soft power, in contrast to the USA's focus on counter-terrorism and humanitarian aid, and to the self-interested policies of emerging regional powers (the Gulf States, Turkey, Ethiopia and Kenya) and China, are not bearing many fruits although it removes EU countries from the top of the target list of insurgents.

All Somalis, even those closely affiliated to the insurgents, have expressed their desire for a peaceful state based on the rule of law that enjoys good relations with the rest of the world. It is not for lack of good will among the people that instability perdures, but because the entire international community, including the EU, is seeking to impose a political institutional form which does not fit the country; the significant resources deployed to achieve this goal acerbate conflict.

### **A new set of policy objectives for the European Union**

The EU could focus on the following objectives in Somalia:

1. Reducing the outflow of migrants by providing better employment opportunities and a more peaceful environment for Somalis
2. Decreasing its overall level of expenditure in Somalia

3. Contributing to demilitarization of the Somali conflict and reducing the threat Somalia poses to neighboring states
4. Pioneer novel forms of international cooperation, in fighting the consequences of climate change, contributing to local peaceful settlements, reducing opportunities for transnational organized crime and encouraging integration of Somali businesses into global EU trade flows.

Taken together, these policies would contribute to creating a strong identity for EU international assistance; if deemed successful, this policy orientation could also be applied to other fragile/failed state conflict environments, such as South Sudan, Libya, Yemen etc.

### **Measures to implement the new policy objectives**

- a. Wind down the contribution to AMISOM as quickly as possible, even when there is no alternative ready. If AMISOM leaves Somalia en masse tomorrow, Al Shabaab might be able to conquer a few new towns and stretches of road; however, faced with hostility by the majority of the Somali population, the existence of self-defense militias – clan-based or locality-based – and the current state of over-stretch of Al Shabaab military control, the insurgents will not be able to make such significant gains, and half of their *raison d'être* will have disappeared when foreign troops leave Somalia.
- b. Cease the support to the Federal Somali government and instead focus on local peace-building initiatives and socio-economic development. This may be more difficult to pull off diplomatically than stopping support to AMISOM, as the UN and other international institutions continue to make support to the federal government the cornerstone of their Somalia policy. Of course the EU can continue through its contributions to the UN, IMF, AU and other international organisations to support their state-building work, but it must be clear by now that nothing good will come of it, other than an authoritarian state living off foreign rents and sending its population into insurgency or exile. The dissolution of the federal Somali state will remove the other *raison d'être* for the Al Shabaab insurgency.
- c. Reorient existing instruments such as the Somalia Stability Fund or the Somaliland Development Fund to provide small grants to democratically elected community councils, enlisting the support of local and international NGOs to achieve Community Driven Development. The National Solidarity Program in Afghanistan has been hailed, across the board, as a success by most if not all development actors.
- d. Focus on recruiting appropriate long-term experts to serve as EU agents in localities throughout Somalia; a tandem consisting of one EU national and one local Somali may work best. Allow these local agents to decide on measures to reach the four given policy objectives above, including by organizing and supervising community driven development activities.
- e. Orchestrate the implementation of mid-term to long-term development projects, including protecting ecosystems, improved water management, infrastructural works in renewable energy generation and distribution, communication and transportation, storage and processing of agricultural produce, light industrialization, and a vast improvement in educational opportunities throughout Somalia. Many European experts may be deployed to Somalia, or to work on Somalia, to achieve this, thus having a beneficial side-effect for European citizens.

- f. Abandoning the idea of a central Somali state will have some negative consequences: who will issue passports that are recognized abroad to Somali citizens, who will ensure nationwide systems of exchange function and are compatible with international systems? The EU would have to invest in exploring such innovative measures

<https://www.zomiacenter.org/posts/2019/4/19/al-shabaab-governance>