

EU's Peacebuilding in The Horn of Africa: Its Strategy, Engagement, and Effectiveness in Somalia¹

Ana Carina Franco
Mohamed Husein Gaas

Portuguese Institute of International Relations (IPRI-NOVA)
Raad Peace Research Institute (RAPRI), Mogadishu

Summary

EU action and engagement in Africa has traditionally been centred around a 'triple nexuses of humanitarian assistance, development aid, and peace. In this context, the EU has assisted the establishment of the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Architecture in 2002 and supported the deployment of an AU peacekeeping force in Somalia – the AU Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) – and its successor – the AU Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS). As such, the EU has been a major contributor to peacebuilding and stabilisation efforts in the country and wider Horn of Africa region. This policy brief explores the EU's role as a global peace and security actor and its peacebuilding mission in the Horn of Africa, particularly Somalia. We argue that the EU continues to remain first and foremost, a normative 'soft power' actor and that its previous lack of clear strategy, its fragmented engagement, and over-reliance on proxies has hampered its efforts to play a meaningfully constructive role in helping to politically stabilise Somalia.

¹ For the purpose of this brief and in line with practice adopted by the EU, the Horn of Africa corresponds to the eight members of Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). However, the brief gives a special focus to the EU relation with the Federal Republic of Somalia.

Background: Understanding EU Peace and Security in Africa

The EU has been referred to as “a collective actor” that enforces norms abroad based on its own experience of political and economic integration, and it is a approach that the bloc has exercised towards the AU, an organisation whose structure is at least partly influenced and reflective of the EU. As stated by Vines, despite significant foundational and operational differences, the AU “looks superficially like an African version of the EU”.² However, to understanding EU peace and security policy, it is helpful to understand the concepts that have underpinned its development.

EU peace and security policy is based largely on a number of concepts that were developed to promote what is today known as normative power. Perhaps the development of EU policy in this regard can be traced into F. Duchêne’s concept of civilian power in the 1970s, which focused on how the then European Economic Community (EEC) could seek to exert influence in foreign relations.³ A. Sepos further framed this normative dimension of EU global power projection. Its soft, civilian, and normative dimension can be either ‘covert behavioural’ or ‘latent non-behavioural’ depending if it consists of the

mobilisation of ideational and institutional resources, or on the exercise of influence and attraction.⁴ However, both these scholars’ conceptual framing was further advanced by I. Manners, who put forward the concept of ‘Normative Power Europe’ in early 2000s,⁵ thinking that reformulated Duchêne’s concept of civilian power. Therefore, these normative conceptual dimensions have been subverted by the fact that EU member states use the EU to maximise their own (national) interests, entailing EU intervention in conflict prone areas of the world.⁶

As it is often the case, this intervention, including by way of international partnerships, is frequently driven by the interest of member states, some of whom are former colonial powers in Africa. That said, the Treaty of Lisbon created a new framework, especially in terms of restructuring the EU’s diplomatic institutions, reinforcing the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission (HR/VP) position and the establishing the European External Action Service (EEAS). One of EEAS’s first tasks was to create two regional strategies for Africa, one for the Sahel in 2021, and another for the Horn of Africa in 2022. EU special representatives also appointed to both regions to enhance coordination and

promote EU policy in these regions. The 2003 European Security Strategy had already highlighted regional conflicts in the EU’s ‘near abroad’ as threats to the EU’s own security, with the twin issues of illegal migration and the possible accompanying spread of extremist violence in the wake of the attacks in the United States on 11 September 2001, identified as high priorities.

Therefore, by the late 2000’s, EU-Africa relations were increasingly viewed through the prism of EU security policy. As such, the EU was already supporting the operationalisation of the AU African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA),⁷ and security was presented as a key aspect in the EU-Africa joint strategy from 2007 onwards. Through APSA and the provision of funding to the AU, the EU African Peace Facility (APF) supported the then-newly established AMISOM in its efforts to subdue al-Shabaab and stabilise Somalia. However, after 2021, EU support was mainly channelled through its European Peace Facility (EPF) to enable direct support to African states.⁸

This means that, until recently, the EU has rarely conducted direct military interventions or channeled funding into states for the purposes of stabilising them rather than indirectly by support for AMISOM type missions.⁹ Notable

² Vines, A. (2013). “A decade of African Peace and Security Architecture”. *International Affairs*, 89: 1, 89–109

³ Duchêne, F. (1972) ‘Europe’s Role in World Peace’. In Mayne, R. (ed.) *Europe Tomorrow: Sixteen Europeans Look Ahead*. London: Fontana, 32–47

⁴ Sepos, A. (2013). “Imperial power Europe? The EU’s relations with the ACP countries”. *Journal of Political Power*, 6:2, 261–287

⁵ Manners, I. (2002) “Normative power Europe: a contradiction in terms?”. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 40:2, 235–258

⁶ See, for instance, France in the Sahel following the Malian political-military crisis in 2012–13, and Portugal in the conflict in northern Mozambique in 2019–20.

⁷ Formulated in 2002.

⁸ Replacing AMISOM, AU Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) is now funded by both the EPF (military components) and the APF (civilian components). Except for military equipment provision to Ukraine, EPF has so far only provide non-lethal equipment, including to Somalia.

⁹ See for instance, Gegout, C. (2017). *Why Europe intervenes in Africa: security, prestige and the legacy of colonialism*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. Gegout explains how “the norm for the European Union is non-intervention”. (p. 263)

exceptions are the EU military intervention in the Gulf of Aden and Red Sea through the European Union Naval Force (EUNAVFOR) 'Operation Atalanta', and elsewhere in Africa, for example in the Central African Republic in 2014-2015 in support for the UN and France. More recently, in 2021, EU states launched the Combined Maritime Forces operation in the Gulf of Guinea which as a concept is also being applied in the Horn of Africa.¹⁰ However, this initiative is seeing EU states participate individually, and is not the EU participating as a unified entity.

Hence, the EU's willingness to contribute to conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms needs to be viewed through the prism of its support to regional and continental institutions, such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the AU. In fact, in 2006, the EU identified the Horn of Africa as a test case for applying the EU-Africa Strategy, especially given its "regional system of insecurity".¹¹ The EU Special Representative (EUSR) has engaged mostly in diplomatic efforts related to ongoing instability in Ethiopia, Uganda and Somalia, meaning that the EU channels its stabilisation funding and initiatives for Somalia through multilateral organisations such as IGAD but also through the United Nations (UN) and NGOs. This meant that little direct funding has been channeled directly to the Somali government and its institutions until recently.

However, for the EU in the Horn of

Africa, the UK has played a pivotal role, particularly in terms of support to security sector reform in Somalia, which has included a bilateral programme for training Somali security forces since 2013. As such, the EU lost a key facet of its partnership mission in the region because of the UK's decision to leave the EU in 2016. Nevertheless, as a single entity, the EU has remained first and foremost a 'soft power' actor in the Horn of Africa.

EU Strategy and Engagement in Somalia and the Horn of Africa

The EU has been involved in Somalia and the wider region since early its inception as an actor, with a focus on peace and security, humanitarian assistance and development. However, in its senior foreign policy official frequently visited the region most recently to Somalia, EU's HR/VP, Josep Borrell, stated last year during his visit that "Somalia and its broader region remain critical for [the] Europeans' security and interests."¹²

Thus, EU's strategy for the Horn of Africa pays special attention on European relations with Somalia, which also needs to be understood in light of the overall strategic importance of the country, and its political and conflict dynamics in the wider Horn of Africa, Red Sea, and Western Indian Ocean.

In Somalia, the EU has been managing tensions inherent to the Somali federal

project through its policy which enabled it to manage tensions between its normative, mostly liberal, stance and conflicting dynamics in the country. For instance, in Somaliland, the EU focused mainly on conflict resolution and development initiatives.¹³ Hence, the political complexity is addressed, to some extent, through its developmental support to Somaliland while maintaining its commitment to the Somali federal project that includes Somaliland.

EU's participation in military activities in the Horn of Africa follows a proxy logic, particularly regarding counterterrorism and counterinsurgency interventions. This logic consists almost exclusively in financial, capacity building and equipment provision support to regional actors, namely within the AU such as IGAD and funding them, especially until 2012. Otherwise, between 2008 and 2010, the EU had established military missions and operations in the region under its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), which is an integral part of EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). Those (military) mission and operation included EUNAVFOR Operation Atalanta to combat piracy and protect maritime routes, and World Food Program's vessels, and the EU Training Mission (EUTM) for military training and support to Somalia's security sector reform. In 2013, the EU transforms its former regional civilian PSDC capacity building mission, European Union Capacity Building Mission – EUCAP Nestor, in a Somali-focused mission aiming

¹⁰ The first initiative was launched in 2021 in the Gulf of Guinea: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-launches-its-coordinated-maritime-presences-concept-gulf-guinea_en. For more on the concept, see: <https://combinedmaritimeforces.com>

¹¹ European Commission (2006). Communication from

the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament – Strategy for Africa: An EU regional political partnership for peace, security and development in the Horn of Africa, COM(2006) 601 Final, Brussels, 20 October 2006

¹² [www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/somalia-speech-high-](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/somalia-speech-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-joint-medal-parade-eucap-and_en)

[representativevice-president-josep-borrell-joint-medal-parade-eucap-and_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/somalia-speech-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-joint-medal-parade-eucap-and_en)

¹³ See, for instance, chapters authored by Coppieters, Pegg, Visoka and Newman in *Routledge Handbook of State Recognition* (2021) Visoka, Doyle & Newman (eds), London: Routledge

at strengthening maritime civil law enforcement in the country (EUCAP Somalia). In 2019, EUCAP's mandate broadens to include support to the Somali federal police functions. Furthermore, it was only in 2019 that EUTM (along with EUCAP) directly contributed to state control of areas recently recovered from al-Shabaab when the EU missions trained Somali (military and Darwish/police) security forces participating in Operation Badbaado in Lower Shabelle region.¹⁴

Within a decade, EU's strategy towards Somalia evolved in line with EU's 'integrated approach' to conflicts and crises, including the 'triple nexus' humanitarian-development-peace. In 2015, the Valletta Summit results in increased action towards migration management in countries of origin, transit, and destination, including in the region, especially Somalia. Under the EU Emergency Trust Fund for stability and addressing root causes of irregular migration and displaced persons in Africa (EUTF for Africa) launched at the Summit, the EU has established partnerships with UN and aid agencies and national authorities for the implementation of programs with the aim of managing African borders. The EU's 'Better Migration Management' programme adopted under the Khartoum Process is part of overall efforts to manage migration movements originating from the Horn of Africa.

EU's integrated approach encourages different services and missions to work in coordination to maximise synergies and impact. They may include European Commission's different Directorate-

General (DG), e.g., DG International Partnerships (INTPA) or DG for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO), the EUSR office, the EU Delegations and the CSDP missions. Yet, in practice, the still embryonic institutionalisation of that integrated approach, along with increasing international competition, but also little direct funding channelled to the 'fragile' state, be Somalia for this case, prevents the EU to act in the region as an actor in its wholeness.

In fact, the new Horn of Africa strategy encompasses a larger geographical scope, particularly in the maritime domain given the expansion of EUNAVFOR Operation Atalanta's area of operations from the Red Sea to the Western Indian Ocean "in light of developments along the Eastern African littoral, notably northern Mozambique".¹⁵ It also reflects the EU strategy for the Indo-Pacific dated from 2021¹⁶ and the decision to expand the Critical Maritime Routes (CMR) programme to South and Southeast Asia.

Importantly, EU's diplomatic efforts in the region reflect the growing power competition, namely from non-Western partners, such as Turkey, and the Gulf countries. One needs to assess EU's growing attention to Gulf states in light of the longer-term role of soft power exercised by countries, such as the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia and Qatar, and these countries' overt political agenda. This agenda is largely a result of concerns over the Iranian naval presence in the Red Sea and

Gulf of Aden and its activities in the region.

The Federal Government of Somalia's previous (2017-2022) alignment with Qatar have been preventing the U.A.E. to play a meaning full role through its engagement with Mogadishu, but not with some of its federal member states. This was as a way of curtailing Iran's growing presence and later support the military intervention in Yemen. However, it seems now the U.A.E. is increasing replacing the previously privileged Qatari influence relations with Mogadishu. In fact, since May 2022 election, the new Somali Federal Government is aligning itself with U.A.E. All in all, Gulf countries have for the last two decades invested heavily in the peacebuilding, Somali politics, and ports in Somaliland and in Puntland - areas where EUCAP has been presented to promote maritime security and governance. Furthermore, China's investment in e.g., fisheries along the Somali coast is likely a concern for the ongoing EU support to Somalia's Blue Economy. It often seen as challenging EUNAVFOR Operation Atalanta and EUCAP's overall efforts off the Somalia's coast. However, it should be mentioned that Somalia's preceding government has successfully lobbied and ended the UN Security Council anti-piracy mandate of EUNAVFOR. In its letter to the 15 Security Council members, it voiced concerns against EUNAVFOR and suggested and that Somalia fishermen abandoned their fishing activities due to fear from the Operation Atlanta naval ships patrolling the Somali coast.¹⁷

¹⁴ Williams, Paul D, and H. Y. Ali (2020), *The European Union Training Mission in Somalia: An Assessment*, SIPRI background paper, p.12

<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-8135-2021-INIT/en/pdf>

¹⁶ https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/jointcommunication_2021_24_1_en.pdf

¹⁷ Authors conversation with a senior MFA official of the previous Somali government (2017-2022)

The EU navigates these multiple, often conflicting, international alliances by prioritising its normative or softer power, while also providing funding and building the capacity of national and regional actors on security and defence. However, in all its multiple engagement in the region is influenced by its individual states' interests that at times conflict and diverge. This aspect of the EU engagement has been revealed more clearly by the ongoing Ukraine conflict and stances of its member states.

EU: An Effective Actor in Somalia

EU's engagement in Somalia is multi-faceted. Yet, since it has established its presence in Somalia, it has pursued several initiatives to help stabilise the country. This includes supporting the deployment of AMISOM, the establishment of the UN Assistant Mission in Somalia, and CSDP missions and operation. The EU has worked to develop a competent government and democracy in the country. The EU has also provided financial aid to Somalia, including in the form of grants and budget support that increased in recent years. However, this has been slow and ineffective in many ways, especially given the lack of critical reforms at national and States levels.

The EU has been also providing extensive financial support for Somalia's peacebuilding and development efforts through various channels that include the UN, IGAD, and NGOs. EU's National Indicative Program (NIP) 2014-2020 had allocated nearly 300 million euros in support for Somalia's development goals, in addition to, at least, 100 million for peace- and state-building

programming. It has also included funding for infrastructure, education, and health services, as well as providing technical assistance to the Somali government. Furthermore, it provided technical expertise to strengthen the capacity of the government by training and equipping the Somali security forces and was involved in the establishment of a police and justice system.

Despite these EU efforts for the last few decades, insecurity in the country remains a problem. This makes the question of the effectiveness of the EU as a peace building actor legitimate one. The reasons for the EU's inability to be more success in its peacebuilding efforts in Somalia are many. Yet, they can be summarised as it has not had a clear strategy or plan for Somalia until 2013, and it has encountered several setbacks related to the precarious political and security situation in the country. This has also resulted in more limited level of engagement in and funding of Somalia's Federal Member States. Even then the EU has been divided over how to approach Somalia, with some of its member states pushing for a more military intervention-oriented approach, while others favoured a more diplomatic approach.

Further, the EU peace engagement in Somalia has been hampered by the complexity of the conflict in the country, but also by the lack of a strong partner in Somalia, thus opting for proxy in the form of IGAD, and AMISOM within its longer-term engagement with the AU. However, this has not led to its effectiveness in peacebuilding of the country. It also raises questions on how appropriate this setting is to effectively

address the conflict in Somalia. The peacebuilding initiatives' impact remains slow and fragile, despite more recent investment in the past years on stabilisation programming mainly channelled to international partners on the ground. However, in recent years, through a comprehensive approach, the EU has invested considerable resources in supporting security and institution building, along with impactful projects benefiting the local communities, especially in areas liberated from Al-Shabaab. Yet, many of these resources are used on administrative and staff salaries of international organisations that, in most case, lack clear understanding of conflicts and other social dynamics in the country that affect their operation and stabilisation as a whole.¹⁸

Despite these shortcomings, the EU has had some success in Somalia, including the training of the Somali National Army, and more recently the police force, along the provision of humanitarian assistance. However, this success has also faced challenges, including the fact that the national security forces are still not yet fully equipped (only partially due to UN sanctions) and continue to lack meaningful reform. This makes country to be fragile and the government unable to extend its control fully so far throughout the country until the recent ongoing offensive. The new Somali government's offensive culminated in January 2023 with the liberation of the entire Gamudug and Hirshabelle regional states whose territory included large parts controlled by Al-Shabaab. However, the continued Al-Shabaab presence and control in large areas in Jubaland and Southwest regional states, limit international organisations

¹⁸ Telephone interview 5 with respondent.

operations and delivery of aid aimed at contributing to the stabilisation of the country.

Conclusion

EU security and peace endeavours in the Horn of Africa can be understood by its normative power given the focus on the mobilisation of ideational and institutional resources. EU's peace-making is often anchored in regional organisations support and participation in stabilisation efforts, but also in the UN, and (mostly international) NGOs for program implementation. However, EU's effectiveness of peace-making in Somalia has been undermined by its nature of engaging security by proxy, in the form of regional organisations, mostly the AU, and lack of direct funding and diplomatic support to Somalia's government and its lack of decentralised engagement with the federal Member States. This mean that real opportunities of building Somali security forces and helping the country to end the UN security Arms embargo plays in this Furthermore, EU's individual states' policy making sometimes lack a common approach towards those issues. Finally, the EU's lack of teeth beyond its global and multilateral projection of 'soft power' undermines its effectiveness as a peace-making actor in the region and further hinders its ambitions as a key peacebuilding 'global' actor in Somalia.

AUTHORS

Dr. Mohamed Husein Gaas is the Director of Raad Peace Research Institute (RAPRI). He is also a Research Associate at the Conflict Research Programme (CRP) of London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). He can be reached at Mohgaas@gmail.com

Ana Carina Franco is a PhD candidate at the Universidade Nova de Lisboa and Researcher at the Portuguese Institute of International Relations. She can be reached at acarina.sfranco@campus.fcsh.unl.pt

RAPRI

The **Raad Peace Research Institute** Mogadishu (RAPRI) is a non-profit research institute established in 2021, whose main purpose is to conduct research on the Horn / East Africa. The institute is independent, regional, and explores issues related to these regions' peace, conflicts, security, governance, and development.