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## Somali Perspectives: Security, Elections, and the Federalisation Process

by Bernardo Venturi

### ABSTRACT

The high-level seminar held in Rome on 15 April 2016, which saw the participation of delegations from Galmudug and South West regional states, represented an important opportunity to trigger international dialogue on the future of Somali institutions and the security challenges affecting the Horn of Africa. The seminar was organised by the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) in collaboration with the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI), and the Embassy of Italy to the Federal Republic of Somalia. The security situation seems to have improved, even if the path towards stabilisation and peace still appears to be troubled and in need of international assistance to build up reliable local forces. At the same time, the definition of a viable electoral system seems to be a key aspect for the future of Somalia. Finally, building a federalist model appeared to be a common ground, but the kind of federalism to adopt is still a matter of contention and discussion.

*Somalia | Security | Elections | Federalism*



## Somali Perspectives: Security, Elections, and the Federalisation Process

by Bernardo Venturi\*

### Introduction

The high-level seminar held in Rome on 15 April 2016 represented an important opportunity to discuss the future of Somali institutions and the security challenges affecting the country. The seminar – organised by the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) in collaboration with the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI), and the Embassy of Italy to the Federal Republic of Somalia – featured a productive talk on the Somali situation, with particular attention to security challenges, the electoral process and the federalisation perspectives. This report provides a summary of the meeting and highlights the key points that emerged from the debate.<sup>1</sup>

The three themes mentioned above were introduced by the President of the Galmudug regional state of Somalia, Abdikareem Guled, and the President of the South West regional state of Somalia, Hassan Sheikh Aden Issak. The seminar also saw the participation of a delegation from Galmudug regional state, composed of Hared Ali Hared, Deputy Speaker of Galmudug State Parliament, and Abdallah Abshir Sharif, Personal Assistant to the President; and a delegation from South West regional state, including Abdullahi Sheikh Hassan Ali, Minister of Commerce, and Mohamed Hagi Abdinur, Senior Advisor of the President.

**Gianni Bonvicini**, IAI Executive Vice President, introduced the meeting highlighting that IAI already held a similar seminar on 6 May 2015,<sup>2</sup> which saw the participation of delegations from Puntland and Jubaland, and that these seminars enjoyed the full support of the MAECI. The objective of this initiative was twofold:

<sup>1</sup> See also the interview with Ali Dahir, Senior executive of Shabelle Media Network: <https://youtu.be/ezERZ91zkyE>.

<sup>2</sup> See the seminar report: Stefano Pioppi, “Somali Perspectives: Institutional and Policy Challenges”, in *Documenti IAI*, No. 15|18 (May 2015): <http://www.iai.it/en/node/4185>.

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· Report of the high-level seminar on “Somali Perspectives: Institutional and Policy Challenges” organised in Rome on 15 April 2016 by the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) in collaboration with the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI), and the Embassy of Italy to the Federal Republic of Somalia.

to foster cooperation and support towards the Somali regional states for a future Somali federation, and to understand better the current trends in the country and the Horn of Africa region.

IAI President **Ferdinando Nelli Feroci** welcomed the representatives of the two regional states and thanked the MAECI for their consideration and support. President Nelli Feroci stated that Somalia has made significant steps forward in the last years, even if security problems are still present. In addition, the federalist process is still undergoing a complex and challenging evolution.<sup>3</sup> The seminar could represent an opportunity for dialogue, also for academic representatives and the diaspora in Italy. He stressed IAI's availability for future similar exercises.



Seminar participants

**Marco Claudio Vozzi** (Directorate General for Global Affairs, Countries of Sub-Saharan Africa, Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation) thanked the representatives of the two regional states for their presence. In fact, he considered it paramount to have a direct dialogue with Somali regions, especially in this period. Security is still a matter of concern, but a lot has been done in the last years and the next elections represent another important milestone for the country. They are not based on the "one-person, one-vote" principle, but a lot of improvements were made. For Italy, Somalia is a priority for the Italian Government in terms of both diplomacy and cooperation.

**Abdikareem Guled**, President of Galmudug regional state of Somalia, thanked the Italian MFA and IAI for this initiative. Galmudug is an official regional state in central Somalia merging Galgaduud and Mudug regions. The state is strategic for connecting Northern and Southern Somalia.

**Hassan Sheikh Aden Issak**, President of South West regional state of Somalia, thanked the promoters for welcoming his delegation. The South West regional state of Somalia is a highly populated autonomous region in southwestern Somalia. It was originally founded by Hasan Muhammad Nur Shatigadud, leader of the Rahanweyn Resistance Army (RRA) on 1 April 2002.

<sup>3</sup> For an overview on the current situation in Somalia, see Rossella Marangio, "Somalia: A Long Road Ahead", in *IAI Working Papers*, No. 16|10 (April 2016), <http://www.iai.it/en/node/6230>.



From left to right: Hared Ali Hared, Abdikareem Guled, Osman Lul Mohamed, Gianni Bonvicini

## 1. The security situation

President Abdikareem Guled presented the current security situation in Somalia as the most positive phase in recent Somali history. Al-Shabaab is still present in the region through violent actions, but it is weaker than in the past and the Italian government is supporting the Somali government in the fight against it. President Guled advocated for resources for AMISOM and more for the Somali security forces, with a

view to establishing a federal army and a state police in each region as a precondition for an effective and sustainable peace. He also added that the current relations among Somali regions are based more on cooperation than conflict, in accordance with the principle "create peace among us, be in peace with our neighbourhood and create progress."

President Hassan Sheikh Aden Issak described Somalia as on its way to reconciliation after very difficult years of war among clans. The fact that, contrary to most of past peace negotiations that were held abroad, the current meetings are taking place mainly in Somalia represents a step forward in this direction. In South West regional state, Al-Shabaab had a strong presence, creating wars, but this violence is decreasing, also thanks to AMISOM support. President Issak stressed that Al-Shabaab, like other terrorist groups in the world, does not have any religious connotation. AMISOM helped to clean the cities of terrorism, but Al-Shabaab is still present in remote areas and the President advocated for local forces with expertise on the ground to free the Somali population of terrorist groups. Local forces need training, technical and financial assistance to support this struggle. AMISOM should not stay in Somalia for a long time, but support a transition toward a functioning national army and local police forces. Beyond security, social protection is needed, as people should realise that war is over and services are available and they need to see a state that is working properly. He also identified as crucial needs: job opportunities, education (schools and vocational courses, also to avoid enrolment of youth in local militias) and rule of law.

Answering a question addressed by Nicoletta Pirozzi, IAI's Senior Fellow, both presidents described the EU's support to Somali police as effective, but very small compared to local needs. Then they described the desired model of police as based on a network of regionally-organised forces to be connected with the federal level, stressing the existence of a common vision on it among the Somali regional states.

## 2. The electoral process and the federalisation process

President Abdikareem Guled stated that in early April 2016 the federal government reached a collective agreement through the National Leaders Forum on the electoral process and they will elect the two chambers in August 2016 (Upper House before the Lower House). After that, the president will be elected. In addition, at the end of May a



From left to right: Hassan Sheikh Aden Issak, Mohamed Hagi Abdinur, Abdullahi Sheikh Hassan Ali

conference will gather the current Parliament and the regional states and will discuss the Constitution, also involving representatives of civil society organisations. "Somalia will soon stand on its own feet." This political system has advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, people can decide who represents them. In addition, the population will have power at the regional level, avoiding a single competition for the central government, and this will also favour a more efficient division of power and positions between central and local levels. As far as the disadvantages are concerned, the country does not have appropriate legislation for a federal state, especially as the division of competences is still unclear. Moreover, there is an underlying misconception of federalism as a division across clan lines, while it should be considered a way to join up efforts for the whole country.

President Hassan Sheikh Aden Issak described how 13,750 Somali representatives will elect the parliament. It does not represent a final result, but a significant step forward compared to previous elections in which only 135 elders elected the representatives. He stated that in 2020 Somalia will reach a full democracy, based on the principle "one-man, one-vote." This period will be very difficult for local politicians to prepare elections. Security should be the first priority and international support is needed. President Issak urged the Italian government to support that process, recalling the cultural and historical ties that unite the two countries.

President Abdikareem Guled pointed out that Somali government is convinced of its choice of a federalist system, "overcoming all misunderstandings of the last 26 years." Nevertheless, the President of Galmudug reiterated that the federal system has some disadvantages. For examples, current Somali laws are not appropriate for this system, because they were planned for a centralised government. In addition, Somali people consider federalism divisive. They still have to clarify the division of competences between the federal institutions and the regional states, for instance in regard to agriculture, fisheries and taxes, and the kind of federalism to adopt is also still under discussion.





From left to right: Joshua Massarenti, Hared Ali  
Hared, Abdikareem Guled

President Hassan Sheikh Aden Issak described federalism as a bottom-up process of state-building. However, he highlighted that it also needs technical assistance from outside. He considers federalism as the right solution for Somalia, but his administration does not know which form of federalism they need. He also advocated for a central state closer to all citizen, in cities and remote areas.

### Conclusion

Gianni Bonvicini described the requested cooperation between Italy and Somalia as based on three axes. Firstly, support to police forces (i.e., training, equipment, salaries, etc.); then, support to local populations through social services such as schools, vocational training, health services and a judicial system; finally, support for the discussion and implementation of a federal model. From the discussion, it emerged that the security situation has generally improved, even if it remains critical in some areas and still in need of international assistance to build up reliable local forces. At the same time, a functioning electoral system seemed to emerge as a decisive element for the future of Somalia. Finally, the federalist option seemed to be a common ground, but the kind of federalism to adopt is still under discussion. The meeting confirmed, as stated by Rossella Marangio, that "dialogue and negotiations between the different components of the federal state need to be enhanced and continuously supported, both by domestic and international actors."<sup>4</sup>

*Updated 9 May 2016*

<sup>4</sup> Rossella Marangio, "Somalia: A Long Road Ahead", cit., p. 9.

### Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)

Founded by Altiero Spinelli in 1965, does research in the fields of foreign policy, political economy and international security. A non-profit organisation, the IAI aims to further and disseminate knowledge through research studies, conferences and publications. To that end, it cooperates with other research institutes, universities and foundations in Italy and abroad and is a member of various international networks. More specifically, the main research sectors are: European institutions and policies; Italian foreign policy; trends in the global economy and internationalisation processes in Italy; the Mediterranean and the Middle East; defence economy and policy; and transatlantic relations. The IAI publishes an English-language quarterly (*The International Spectator*), an online webzine (*AffarInternazionali*), two series of research papers (*Quaderni IAI* and *IAI Research Papers*) and other papers' series related to IAI research projects.

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