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### The EU’s Comprehensive Approach as the Dominant Discourse: A Corpus-Linguistics Analysis of the EU’s Counter-Piracy Narrative \*

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**ABSTRACT:** Using corpus linguistics techniques, this article discusses the EU’s comprehensive approach narrative in the context of counter-piracy at the Horn of Africa. It shows that 1) the comprehensive approach is systematically put forward by the EU in its counter-piracy discourse, 2) this approach is presented as the best (if not the unique) and normal way to deal with the problem, and 3) the EU claims the paternity of this approach and attributes successes to its own activities and approach. The article demonstrates that the EU uses the comprehensive approach narrative to showcase its positive and unique contribution as a global security actor and to normalise its power projection practice. This case study also contributes to demonstrate that the comprehensive approach tends to achieve discursive dominance at the EU level. By integrating interpretative framework from the field of International Relations (IR) with the empirical, data driven descriptions that corpus linguistics analysis provides this article makes an original contribution to European foreign policy studies and contributes to the methodological enrichment of the discipline.

**KEY WORDS:** Comprehensive approach, piracy, maritime security, dominant discourse, corpus linguistics, European Union

#### Introduction

Following the Maastricht Treaty, the European Union (EU)’s foreign and security policy has traditionally been conducted by two distinct, although interrelated, bureaucracies, i.e. the Commission and the Council; the former being the supranational component of the Union, supposed to act in the interest of the Union itself (understood as something more than the sum of its member states) and the latter being the inter-governmental component, supposed to reflect compromises between member states. The heterogeneity of the agency within the EU’s structure has translated into so-called ‘turf wars’<sup>1</sup> as well as competing discourses<sup>2</sup>. The establishment of the European External Action Service (EEAS), which

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<sup>1</sup> F. Cameron, *An Introduction to European Foreign Policy*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2012), 47.

<sup>2</sup> C. Carta & J.-F. Morin, *EU Foreign Policy through the Lens of Discourse Analysis* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014).

results from the merging of the Directorate General External Relations with the Council secretariat responsible for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) by the Treaty of Lisbon has somewhat blurred the distinction between the supranational and intergovernmental dimensions of the EU's foreign and security policy, and offered the EU the possibility to develop and apply a more consistent and comprehensive approach to security that goes beyond the NATO concept of civil-military cooperation<sup>3</sup> and implies projecting economic, civilian, military and normative power beyond the EU's external boundary.

Since at least 2003, when the EU launched its first military operations and released the *European Security Strategy* (Council, 2003), the practice of projecting security beyond the EU's external boundary has impacted on the formulation of the Union's foreign, security and defence policy discourse. Whereas the dominant discourse (that is to say one which has reached hegemony within a particular policy and/or institutional context and thus is accepted and reproduced by the majority of the stakeholders within one community) has mainly remained focused on the soft power and 'benign' intentions of the EU, recent studies have stressed the development of a discourse pushing for the EU to act more strategically<sup>4</sup> or, in other words, to unleash what Larsen, back in 2004, termed its 'full-instrumental power'<sup>5</sup>. In addition, a geopolitical language has been growingly employed in the media and by EU officials to refer to the Union's foreign policy goals and activities<sup>6</sup>, although the EU's geopolitical discourse has mainly remained 'tacit'<sup>7</sup>. In fact, despite the development of an EU geopolitical vision, the EU's global actorness dominant discourse has seemingly rather been framed around the less controversial concept of the comprehensive approach to security, which is 'uncontested'<sup>8</sup>, represents some sort of a 'trademark' for EU officials<sup>9</sup> and is constructed as 'an end in itself'<sup>10</sup>, i.e. a way to both fulfil the EU's foreign and security policy goals and to rationalize, or normalize, its foreign and security policy activities as well as the relevance of the EU's foreign and security policy actorness.

Whereas, the centrality of the comprehensive approach in the EU's foreign, security and defence policy discourse has been acknowledged in the literature<sup>11</sup>, no study has yet systematically demonstrated the discursive prevalence of the comprehensive approach and the way it shapes the EU's foreign and security policy dominant discourse leaving limited

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<sup>3</sup> N. Pirozzi, 'The EU's Comprehensive Approach to Crisis Management', EU Crisis Management Papers Series (Brussels: Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, 2013), 6.

<sup>4</sup> See for example J. Rogers, 'A New Geography of European Power?', *Egmont Paper* 42 (2011).

<sup>5</sup> H. Larsen, 'Discourse analysis in the study of European foreign policy', in *Rethinking European Union foreign policy*, eds B. Tonra & T. Christiansen (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 79.

<sup>6</sup> L. Bialasiewicz et al., 'Interventions in the new political geographies of the European neighbourhood', *Political Geography* 28, no. 2 (2009): 1141; B. Germond, 'The European Union at the Horn of Africa: The Contribution of Critical Geopolitics to Piracy Studies', *Global Policy* 4, no.1 (2013): 81.

<sup>7</sup> M. Kuus, 'Policy and Geopolitics: Bounding Europe in Europe', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 101, no. 5 (2011): 1140-1155.

<sup>8</sup> K. Zwolski, 'The EU and a holistic security approach after Lisbon: competing norms and the power of the dominant discourse', *Journal of European Public Policy* 19, no. 7 (2012): 996.

<sup>9</sup> M.E. Smith, 'A liberal grand strategy in a realist world? Power, purpose and the EU's changing global role', *Journal of European Public Policy* 18, no. 2 (2011): 148.

<sup>10</sup> P.M. Norheim-Martinsen, 'EU Strategic Culture: When the Means Becomes the End', *Contemporary Security Policy* 32, no. 3 (2011): 518.

<sup>11</sup> For example A. Biava, M. Drent & G.P. Herd, 'Characterizing the European Union's Strategic Culture: An Analytical Framework', *Journal of Common Market Studies* 49, no. 6 (2011): 1227-1248; Smith, see n. 9 above; Norheim-Martinsen, see n. 10 above; Zwolski, see n. 8 above.

room of manoeuvre for other sub-discourses, such as the geopolitical one, to develop. It is actually widely accepted in the literature that the EU brands its foreign and security policy with the comprehensive approach label, but scholars have failed to provide rigorous textual evidence for this. In turn, this gap in the literature has prevented current debates from discussing the extent to which the comprehensive approach narrative normalizes the EU's practice of power projection.

Using corpus linguistics techniques, this article analyses the narratives surrounding the EU's counter-piracy activities at the Horn of Africa (where the Union has been active since 2008). It shows that 1) the comprehensive approach is systematically put forward by the EU in its counter-piracy discourse, 2) it is presented as the best and evident (if not the unique) way to deal with the problem, and 3) the EU claims the paternity of this approach and attributes successes to its own activities and approach. This case study illustrates the way the EU uses the comprehensive approach to showcase its positive and unique contribution as a global security actor and to rationalize its power projection practice. By so doing the article also discusses the extent to which the comprehensive approach has achieved discursive dominance.

We start by discussing the methodology, data and process; we then review the concept of comprehensive approach and how it has been operationalized since 2008 in the context of the EU's counter-piracy activities at the Horn of Africa. We then analyse the EU's comprehensive approach narrative in the context of counter-piracy and the way it frames the EU's dominant discourse using corpus linguistics techniques. We conclude on the dominant status of the comprehensive approach within the EU's foreign, security and defence policy discourse, and what it demonstrates in terms of the EU's global actorness.

### **Methodology, data, process and limitations**

The methodology adopted in this article combines traditional qualitative discourse analysis methods from the field of International Relations (IR) with quantitative methods and techniques offered by corpus linguistics. More specifically it integrates IR interpretative framework with the empirical, data driven descriptions that the analysis of corpora is able to provide.

A corpus is a large-scale collection of machine-readable texts. Both the size and the format element are relevant, because the idea behind corpus-based analysis is that it could not be done manually. We process corpora using software tools, which extract quantitative information (e.g. frequency lists and statistics) from the corpus and, as Scott and Tribble put it, reduce 'the rich chaos of language' to its 'boiled down extract'<sup>12</sup>. Corpus tools enable us to process billions of words, to count what is frequent and what is rare in our dataset, and to identify linguistics patterns that may otherwise not be visible. Corpus work has an explorative nature and findings are often 'serendipitous'<sup>13</sup>. The data are approached without a pre-defined theory, and even though there might be expectations about what will be found in the corpus 'box', it is the patterns that emerge bottom-up from the data that direct the path and the focus of the analysis. Such a data-driven approach does not

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<sup>12</sup> M. Scott & C. Tribble, *Textual Patterns: Key Words and Corpus Analysis in Language Education* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2006), 6.

<sup>13</sup> A. Partington, 'Evaluating evaluation and some concluding thoughts on CADs', in *Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies on the Iraq Conflict. Wording the War*, eds J. Morley & P. Bayley (London & New York: Routledge, 2009), 292.

necessarily equate to objective findings, as pattern recognition remains an inevitably interpretative activity, it does, however, mean that our research is replicable and accountable<sup>14</sup>.

At the core of the research is the corpus, therefore corpus design and compilation are integral part of the research process and our 'results are only as good as the corpus'<sup>15</sup>, which means that the corpus we collect must suit the research question. This work is based on a 6 million word corpus, constituted of two main sub-corpora, which henceforth will be referred to as the "States corpus" and the "Bodies corpus". The States corpus collects documents from institutional websites of EU member states, containing either the word *piracy* or *maritime security*, and the Bodies corpus collects documents from EU institutions and agencies, mentioning the same search terms. Methodologically speaking, corpus analysis is intrinsically comparative, as Baker explains: '[a] key way that we make sense of things is by casting the in relationship to something else'<sup>16</sup>. After all, the identification of patterns is a comparative ability: we count things that are similar, or we notice things that are different. With respect to the matter under investigation here, the rationale for comparing within and between States and Bodies was the prevision of potentially interesting affinities and contrasts. For example: it was anticipated that EU level institutions would show a greater tendency to present responses to piracy in terms of a coordinated comprehensive approach than would happen at individual member states' level (or at least of some states) due to the supranational dynamics taking place at the EU level as well as the need to justify its approach and global actorness. Some expectations were confirmed, others were not corroborated by the evidence in the corpus.

The original dataset collected automatically using web-crawling software was much larger than the finalized corpus and comprised data from all the 27 member states and relevant EU institutions (Council and EEAS). The finalized corpus consists of approximately 17% of what was downloaded; the downsizing is due to two reasons<sup>17</sup>. Firstly, it is the result of a careful process of data harmonisation, consisting, for example, in the removal of documents in languages other than English, of duplicated documents and in the clean-up of boilerplate information, that was part of the web-pages downloaded, but unrelated to the content. Secondly, it is affected by the need to identify sub-sets of data viable for comparison, that is to say sources (individual member states or EU institutions) that provided enough material to allow and justify quantitative analysis, which explains our account of seven member states only. Table 1 illustrates the composition of the finalized dataset.

In the States corpus, looking at data distribution, a correspondence was noticed between the naval strength and tradition of the state and its greater engagement in the issue of maritime security. The correlation is generally confirmed, with a few exceptions. Denmark, for example, is a case of overrepresentation in the data, with respect to its navy (probably due to the importance of commercial shipping for Denmark in general and to the Danish-based Maersk shipping mega-company in particular), while for Sweden there is no document in the corpus despite its involvement in counter-piracy; both Portugal and Spain have sizable navies, but there were no texts for Portugal and for Spain there were so few

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<sup>14</sup> On the principle of 'total accountability' see T. McEnery & A. Hardie, *Corpus Linguistics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 14-16.

<sup>15</sup> J. Sinclair, *Corpus, Concordance, Collocation* (Oxford, oxford University press, 1991), 13.

<sup>16</sup> P. Baker, *Sociolinguistics and Corpus Linguistics* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 125.

<sup>17</sup> The authors would like to thank Dr Sheryl Prentice for her work in collecting an initial version of the corpus.

that it had to be excluded from the analysis; Italy and Greece, both with sizeable navy and naval traditions, are also comparatively underrepresented in the corpus. It must be acknowledged that the scarcity or absence of data for some of the member states might be due to the lack of English translations of the websites and documents, rather than necessarily reflecting their lack of involvement in maritime security. This constitutes a limitation of corpus linguistics (except when there is a possibility to conduct a multilingual study).

**Table 1: Composition of the finalized data set**

	Source	Texts	Words
<b>Bodies</b>	EEAS	289	1,591,972
	Council	27	153,896
<b>States</b>	UK	230	1,939,591
	Germany	61	923,392
	France	345	533,513
	Italy	15	316,232
	Denmark	15	152,340
	Greece	40	102,191
	Netherlands	91	59,633
	<b>Total</b>	<b>797</b>	<b>5,772,760</b>

Along with the assumption that Bodies and States would produce an interesting comparison, we also expected to find different representations of piracy and maritime security across the individual member states. Because of the heterogeneous nature of the data, we began the analytic process at States' level, first examining each State sub-corpus and obtaining a description of the dominant representations for each 'box' and then comparing the descriptions to identify similarities as well as differences. One of the downsides of direct comparison between datasets, in fact, is that it tends to emphasize difference, while overlooking similarities<sup>18</sup>, a problem that we can overcome by comparing analyses rather than analysing comparisons.

We predominantly worked with collocation analysis, looking at words that frequently appear in the vicinity of the terms *piracy* and *maritime security* in each dataset. 'Collocates' are words that co-occur with the 'node' word within a given 'span' (in the present study we adopted a fairly standard span of ten; five words to the left and five to the right of the node). Patterns of co-occurrence can be based on different definitions<sup>19</sup>, in this case collocates were calculated setting a minimum threshold for frequency (five occurrences in at least five separate documents) and combining two statistical metrics: Log-likelihood for statistical significance, and Mutual Information for strength of the attraction, as proposed in Gabrielatos and Baker<sup>20</sup> (2008). The concept of 'consistent-collocates' (or c-collocates) developed by Gabrielatos and Baker is also central to this analysis, as they are indicators of similarity. C-collocates are words that stably collocate with the node in multiple datasets

<sup>18</sup> C. Taylor, 'Searching for similarity using corpus-assisted discourse studies', *Corpora* 8, no.1 (2013): 81-113.

<sup>19</sup> McEnery & Hard, see n. 14 above, 122-133.

<sup>20</sup> C. Gabrielatos & P. Baker, 'Fleeing, Sneaking, Flooding: A Corpus Analysis of Discursive Constructions of Refugees and Asylum Seekers in the UK Press, 1996-2005', *Journal of English Linguistics* 36, no. 1 (2008): 5-38.

and are to be viewed as indicating core elements of meaning, semantic associations and semantic prosodies. Comparing collocational profiles of *piracy* and *maritime security* across sub-corpora, we identified some c-collocates that are shared by all (or most) sub-corpora (for example: *Somalia* or *terrorism* for *piracy*) and define dominant ways to present the subject matter, and others that are unique to one member state or institution (for example the pronoun *we*, which systematically co-occurs with *piracy* only in the EEAS data) that are related to a specific context and sometimes signposts of alternative discourses.

The idea of shared and unique characteristics is extended beyond the individual collocates and applied to broad semantic categories on the basis of the dominant context in which the words appeared. The classification was derived introspectively on the basis of close reading and disambiguation. Four macro-categories, present in all the sub-corpora, were identified: Problem, Solution, Causes, and Places. The predominant categories are by far Problem (*piracy as a problem a threat, a risk, references to pirate attacks, incidents, acts and associated phenomena/activities, such as armed robbery, terrorism and so on*) and Solution (*actions and strategies to prevent and stop piracy: fight, counter, tackling, effort, measures, operation and so on*). This is typical of a problem-solution framework:

‘The problem-solution pattern is characteristically lexically signalled either by means of inscribed signals (eg. *solution*) or inscribed evaluations functioning as signals (eg. *unfortunately*) or by means of evoking signals (eg. *had no money*). One or more of these signals serves as trigger for the pattern, in that it makes the pattern visible to the reader’<sup>21</sup>.

The problem-solution framework was a productive way to interpret the corpus evidence at a further level of analysis, since it fits well with the ‘comprehensive approach’ model. While we consistently find problem-solution collocates across all sub-corpora, it remains to be seen whether similar patterns of co-occurrence are matched by uniform discourses. The analysis of concordance lines (obtained by retrieving all the instances of co-occurrence) can reveal new sets of patterns and evaluations. By examining words in context we can see the ways in which ‘problems’ and ‘solutions’ are organized textually and which elements are addressed or prioritized: the problem, the response, the evaluation of the result<sup>22</sup>. In the Bodies corpus, for example, the focus is on the response, or rather the planning/intention of the response to maritime piracy; a feature that does not appear in any of the States’ sub-corpora.

This snapshot of the research process – from quantification, through collocation analysis, classification and concordance analysis within each source and then comparing across sub-corpora – shows two typical elements of corpus-based analysis: firstly the fact that the initial handling of the corpus (compilation, clean-up, quantifications) is part and parcel of the analysis; secondly the fact that the analysis typically moves from general to particular in ever closer loops ‘funneling’<sup>23</sup> down the data. The analysis is fully driven by the data, findings emerge bottom-up and already from the early number-crunching potential areas of interest for further exploration. The present article focuses on one particular issue, but the corpus was not collected to analyse specifically this, it was the comprehensive

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<sup>21</sup> M. Hoey, *Textual interaction, An Introduction to Written Discourse Analysis* (London: Routledge, 2001), 140.

<sup>22</sup> M. Hoey, *On the Surface of Discourse* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1983).

<sup>23</sup> A. Marchi, “‘The moral in the story’: a diachronic investigation of lexicalised morality in the UK press’, *Corpora* 5, no. 2 (2010): 164.

approach that emerged as salient from the corpus itself. The exhaustive analysis of such a large dataset brings up a variety of research paths and of findings, we chose to report here on one of the main patterns that were identified and pursued because they touched an issue of interest in the field of European studies. The following two sections discuss the concept and practice of the EU's comprehensive approach (interpretative context); we then proceed with a corpus analysis of the 'comprehensive approach' narrative in the context of counter-piracy at the Horn of Africa.

## **The EU's Comprehensive Approach to Security**

The EU has become a global actor that holds and implements a variety of economic, civilian, military and normative levers to influence other actors and shape events on the world stage. The diversity of tools at the EU's disposal, the EU's comparative advantage in civilian power projection as well as a desire to play the 'benign interventionist' card<sup>24</sup> led to the adoption of a so-called comprehensive approach to security by the Union<sup>25</sup>, based on three interrelated elements: a comprehensive conception of what threats are and what security is, a comprehensive philosophy of the remedies to apply in response to crises and security threats, and a cross-sectoral and all-inclusive range of tools and actors envisaged to deal with security threats (i.e. a problem-solution framework). According to the literature in IR, this approach has not only been applied by the EU on the field but has also become intimately linked to the Union's foreign and security policy dominant discourse<sup>26</sup> and to the Union's strategic culture<sup>27</sup>, where the comprehensive approach to security holds a central position.

The comprehensive conception of security is based on an encompassing perception and definition of threats, ranging from civil wars and international crises to transnational criminality, energy insecurity, and environmental degradations. In other words, it is based on the endorsement of an expanded security agenda following the end of the Cold War. This translates into an encompassing conception of what security is, which goes beyond defence and national security, so as to include human security (e.g. development, poverty, human rights) and regional and global security, which implies the promotion of certain values (supposed to contribute to countries' stability, such as good governance, the rule of law and human rights) and the acknowledgement of actors' interdependence.

Adopting a comprehensive approach to security also means endorsing a comprehensive philosophy of the remedies to apply to 'treat' the issues/threats. It is based on an understanding that peace and development are fundamentally intertwined (security-development nexus), acknowledging the need to create favourable conditions for sustainable peace and security (long-term strategy) and thus understanding that treating the symptoms of conflicts/issues is not enough; what needs to be treated are the long-term root causes. This requires paying attention to long-term and structural problems, such as poverty, inequalities, exploitation, oppression, corruption, bad governance, etc. Accordingly, military and civilian responses should be integrated; cooperation with partners and

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<sup>24</sup> Norheim-Martinsen, see n. 10 above, 527.

<sup>25</sup> Council of the European Union, 'Council conclusions on the EU's comprehensive approach', Foreign Affairs Council meeting ( Brussels, 12 May 2014), in [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/142552.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/142552.pdf).

<sup>26</sup> For example Zwolski, see n. 8 above, 991-994.

<sup>27</sup> For example Biava, Drent & Herd, see n. 11.

multilateralism (i.e. engaging with allies, international organisations, local authorities and NGOs) is supposed to work better than operating in isolation. Such an approach is also supposed to bring more legitimacy to security operations and thus reforms are likely to be endorsed more efficiently. Pooling various competences (including from the civil society) is also likely to increase the effectiveness of the remedies. Thus, another key expression in the EU's discourse is *effective multilateralism* (or simply *multilateralism*), which is often linked to the comprehensive approach narrative and presented as a key to legitimacy, since multilateralism is supposed to guarantee that Europeans' projection activities are not a new form of colonialism<sup>28</sup>.

Finally, adopting a comprehensive approach to security means favouring the use of a comprehensive range of tools and actors to tackle the threats. This includes political missions (diplomacy), military missions (including peace-enforcement and peace-keeping), civilian missions (including police operations, security-sector reform (SSR) operations, which contribute to enhancing local operational competences and tolerance through the spread of norms, the rule of law and good governance), humanitarian aid (in the short term) and development assistance (in the long-term). Whereas, diplomacy, military and police operations are conducted by member states and the EU, NGOs and the civil society are encouraged to participate in the other activities, for which they sometimes possess better competencies/capacities. For example, to promote human rights practices, states can impose conditionalities on development assistance or can provide training to local forces (SSR), but field monitoring and the day-to-day social work will be carried out more efficiently by local and global NGOs.

### **The Comprehensive Approach in Practice: The EU at the Horn of Africa**

At the Horn of Africa, the EU's comprehensive approach, supported by the 2011 *Strategic Framework for the Horn of Africa*<sup>29</sup> and coordinated by a Special Representative for the Horn of Africa, translates into a variety of activities on the field: development programmes, financial assistance and diplomatic activities aiming at promoting not only economic growth but also the rule of law, human rights, good governance and democratic institutions; a military training mission in Somalia (EUTM Somalia); counter-piracy operation Atalanta (EUNAVFOR) which has been active since December 2008 with an average of five to ten frigates and support vessels (as well as two to three maritime patrol aircrafts) patrolling the safety corridor and other assigned areas or escorting World Food Programme and African Union ships; a maritime capacity building mission (EUCAP Nestor) aiming at developing regional maritime governance capabilities, notably coast-guard tasks; as well a range of projects and activities such as the regional capacity-building Maritime Security Programme (MASE) and the Critical Maritime Routes Programme. This demonstrates a mix of short and long-term objectives and activities as well as a mix of defence, security and economic initiatives.

Effective multilateralism is also at play at the Horn of Africa. The EU cooperates with the UN, the African Union, NATO (operation Ocean Shield), US-led operation Enduring

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<sup>28</sup> M. Kaldor, M., Martin & S. Selchow, 'Human security: a new strategic narrative for Europe', *International Affairs* 83, no. 2 (2007): 285.

<sup>29</sup> Council of the European Union, 'Council Conclusions on the Horn of Africa', 3124th Foreign Affairs Council meeting (Brussels, 14 November 2011), Annex: A Strategic Framework for the Horn of Africa, in [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/foraff/126052.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/foraff/126052.pdf).



Freedom – Horn of Africa, as well as with individual regional states and external players such as China, Japan and India. The EU has also been involved in the creation of the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS) in 2009 to facilitate cooperation in the field of counter-piracy, and the EU launched the Maritime Security Centre – Horn of Africa (MSCHOA) to provide assistance to various stakeholders (but especially shipping companies). Those public-private partnership initiatives fit perfectly well with the holistic philosophy behind the comprehensive approach to security.

In its 2011 *Strategic Framework for the Horn of Africa*, the EU has set up both long-term and short-term objectives: On the one hand the Union aims ‘to support the people of the region in achieving greater peace, stability, security, prosperity and accountable government’, which requires promoting good governance, the rule of law, human rights and democracy in the region, contributing to conflict prevention and resolution in Sudan and Somalia, promoting economic growth and reduce poverty. On the other hand, the EU wants to ensure that ‘until that is achieved, the insecurity in the region does not threaten the security of others beyond its borders, e.g. through piracy, terrorism or irregular migration’<sup>30</sup>. Assessing the success of the comprehensive approach in dealing with piracy at the Horn of Africa leads to two divergent findings. At first sight, the number of attacks has drastically diminished since 2011 and attacks eventually almost ceased. However, it appears that the structure for pirates to operate is still in place; pirates have just ceased operations for the time being; they have not been eradicated<sup>31</sup>. Moreover, the decrease in the number of attacks can well be attributed to the success of patrols, repression and law enforcement only (since this has engendered a cost too high for pirates) and not to the improvement of the political and security environment on land, although this has been widely debated even after 2011 when attacks gradually stopped<sup>32</sup>. The symptoms have been treated, but the root causes, i.e. weak state and bad governance, are seemingly still there as well as the organized criminal structures supporting piratical operations. The well-established pirates’ business model implies that as soon as they stop being deterred attacks will certainly resume, since the decision is based on a rather simple risk-benefit analysis. This tends to qualify the actual positive impacts of the comprehensive approach. The EU’s narrative has nonetheless highly praised this approach and its supposed success as discussed below.

### **The Comprehensive Approach Narrative: Showcasing the EU’s Positive and Unique Contribution**

Corpus data shows that the EU’s practice at the Horn of Africa in the context of counter-piracy has indeed been backed by a narrative systematically putting forward the comprehensive approach. In both States’ and Bodies’ data we find evidence of the discourse emphasizing *comprehensiveness* when dealing with piracy and maritime security, especially regarding the Horn of Africa and operation Atalanta<sup>33</sup>. This is not lexicalized as a *holistic*

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<sup>30</sup> Council of the European Union, see n. 29 above, 3.

<sup>31</sup> H.-G. Ehrhart & K. Petretto, ‘Stabilizing Somalia: Can the EU’s comprehensive approach work?’, *European Security* 23, no. 2 (2014): 185.

<sup>32</sup> For example S. Percy & A. Shortland, ‘The Business of Piracy in Somalia’, *Journal of Strategic Studies* 36, no. 4 (2013): 541-578; C. Bueger, ‘Learning from piracy: future challenges of maritime security governance’, *Global Affairs* 1, no.1 (2015): 33-42.

<sup>33</sup> *Horn of Africa* and *Somalia* are also c-collocates and the most frequently mentioned places where piracy originates.

*approach* (as proposed by Zwolski<sup>34</sup>), but explicitly as a *comprehensive approach* or a *comprehensive strategy*, as well as being implied in a broader discourse of cooperation, multilateralism and multitask approach. The three-pronged way of tackling the problem (in this case the threat of piracy), i.e. legal aspects, military action and economic assistance, appears as well. This echoes scholarly debates about the comprehensive approach being at the core of the EU's strategic culture 'based on an enlarged vision of security and on a comprehensive, multilateral and internationally legitimated approach to threats, implying the use of all sorts of instruments (military and civilian) in an integrated manner' (Biava, Drent and Herd, 2011, p. 1244).

Counter-piracy operation *Atalanta* is represented in positive terms (we find explicit praise of it in 33% of the concordance lines) and as an EU's success. *Atalanta* appears in the list of collocates for most sub-corpora: it is a c-collocate in four out of five sources and it is mentioned throughout the data (see Table 2 below). The low occurrence in the Danish sub-corpus is probably due to Denmark having 'opted out' of the CSDP, hence only one mention of operation *Atalanta* despite a strong emphasis on maritime security.

**Table 2: Mentions of *Atalanta* in the corpus**

Source	Mentions of <i>Atalanta</i>	% of texts	Pmw <sup>35</sup>
Denmark	1	6.6	6.5
France	72	20.8	134.9
Germany	34	55.7	36.8
Netherlands	49	53.8	821.6
UK	10	4.3	5.1
EEAS	103	35.6	64.6

A recurring characteristic in the examples where a positive evaluation of operation *Atalanta* is expressed is the description of the comprehensive approach. In fact, it appears that the comprehensive approach is key to the EU's counter-piracy activities at the Horn of Africa (*comprehensive* also collocates with *piracy* in the sub-corpus) and data shows that the comprehensive approach is used by the EU as an indicator of positive process or even positive achievement in itself. In other words, the simple fact that a comprehensive approach was put in practice is represented as a proof of success and used as a (key) performance indicator. This fits well with Norheim-Martinsen's point that 'acting comprehensively has become an end in itself for the EU'<sup>36</sup>.

The three elements of law & order, deterrence & military action, and development also appear to construct a discourse of counter-piracy consistent with the idea of the comprehensive approach, i.e. a response that is multi-layered and has a broad scope, that not only solves the piracy problem in the short-term (by restoring freedom of navigation at the Horn of Africa) but also tackles the root causes of piracy, notably economic development and governance. Data shows that the *comprehensive approach* collocates with

<sup>34</sup> Zwolski, see n. 8 above.

<sup>35</sup> Pmw means 'per million words'. It is a normalized word frequency which allows comparison of word frequencies across corpora of different sizes.

<sup>36</sup> Norheim-Martinsen, see n. 10 above, 518.

both the symptomatic treatment of the threat (e.g. *deter and disrupt/interrupt/arrest/delay piracy*) and the root causal treatment (e.g. *addressing the root causes of piracy will be essential / tackling symptoms and root causes*).

By extending the analysis to the actual mentions of *comprehensive approach*, we found 71 references to the *comprehensive approach* in the EEAS sub-corpus. We find similar results in the French and Danish sub-corpora (see Table 3 below). France and Denmark were also the sub-corpora where strategic planning and prevention and a focus on cooperation were most represented. In the French data the semantic field of law & order was also particularly rich. It is interesting to note that the absence of references in the Dutch data does not correlate with a lack of interest in cooperation. On the contrary in the Dutch corpus we find copious references to multilateralism. In fact the Dutch corpus is characterized by general pragmatism and the discourse surrounding piracy puts the emphasis on resources and results (particularly military ones) rather than strategies and method, which may explain the data.

**Table 3: Mentions of the phrase ‘comprehensive approach’ in the corpus**

Source	Mentions of <i>Comprehensive approach</i>	% of texts	Pmw
Denmark	6	40	39.3
France	23	6.6	43.1
Germany	19	31.1	20.5
Netherlands	0	0	0
UK	26	11.3	13.4
EEAS	71	24.5	44.5

In sum, the EU’s involvement in counter-piracy at the Horn of Africa is constructed as a success and the comprehensive approach is represented as being instrumental in explaining this success. There are two characteristics to the representation of the *comprehensive approach* in the EEAS: 1) the fact that it is needed, and 2) the fact that it is an EU idea and the EU has got it. To begin with, in nearly 50% of the examples the necessity of a *comprehensive approach* is expressed. For instance:

- <need for a more comprehensive approach
- <a comprehensive approach [is] required/needed
- <must take a comprehensive approach, calls for sustaining a comprehensive approach
- <requires/calls for a comprehensive approach
- <find a way to bring all the EU’s assets together in a comprehensive approach
- <adopt/create/put together a comprehensive approach
- <achieving a real and purposeful comprehensive approach
- <cannot succeed without a comprehensive approach

This shows that the EU’s discourse aims to construct the comprehensive approach as a necessity. This, in turn, may well help the EU stressing that its approach is best adapted to deal with the threat of piracy at the Horn of Africa by promoting the idea that the comprehensive approach is the only way to deal with the short-term as well as long-term

root causes of piracy. Whether this is true or not is not the focus of this article; what matters is that the comprehensive approach is presented as necessary. This narrative allows representing the EU's approach, methods and activities as beyond question and 'naturally' successful.

The construction of the comprehensive approach as the only and natural method for tackling piracy at the Horn of Africa (as shown in our data) is also backed and strengthened by academic and think tank discourses. Indeed the great majority if not all the authors discussing the EU's involvement at the Horn of Africa have expressed the necessity to both tackle the symptoms and root causes of piracy, notably on land<sup>37</sup>, which reinforces the case for the adoption of a comprehensive approach and thus justifies the EU's choice and, to some extent, praises its activities. The EU's involvement in counter-piracy at the Horn of Africa has thus contributed to the naturalization of the comprehensive approach. i.e. taking its relevance as granted. The naturalization of a concept is instrumental in the process leading to the establishment of a dominant discourse, in this case the comprehensive approach dominant discourse (as discussed in the next section).

In addition to constructing the comprehensive approach as the natural way to tackle the threat of piracy, in 45% of the examples the idea and the practice of a *comprehensive approach* is described as an EU achievement, or in other words is labelled 'made in the EU'. For instance:

*<the EU's unique capacity to deliver a comprehensive approach  
<the EU's unique comprehensive approach also makes us a highly effective partner  
<this shows the weight of the EU and its comprehensive approach*

Although the concept of a comprehensive approach was not new when the EU started to emphasize on it in the mid-2000s<sup>38</sup> and had notably been employed to refer to NATO civil-military operations since the early 1990s<sup>39</sup>, the EU tends to claim (at least tacitly) the paternity of the comprehensive approach and presents it as an EU 'trademark'<sup>40</sup> or in other words a proof of the added value of the EU as a global security actor. This is all the more important since the EU represents its security and defence policy as a contribution to a multilateral world order<sup>41</sup>.

As an advocate of multilateralism, the role of the EU within multilateral frameworks is positively stressed, which the comprehensive approach narrative helps achieving. Data shows that *comprehensiveness* is indeed related to the global scope of the problem of piracy and to the international scope of the solution: *international, cooperation, common, global, together*. 17 out of 24 co-occurrences of *piracy* and *cooperation* are about the need or the

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<sup>37</sup> As mentioned by Percy & Shortland, see n. 32, 541.

<sup>38</sup> S. Biscop, 'The European Security Strategy in Context: A Comprehensive Trend', in *The EU and the European Security Strategy: Forging a Global Europe*, eds S. Biscop & J.J. Andersson (London: Routledge, 2008), 13.

<sup>39</sup> In 2004 Denmark was the first to advocate such an approach within NATO, which is interesting given that Denmark is also overrepresented in our corpus data (c.f. above). In other words, Denmark's interest in maritime security at the Horn of Africa may well be correlated with its interest in the comprehensive approach.

<sup>40</sup> Smith, see n. 9, 148.

<sup>41</sup> Council of the European Union, 'A Secure Europe in a Better World: European Security Strategy' (Brussels, December 2003), 9-10.

commitment to *strengthen/expand/enhance* international cooperation, specifically with respect to law & order solutions:

*<ASEM leaders [...] should look at the state of international legal cooperation on piracy and the need for stronger domestic legislation  
<strengthen bilateral, regional and international cooperation for comprehensively combating piracy and promoting maritime security  
<the European Union and the United States commit to strengthening cooperation in counter-piracy based on international law including dealing with root causes*

In addition to *international cooperation* we find references to *international partners, coalition, forum, community, efforts* and *responsibility*. Other signals of the shared problem and the (need for a) shared effort to solve it are found in expressions such as: *act together, fighting together, work together, the common challenge of fighting piracy, combating piracy is a common challenge, common interests - namely against piracy*, and so on. Piracy itself and piracy as a challenge is described as *global: global piracy* (five), *global challenges like ... piracy* (four): *Global issues (fight against terrorism, piracy at sea, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, water security, water resources management and food security)*. It appears that the comprehensive approach narrative and the multiple references to cooperation and multilateralism mutually reinforce each other.

In sum, the comprehensive approach to combating piracy at the Horn of Africa is constructed as the unique, natural and effective method to tackle the threat. The EU is presented as the initiator of such an approach and as having some sort of a comparative advantage in it, while fostering multilateralism and cooperation. The EU's achievements are presented as successful and the comprehensive approach is depicted as instrumental in explaining the EU's success in tackling both the short-term issues (i.e. pirates operating at the Horn of Africa) and the longer-term root causes (such as poverty, bad governance and insecurity on land).

### **Discussion: the Comprehensive Approach as the Dominant Discourse**

A dominant discourse is one which has reached hegemony within a particular policy and/or institutional context, i.e. it is accepted and reproduced by the majority of the stakeholders within one community (e.g. the EU); those originally producing the narrative as well as the target audience. Ideas, norms and concepts put forward by the dominant discourse tend to be considered as natural and evident by the majority, including practitioners and sometimes scholars. The dominant discourse sustains social norms and is enduring, i.e. sudden paradigm shifts and exogenous factors cannot radically alter it, at least not in the short term, all the more since the effect of the dominant discourse is to stabilize one particular (social) order resulting in a perpetual circle of representation-construction-normalisation. The dominant discourse is however not homogenous and usually is made up of competing sub-discourses.

In the field of European studies, scholars have widely debated the nature of the EU as a global actor and despite many disagreements about the origin, scope and role of the EU's foreign, defence and security policy discourse and about the extent to which it

influences and constrains the EU's politics and policies<sup>42</sup>, a broad consensus has emerged about the discursive dominance (or at least centrality) of the EU's values (such as democracy, good governance, the rule of law, human rights and market economy) and about the fact that the need to promote these values beyond the EU's external boundary in order to 'secure Europe' while contributing to 'a better world'<sup>43</sup> has become the accepted norm within the EU. In this context, scholars have stressed the existence of various competing sub-discourses, especially since the inception of the European Security and Defence Policy in 1999 and its operationalization in 2003.

Larsen suggested that since the end of the 1990s the 'civilian power' discourse has been challenged by a 'full instrumental power' discourse according to which 'the Union's access to military means might be beneficial in responding to international crises and in contributing to international peace and stability'<sup>44</sup>. Building on that, Rogers identified an 'EU Grand Strategy' discourse, which constructs the EU as a global power: 'the grand strategy of the Union was once organized around [...] its "civilian culture", but [...] this has been restructured [...] to assume a "global role", which requires the exercise of "full instrumental power", mixing ideological, civilian and military components'<sup>45</sup>. That the EU must act more strategically has been defended and instigated by what Rogers calls a community of 'euro-strategists'<sup>46</sup> and has indeed been put forward by the highest European bodies. For example, in 2008, the *Implementation Report on the European Security Strategy* stated that it is in the EU's interest to be more visible and effective on the world stage by developing its strategic thinking: 'To ensure our security and meet the expectations of our citizens, we must be ready to shape events. That means becoming more strategic in our thinking, and more effective and visible around the world'<sup>47</sup>. However, this narrative is still questioned by other civil society stakeholders such as NGOs as well as some parts of the Commission in the field of development assistance where the 'apolitical character of the EU's aid' remains an important feature<sup>48</sup>.

The normative power discourse, which emphasizes the superiority of the European values and the need to 'change' others<sup>49</sup> may well prevent the EU from unleashing its 'full-instrumental power' in practice, since it 'sets the limits of legitimate foreign policy' for the EU<sup>50</sup>. The EU is constructed as a model to follow, but to transform 'others' the method counts; the EU's identity revolves around soft power norms hence the constraints placed on power and forces projection. In other words, even if in practice the EU does not follow the civilian or normative power discourse principles to the letter when its economic or geopolitical interests are at stake, in official documents and speeches, the dominant narrative remains articulated around the EU's values, civilian intensions and normative

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<sup>42</sup> T. Diez, 'Setting the limits: Discourse and EU foreign policy', *Cooperation and Conflict* 49, no. 3 (2014): 319-333; Larsen, see n. 5 above.

<sup>43</sup> Council of the European Union, see n. 41 above.

<sup>44</sup> Larsen, see n. 5 above, 72.

<sup>45</sup> J. Rogers, "'From Civilian Power" to "Global Power": Explicating the European Union's "Grand Strategy" Through the Articulation of Discourse Theory', *Journal of Common Market Studies* 47, no. 4 (2009): 839.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 831.

<sup>47</sup> Council of the European Union, 'Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy: Providing Security in a Changing World' (Brussels, 2008), 2.

<sup>48</sup> Zwolski, see n. 8 above, 991.

<sup>49</sup> T. Diez, 'Constructing the Self and Changing Others: Reconsidering "Normative Power Europe"', *Millennium, Journal of International Studies* 33, no. 3 (2005): 613-636.

<sup>50</sup> Diez, see n. 42 above, 330.

power, which grants the Union with ‘civilizing’ credentials. Interestingly, Zielonka shows that the normative power discourse is linked to the ‘civilizing mission’ of the EU; it has ‘legitimized the EU’s territorial expansion, transfer of laws and resources and even the sharing of sovereignty’<sup>51</sup>, although ‘this noble, normative self-image is not always recognized by the EU’s competitors and partners’<sup>52</sup>. In other words, the EU is engaged in a permanent quest to legitimize its external actorness and its external activities; a quest in which the discursive practice plays a central role.

The comprehensive approach is one of the competing sub-discourses. Its originality lies in its capacity to encompass and integrate elements from the other main sub-discourses, i.e. civilian, normative and full-instrumental power discourses. The comprehensive approach discourse allows rationalizing the EU’s projection activities beyond its external boundary (be they responding to normative intensions or rather to ‘realpolitik’ interests) since the comprehensive approach encompasses civilian, normative, economic, humanitarian and, if needed, military elements. As mentioned earlier, the comprehensive approach plays the ‘benign interventionist’ card<sup>53</sup>. Its narrative conveys a message that is targeted at a broader audience and is ultimately more rallying.

Our data has shown that, at least in the context of counter-piracy, this comprehensive approach narrative allows the EU to present itself and its approach as instrumental and almost natural and evident in explaining the positive successes achieved; positive success being often constructed as applying the comprehensive approach, finding indicators of success beyond proofs that a comprehensive strategy has been applied might not always been necessary. Discursive dominance is achieved thanks to the rallying comparative advantage of the comprehensive approach.

## Conclusion

Combining corpus linguistics techniques with traditional qualitative approaches this article has demonstrated that the comprehensive approach to security advocated by the European Union has systematically been represented as the most efficient, evident and natural option to tackle the threat of piracy at the Horn of Africa. This naturalization implies that the EU is represented as successful by the simple fact that it applies such an approach. Consequently, the EU’s projection activities are rationalized and normalized via the use of the comprehensive approach narrative. This illustrates the EU’s ongoing journey from being a ‘soft power’ (mainly civilian) actor to being a ‘smart power’ actor, which is in a position to combine some elements of ‘full-instrumental power’ with a ‘comprehensive approach’ narrative that is true to its values and eventually more rallying. This puts the EU in a valuable position when it comes to the future of its foreign-policy actorness.

We have shown that, in the context of counter-piracy at the Horn of Africa, the comprehensive approach has achieved discursive dominance. This case study contributes to the debate about the centrality of the comprehensive approach within the EU’s foreign, defence and security policy discourse, which our findings quantitatively demonstrates with the aim to contribute to the existing qualitative literature on the question as well as to expose the relevance of corpus approaches to international relations.

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<sup>51</sup> J. Zielonka, ‘Europe’s new civilizing missions: the EU’s normative power discourse’, *Journal of Political Ideologies* 18, no. 1 (2013): 49.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>53</sup> Norheim-Martinsen, see n. 10 above, 527.

The comprehensive approach narrative is central to the EU's foreign, security and defence policy since it transcends the somewhat artificial barriers between the civilian, normative and full-instrumental power discourse. The EU is represented as having the solution to current security problems (such as piracy) in the form of the comprehensive approach. The EU's model is thus the legitimate one to follow (normative power, transformative power); civilian as well as military instruments are constructed as complementary when it comes to transforming the 'other'. This encompassing dimension of the comprehensive approach certainly explains its discursive dominance since it has the most rallying power of all the competing sub-discourses.