

The Comprehensive Approach in the Horn of Africa*

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Abstract

The article acknowledges that the EU Comprehensive Approach is the right methodology and it should be used to contribute to tackle the complex problems the Horn of Africa is currently facing and its root causes. The authors recognize that only the joint employment of diverse tools and policies and by doing it in close co-operation with our Member States, it will be possible to have a meaningful intervention that will play its role in helping achieve stability and sustainable development in the region. The article takes the case of Somalia as a test case for the implementation of the Comprehensive Approach and concludes that the results have been encouraging. Notwithstanding the efforts made by the international community and the EU in particular, local ownership of the process and political will to restore a sustained peaceful environment remains crucial. The article concludes that the EU, collectively, has to define a common strategic vision, to focus on prevention, to mobilize existent strengths and capacities and to commit to a long-term Approach regarding crises in the region.

Resumo

A Abordagem Abrangente no 'Corno de África'

O artigo parte do reconhecimento de que o método de abordagem abrangente é o melhor instrumento a aplicar na gestão dos problemas complexos que afetam a região do 'Corno de África' e no combate às suas causas. Os seus autores reconhecem que, apenas através do emprego conjunto de diversos instrumentos e políticas e de uma estreita cooperação entre Estados-membros será possível desenvolver um modo de atuação significativo, capaz de produzir um efeito de estabilidade e desenvolvimento sustentável na região. O artigo adota como estudo de caso sobre implementação de abordagem abrangente, o caso da Somália, concluindo que os seus efeitos se têm revelado eficazes. Pese embora os esforços desenvolvidos pela comunidade internacional e pela União Europeia em particular, a apropriação dos processos e vontade política para restaurar um ambiente de paz sustentável permanece como uma condição essencial. O artigo conclui, que a UE deve definir coletivamente uma visão estratégica comum, centrar-se na prevenção, mobilizar recursos e capacidades existentes e centrar-se numa abordagem de longa duração em relação às crises na região.

* The article reflects solely the authors' view and does not convey an institutional perspective.

Introduction

Suppose you were born in Somalia in the mid-nineties. You might have some studies at elementary level but you did not progress further. As a matter of fact you are the eldest on your family that is now father-less since his tragic death as collateral damage to another bombing in the city a few months ago. You know you need to help your mother feed your brethren and you are counting your options. Work for one of the militias? Dangerous, you could be maimed or killed. Join al-Shabaab? They might actually pay more than the militias but the risk is equally high, your life could be at stake. Migrate? But even if you could find the money to pay the traffickers to bring you to Europe who knows how long it would take to be able to start sending some support home (in case you arrive safely which is less than granted). Activities related to piracy? You know how to navigate a boat, so the basic skill is there.

Therefore, that is an attractive proposition in the sense that the benefit – even if the lion's share goes to the gang leaders – is reasonable and the worse you can expect if things go bad is to find yourself in prison for a while, unless you have the bad chance of meeting some of the most robust engagement by a few specific navies. So, it is a no-brainer what our young man is going to rationally decide as his future. Did the idea of a steady job did crossed his mind? Perhaps, as not all Somalis, far from it, are involved in illegal activities. The question here is to find it, in particular in a fragile country where a visible and active administration disappeared before you were born, where you cannot count on the state to really be there to help you.

An attentive reader might question the apparent lack of moral dilemma in his choices. Like he was weighing all options as fair and equal, the notion of right and wrong apparently absent from his equation. Should this surprise us when he lives in a country where conflicts have been solved at gun point, where force, not rule of law, is prevalent, where the economy is run outside any regulated channels?

We are perhaps over-dramatizing here, in particular because the piracy route is now dramatically drying to a point of almost no-activity as a consequence of the good work done by EUNAVFOR 'Atalanta' and other strong international efforts, NATO included, making it impossible for the fictitious young man of the previous paragraph to choose a future ransoming ships passing by the coast of his country (and hopefully, like many others who considered piracy as a professional activity, he is now converted to earn his life as a fisherman).

However, the main principle we would like to demonstrate remains valid. People do not become pirates as an emotional decision or just for the sake of financial benefits; they check the advantages and disadvantages of each option and compare it to other possibilities when analysing how to support themselves and their families (and, because of their upbringing, immune or at least reasonably distant for any

moral percept). The missing regular job option (and the fisherman's job can be seen as a low-income option insofar as Somalia practices artisanal fishing subject to competition from others because the Somali federal government does not have neither the ability nor the political will to control its territorial waters and correspondent catch) was in any case hard to find for someone with limited qualifications and probably would need some kind of patronage to even get to an entry point.

This basic truth – piracy problems have their origin in land – took perhaps some time to grasp and irrespective of the success of 'Atalanta', which will cannot be sustained forever, some voices were claiming earlier in the process that we should have a broader look at the problem if we wanted to give a chance for a sustainable solution, while we should also consider the larger issues of a fragile state in Somalia and the lack of stability in the region.

The Horn of Africa

Though a definition of the limits of the Horn as a geographic entity can vary according to the sources, Europeans tend to include in the mix Sudan and South Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti and Somalia. All countries where conflict has gained roots or is latent, from the continuous hostility between Ethiopia and Eritrea to the just-finished civil war inside South Sudan, passing through the unresolved situation in Darfur and the al-Shabaab activities in Somalia (Djibouti is usually more preserved but a border conflict with Eritrea has not been untangled and skirmishes were a reality as late as last year).

The Horn is precisely at an historical fracture line between different cultures, diverse economies and distinct religions, where longstanding conflicts dating from ancestral times have never been totally resolved, or are repeating themselves with cyclical frequency, where one can even say that the effects of climate change have exacerbated the competition for scarce resources and amplify the opposing interests of its inhabitants, peasants, herders or city dwellers. If you throw in this complex scenario the existence of fragile states that are unable to provide basic health, education and safety nets to their constituents and are prone to nepotism, authoritarian temptations, asphyxiated political space and corrupt practices, the risk of unending conflicts and even implosion multiplies exponentially.

Somalia has been for three decades a good example of what could go wrong when a situation gets out of control, the state reduces itself to a minimum and the population remains at the whim of a few warlords competing for power and influence. On top of all that, there is not even an attempt to obtain buy in from the regions on what should be the political model for the future, opening the way for further conflict. It also lays the ground for self-denominated reformist zealots to try to impose by force a retrograde view of society irrespective of the will of the people they subjugate.

However, the Somali society has proved there and again how resilient she can be. Those few outsiders who have travelled to Mogadishu in the last few years do not speak about a beaten and disappointed population, rather to one that know how to adapt to the prevailing situation, with entrepreneurial spirit and a willingness to escape from a destiny that is not written anywhere as inescapable. There is hope things can finally change and essentially there is pressure on the political elites to find compromise solutions that allow for the conflicts to end and for security to be restored, which will be paramount if the country wants to return to a peaceful environment.

From an EU perspective, a peaceful and stable Africa, Horn included, is an avowed objective. Not only it will bring an end to warfare which has a deep impact on people's lives and on the capacity for countries to place themselves in the path of sustainable development but also will have a positive effect in the security of neighbouring regions, including our own continent. The threats in the modern world don't need to be classic military-oriented activities; they are more multiform and adaptable to exploit circumstances where they can thrive. Terrorism, epidemics, drug trafficking, uncontrolled population flows, to quote a few, all have the potential to harm and disrupt and as such it is in our interest to co-operate with our African partners to fight those phenomena and address their root causes to prevent their continuation or their renewal.

The Comprehensive Approach

There has been a lot of debate about what is the EU Comprehensive Approach or, to give it its full name, the EU Comprehensive Approach to external conflicts and crisis. If one reads the Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council by the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the European Commission¹ it will be hard to find a single identifiable definition. The drafter, certainly aware of how burdensome it would have been in a consensus-based organisation like the EU to obtain a swift agreement in framing an encompassing definition where everyone would feel satisfied while still readable, avoided the trap by smartly spreading all over the text snippets of information about what he or she meant. Therefore, we will find words like 'consistence', 'effectiveness', 'coherence' or expressions like 'making optimal use' or 'drawing on the full range of its [the EU] instruments and resources' providing some clues about the objective of the exercise. It should also be noted the concern in

1 The EU's comprehensive approach to external conflict and crises. JOIN(2013) 30 final, Joint communication to the European Parliament and the Council, Brussels, 11.12.2013. Available at http://www.eeas.europa.eu/statements/docs/2013/131211_03_en.pdf.

explicitly identifying the prerogatives of the institutions and Member States that should not be affected by the novel approach.

Conversely, in the Conclusions of the Foreign Affairs Council Meeting of May 12, 2014, on the Comprehensive Approach, a sort of definition is attempted that give another input about what was at stake: "The Comprehensive Approach is both a general working method and a set of concrete measures and processes to improve how the EU, based on a common strategic vision and drawing on its wide array of existing tools and instruments, collectively can develop, embed and deliver more coherent and more effective policies, working practices, actions and results"².

Some ideas, thus, can be developed on the basis of this clarification. Firstly, the Comprehensive Approach is not a policy by itself and does not pretend to replace any existing or future policy – it is just a working method embodying a set of concrete measures and processes; secondly, it implies the existence *ex-ante* of a common strategic vision by the EU – read in conjunction with the Communication it is legitimate to think that here 'the EU' means the institutions and the Member States – which will combine its tools and instruments to pursue an objective; thirdly is it is a collective effort – so all branches within the EU – to reach for effectiveness of policies, practices, actions and results.

The Council also defines that the need for the Comprehensive Approach is most "acute" in crisis and conflict situations and in fragile states. Although giving a general orientation about where the priority lies, the Council does not close the door for the 'working method' to be used elsewhere (probably once it proves successful). Going back to the Joint Communication, there is a Comprehensive (no pun intended) description of how the approach can actually work by pinpointing its different stages. Shared analysis is the beginning (Is there a potential conflict? Who is involved? How do we expect the situation to evolve? What are the potential risks of an action or inaction?). Who shall be in charge? An array of people: Member States intelligence services, EU Delegations, CSDP missions – if existent –, EUSRs – if relevant – or other EU agencies – if involved. Then the EU, collectively, move to define a common strategic vision, to focus on prevention, to mobilise existent strengths and capacities and to commit to the long-term. This last point is particular important. Some critics were adamant that the Comprehensive Approach was no more than a narrow-minded EEAS internal juggle to bring together civilian and military aspect of its crisis-management tasks.

The presence of many stakeholders from different corners of Brussels definitely buries that interpretation, complemented by the emphasis put in the need to sus-

2 Council of the European Union, Council conclusions on the EU's comprehensive approach. Foreign Affairs Council meeting, Brussels, 12 May 2014, available at <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/fac/2014/05/12/>.

tain a long-term engagement. What we have here is the possibility of combining the ability of the Member States to gather information with the capacity of the EEAS to manage crises, the CSDP tools that can be swiftly mobilised to intervene on the ground and respond to short-term issues, the EU delegations permanent political dialogue with host countries or the Commission capacity of putting together diverse development or partnership funds to ensure a long-term perspective (those examples don't pretend to be exhaustive or to limit what each participant is able to do according to their mandates).

Fundamentally, instead of each one working exclusively in its niche, an opportunity becomes open for a communality of positions and a co-ordination of efforts under a unified vision. For a long time, the sometimes alleged territorial approach of the EU agencies and its Member States has been repeatedly criticised by many observers in the civil society and think-tank communities. The Comprehensive Approach at least in paper seemed to be a step in the right direction. But does it work in practice? It is what we intend to check in the next chapter by focusing on the concrete example of one of the original pilot projects: Somalia.

The Somalia Case

Somalia was a natural candidate for testing the application of the Comprehensive Approach having in mind the complexity of its situation and the use of several different EU instruments trying to help Somalians to rebuild a peaceful state. The Lisbon Treaty made it possible, the piracy off the coast of Somalia made it indispensable.

The country is one of the poorest in the world, ranking in 52nd position out of 52 in the Mo Ibrahim index, with a GDP per capita that does not reach even 300 dollars a year, which economy depends considerably on Diaspora remittances and still licking the wounds of a long-lasting and only recently finished civil war. If you add a fragile, inconsequent administration, unable to impose its authority on the country – or providing basic services to its constituents – and facing a terrorist group having a global jihad on its political agenda, it is easy to understand that the obstacles to revert to a normal situation were (and still are) huge. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to portray Somalia as a failed state. Against a backdrop of political pettiness and a fractured approach to ruling that have slowed progress, the country has been able to gather momentum and start rebuilding its still fragile but workable institutions. Though Somali ownership of the process was fundamental – other interventions coming from abroad had proved their inability to provide any durable solution – there was also a growing understanding by the Somali elites in the last 10 years or so that without the support of the international community neither reconciliation nor development would be achievable.

Naval operation 'Atalanta' was a step in the right direction to ensure that Somali waters would not serve as platform to impair the freedom of the seas. For the piracy phenomenon, though, to be eradicated, a simple military operation, which could not be sustained long-term, was not enough and requested the support of other measures. One problem still to be dealt with is the legal situation of those that were apprehended by the operation which in itself is evidence of the need to solve the more general question of the need to establish the rule of law. We could speak here almost of retrofitting a chain-reaction: for the people to have hope and feel socially productive they need jobs. For the jobs to appear you need a peaceful, investment-friendly environment. For that environment to be created you need an accountable, capable government that has authority and resources to police its territory and is able to offer alternatives to those tempted to cross the line, like our fictional young man at the beginning of this text. So for the international community the challenge is to help the government by sustaining and enhancing the role of the administration, by generating capacity-building, by helping it to obtain those resources (human and financial), by providing equipment, by training officers, by starting development projects and ultimately by creating conditions for a safe and fruitful trade.

Without going into detail of each and every project either started or on the pipeline that the EU is supporting, we can underline some of the more significant. We have already spoken about naval operation 'Atalanta' but there are two more CSDP missions in the country: EUTM Somalia and EUCAP Nestor. The former, firstly located in Uganda and with the co-operation of the Ugandan Defence Forces, but since January 2014 based in Mogadishu is focused on specialised training in a range of actions from counter-intelligence to combat. The latter is dedicated to reinforce capacities in the realm of maritime security, first at regional level and since 2015 focusing solely in Somalia.

An AU-led operation authorised by the United Nations Security Council, AMISOM, formed by contingents coming from Burundi, Uganda, Djibouti, Kenya and Ethiopia has been active since 2007, fighting the jihadist movement al-Shabaab. Through the European Development Fund, and more concretely through its African Peace Facility, the EU has been supporting this long lasting effort of the region to bring stability to Somalia and free people from terrorism to the tune of approximately 200 million EUR each year which are used mostly to pay troop stipends.

EDF support, though, is not confined only to this particular activity. The 11th EDF national Indicative Programme foresees and amount 286 million Euros to be disbursed until 2020 with particular focus in three sectors: (1) state building and peace building; (2) food security and building resilience; and (3) education. For 2015, for instance, there were programmes in resilience (25 million €), support to state building and peace building sectors (48 million €), operational support to air services (15,7 million €) and reintegration of mixed migration flows (50 million €).

However, this does not represent the totality of the EU support, since horizontal thematic instruments also have programmes that support concrete projects in Somalia and ECHO is funding humanitarian needs (394.5 million € between 2008 and 2015). If you add EU Member States development initiatives to the equation the volume of funds available is even more impressive.

Therefore, all those programmes sail in the same direction, combining existent instruments to achieve what Somalis themselves are claiming is needed: governance and institution building, help resolving ongoing conflicts and potential future ones, minimise the impact of security challenges (like piracy), support economic growth and encourage regional cooperation. A document approved by the Somali authorities after a very wide internal consultation of stakeholders, called the 'The Somali Compact' determines the priorities of the country for the next three years. This document, signed in Brussels in 2013 following the 'Busan principles', calls for an inclusive overview of the different but inter-related needs of the Somali population and the federal state, interlinking political, state-building, security, economic and developmental needs. It guides EU efforts and plainly justifies the use of the Comprehensive Approach as the only way to avoid compartmentalisation and *ad hoc* short-term solutions. Some will say that in fact it could even be seen as a blueprint for the EU Comprehensive Approach.

One criticism often spread about the EU Comprehensive Approach is that contrary to NATO's similar exercise there is not a vertical chain of command responsible for its success and thus it cannot work because no one 'owns' the process. There is always the temptation to reply that the EU itself is living evidence that we can work based on a more horizontal consensus-based approach. Nevertheless, we can agree that it would be useful to have someone who should have as one of his tasks to ensure that proper co-ordination achieve its targets and instruments and their 'guardians' are speaking with each other. Fortunately, there is someone who fits the job in the EU arsenal: The European Union Special Representative for the Horn. As a constant interlocutor to the EEAS, the European Commission and the Member States he has a privileged role in ensuring that all the actors are rowing at the same speed.

On the ground, the EU Delegation to Somalia, currently in Nairobi but moving later in the year to Mogadishu, epitomizes the Comprehensive Approach. In the compound where they will be representing the EU, EEAS and DEVCO staff will share the premises with CSDP operations staff plus Member States' personnel, a symbol of the willingness to share resources and projects for a common objective.

Conclusions

It is not hard to see that the Comprehensive Approach is the only reasonable path to follow when you are facing a country with a complex set of problems, all inter-

related. A circumscribed approach of pick and choose from a menu according to circumstances has the potential to do more harm than good. What would be the purpose, say, in investing in new schools, if then the students might be victims of lack of a security environment or after graduating will be extremely frustrated because they cannot find a job?

There is a sense of local ownership, which is fundamental, in particular in a country like Somalia where the spectre of foreign intervention can trigger terrible consequences. In this case and after a large consultation process involving a number of layers in Somali society, the federal authorities are comfortable with the approach, are demanding it and expect results. Definitely, there is so much a donor can do and local authorities have to take their share of responsibility. Perhaps it is too early to be able to have an evaluation of the efforts done so far.

To a casual observer, the bombings and other terrorist attacks still prevailing give notice of the deadly persistence of those who challenge the authorities and can sustain a cynical assessment of the reality there. However, this would be a narrow view and one can argue that those who recur to asymmetric warfare are forced to so because they are now unable to mount a more classic challenge, as the territory under their control and the human resources at their disposal have considerably shrink. Moreover, internal differences and conflicts are now mostly settled by constitutional means instead of provoking new outbursts of warfare. Arguably, one should not forget that some of the initiatives taken now will only produce results in a medium to long-term timeframe. The electoral process that should take place this year, a stepping stone for universal suffrage in 2020, is on the other hand a symptom of the progress so far achieved and that has immediate impact on the population.

For sure, the Comprehensive Approach represents also a stage of evolution for the EU and its Member States. Undoubtedly, facing obstacles that go from a history of 'territorial' approaches to the need to adjust financial cycles that have their own logic, it is not easy to try things differently. If it works, like it seems to be the case on a preliminary observation, or at least contributes to build the path that Somalia will have to follow to escape its condition of fragile state, the doors are open to repeat the experience in countries with the same or even different type of problems.