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**"The EU as a Global Actor: Peace,
Security and Conflict"**

The discursive construction of local
ownership in the European Union's
integrated approach to Somalia

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Introduction

As the European Union (EU) aims to be a global actor, it is active in multiple regions of the world. One of these regions is Africa, where the EU has numerous active peacebuilding or peacekeeping missions under the umbrella of the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP). In the Horn of Africa, the EU has deployed the missions EUNAVFOR Operation Atalanta and EUCAP Somalia. Where Operation Atalanta contributes to overall maritime security in the Northwestern Indian Ocean by preventing and combatting acts of piracy, EUCAP Somalia assists in strengthening the maritime law enforcement capacity. Both missions are part of the EU's integrated approach to Somalia, in which the objectives and strategies vis-à-vis the region are outlined. This paper seeks to offer a comprehensive analysis of the EU's integrated approach to Somalia, with emphasis on the representation of the 'local' in the EU's discourses regarding both CSDP missions. In other words, the paper assesses how the concept of local ownership is accounted for in these discourses. In a broader context, this relates to the question to what extent these CSDP missions, and the EU's integrated approach to Somalia in general, maintain the so-called liberal peace logic by, inter alia, not incorporating the local voice in its approach, or whether this logic is countered by embedding the 'local' in its strategies and aims.

As a result, to this paper the subsequent question is central: *how is local ownership discursively constructed in the European Union's integrated approach to Somalia?* To be able to analyze in a systematic way the EU's discourses on the Operation Atalanta and EUCAP Somalia missions, the paper uses a critical discourse analysis. Before this, the relevant literature and theories regarding the paper's central concepts are outlined, after which the methodology is described in the assessment/conceptual framework. After, the analysis and findings are delineated. Here, the discursive themes and patterns that are observed in the EU's discourses, with regard to the construction of local ownership, are explained. From this, it becomes evident that there is, in practice, a two-sided result: in its general strategies vis-à-vis the region, the EU does emphasize the 'local', but this is subsequently not reflected in the CSDP mission's operational framework.

Literature review and theoretical framework

This section discusses the prevailing literature and theories concerning the key concepts of this paper.

Peacekeeping-building

In general, peacekeeping is seen as a multinational force, sometimes with a civilian element, mandated to administer, monitor, or patrol in conflict areas in a neutral and impartial way, usually with the consent of the parties to the dispute, and often under the provisions of Chapter VI of the UN Charter (Pugh, 2004, 47). The Lisbon Treaty marked the first time an EU treaty explicitly referred to peacekeeping. For the EU, peacekeeping is considered the operational capacity drawing on civilian and military assets deployed in missions outside the Union for peace-keeping, conflict prevention, as well as strengthening international security. Today, most peacekeeping missions are situated in Africa (Brosig, 2014, 74-78).

Peacebuilding is fundamentally different from peacekeeping, although both can build on each other in practice, as peacebuilding emphasizes rebuilding war-affected communities through identifying and supporting structures to consolidate peace to avoid a relapse into armed conflict (Boutros-Ghali, 1992). In other words, peacebuilding therefore addresses the underlying causes of conflict and concentrates on establishing a sustainable peace in the long term, while peacekeeping concerns maintaining or restoring peace in a conflict-affected area by focusing on specific security concerns.

Furthermore, due to an attempt to distinguish conceptually between different types of missions, peacekeeping is also referred to as multidimensional peacekeeping, second generation peacekeeping, as well as peace enforcement (Pugh, 2004, 48). All of these, and hence peacekeeping in general, hold one interrelating element: in practice, peacekeeping, with all its various terms, occupies an ethically moral ground characterized by peace being desirable and humanitarianism being approved as an ethical response to human suffering. As a result, it is argued that peace support is often being seen as a positive signifier, implying a moral concern for security and order in the international system (Pugh, 2004, 48).

This moral concern can, however, be Western-centric and for that reason maintain an uneven power relationship between the 'West' and the Global South. In other words, peacekeeping missions often, inter alia, promote moral responses to conflict that reinforce Western superiority, while neglecting the underlying injustices that produce instabilities in the functioning of a country or region. As such, it is theorized that peacekeeping missions, the same applies to peacebuilding missions (and perhaps even more), inherently enable a certain vision of the world order: the so-called liberal peace (Duffield, 2001).

Eurocentrism

The liberal peace is considered as a distinct set of particular ideas and practices intended to reform and regulate polities in the Global South in order to avoid poverty and conflict (Sabaratnam, 2014, 259-260). As Richmond (2006, 298) theorizes, the liberal peace is produced via the methodologies connected to a certain 'peacebuilding consensus', where like-minded liberal states live together in a western-oriented

international society while states are characterized by principles such as democracy, human rights, free markets, development, a well-functioning civil society, as well as multilateralism. As such, it is argued that the liberal peace is a discourse, framework, or structure, with a distinct ontology and methodology. In practice, this logic claims to be a Platonic ideal and a Kantian moral imperative: often it is a certain discourse that may silence any thought or discussion of other alternatives (Richmond, 2006, 295).

Liberal peace directly relates to the concept of Eurocentrism, which refers to the sensibility that Europe is historically, economically, culturally, and politically distinctive in ways which determine the overall character of world politics (Sabaratnam, 2014, 261). Eurocentrism materializes in many ways, with this paper predominantly emphasizing the way in which Western-based interventions, such as peacekeeping missions, may facilitate a certain strand of the liberal peace to which ontologies of Otherness between the 'liberal' and the 'local' are central (Richmond, 2010; 2011). Here, the 'liberal' refers to Western traditions of thought and doing, which corresponds with criticism on the liberal peace for exercising a colonial gaze in its treatment of local 'recipients' of peace efforts (Richmond, 2005).

In addition, as Richmond (2010, 669) argues, the 'local' is a space characterized by context, custom, tradition and differences, which is often suppressed by Western peace efforts. It is hence theorized that we have to move towards a so-called 'post-liberal peace', where ontologically separated elements are reunited by means of hybridity and empathy in which the everyday local agencies, rights and needs are recognized as discursive 'webs of meaning' (Richmond, 2010, 668). It is at the same time, however, argued that that this call for increased local engagement in Western peace operations, de facto sustains a Eurocentric stance as well by putting the cultural differences between two parties (the 'liberal' and the 'local') at the center of future action (Sabaratnam, 2014, 267).

The 'local' (turn)

As MacGinty and Richmond (2013, 769) argue, the 'local' is seen as a range of locally based agencies present in a conflict or post-conflict environment, some of which aim to create the necessary processes for peace, with or without international help, and framed in a manner in which legitimacy in local and international terms unite. Related to this is the concept of local ownership, which has been endorsed by conflict-affected states, international organizations, as well as aid agencies involved in peace activities (Ejdus & Juncos, 2018, 6-7). In general, The EU sees ownership as a dialogue that must develop into a cooperative responsibility of internationals and locals for mutually agreed objectives (Ejdus, 2017, 467).

Furthermore, a theoretical distinction can be made between 4 categories of local ownership. First, the minimalist perspective, associated with the liberal peace logic, understates the meaning of ownership to a transfer of responsibility or a buy-in of local elites into externally designed interventions (Paris, 2010; Ejdus, 2017; Ejdus & Juncos, 2018). The maximalist perspective on the other hand, drawing upon the logic of communitarianism, theorizes that ownership encompasses genuine leadership and broad-based participation of locals. Third, the middle-ground perspective balances between both

and emphasizes the necessity of interlinking international agency and local agency (Ejdus & Juncos 2018, 14).

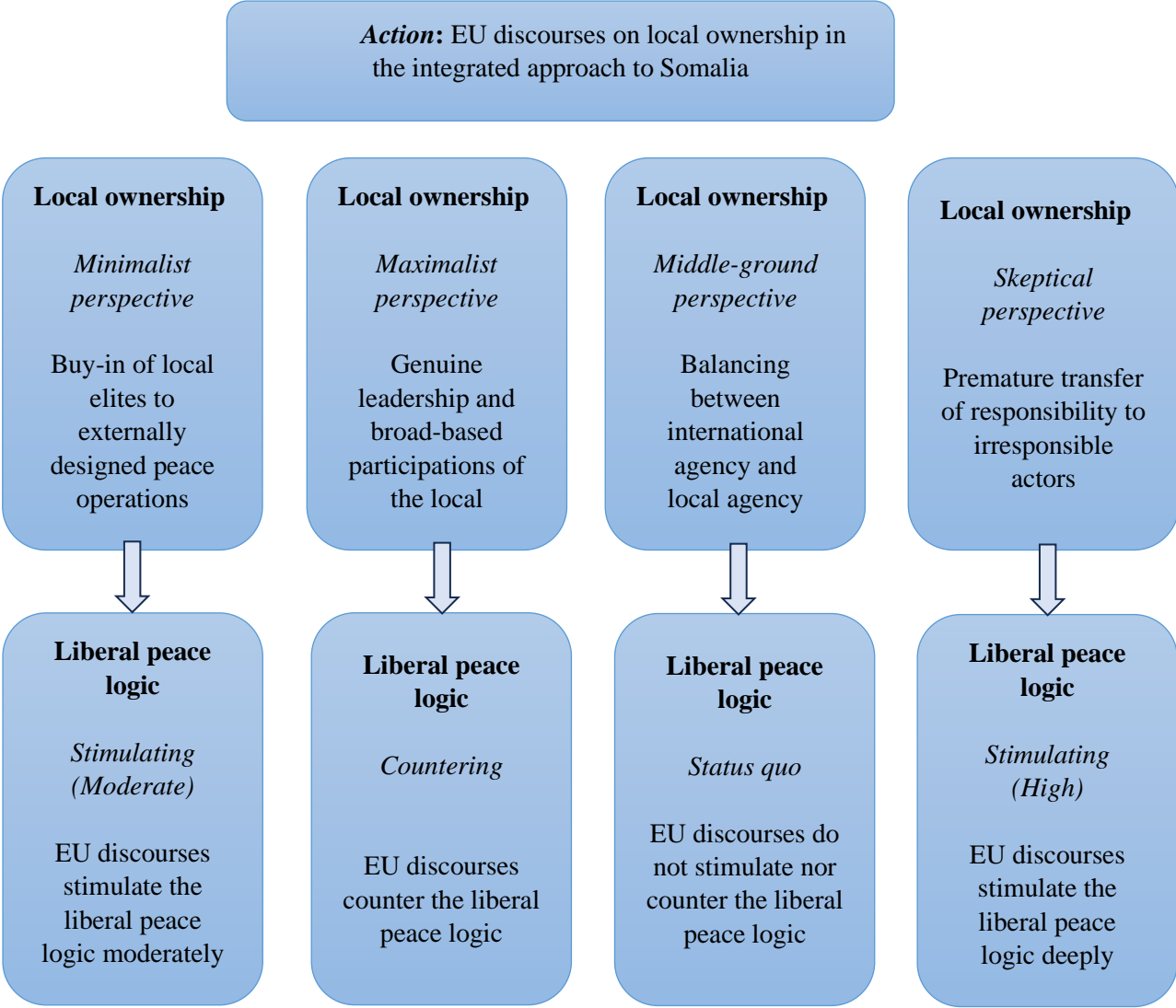
Generally, the increased awareness of the ‘local’ in peace activities is two-sided: it is evident in today’s policymaking on peace activities, as well as a shift in the scholarly literature. One of the main origins of this so-called ‘local turn’ is a critique on the liberal peace paradigm (Heathershaw, 2008; Chandler, 2010; Richmond, 2010). The local turn, in practice, materialized into increased theoretical engagement with social theories such as critical theory, postcolonialism, and poststructuralism, while the empirical lens moved away from a top-down perspective to the grassroots, local and the everyday dynamics of peacebuilding (Auteserre, 2014; as cited in Ejdus & Juncos, 2018, 7).

However, not everyone agrees with the rationales of the local turn. It is stated that although solutions are identified as local, traditional, or indigenous, it does not directly mean that these are necessarily just or sustainable in the long term (Paris, 2010). Other critiques go beyond this argumentation and maintain that the adoption of local-oriented policies mask the power asymmetries that are entangled into liberal peacebuilding and hence minimizes the autonomy and freedom of locals (Chandler, 2010; as cited in Ejdus & Juncos 2018, 8). Criticism of the local turn, to a certain extent, correspond with the skeptical perspective on local ownership, which argues that this activates a premature transfer of responsibility to irresponsible actors (Joseph, 2007, 112), and is essentially used as a “legitimizing concept” (Wilén, 2009).

Synthesis: Assessment framework

The literature review and theoretical framework results in the conceptual framework displayed as table 1. This research uses the theoretical distinction of local ownership by Ejdus and Juncos (2014) to assess which discursive representation of local ownership becomes noticeable in the EU’s discourse on the integrated approach to Somalia. The discursive types of local ownership result in a different status and construction of local ownership in EU discourse. Every discursive construction of local ownership thus develops into a specific meaning of the ‘liberal’ versus the ‘local’ and/or Europe/the ‘West’ versus the Horn of Africa/Somalia. Fundamentally, EU discourses stimulate or counter the liberal peace logic here.

Table 1: Synthesizing concepts; conceptual framework



How is this research executed? This qualitative study uses critical discourse analysis (CDA) to examine in a systematic way the European Union's (EU) discourses vis-à-vis EUNAVFOR Operation Atalanta and EUCAP Somalia, thus the EU's integrated approach to Somalia in general, and to assess in which way local ownership is subsequently accounted for in these CSDP missions. CDA as a research method, in practice, enables the assessment of the ways in which power relations between two distinct actors (the EU and Somalia), spaces (Europe/the 'West' and Somalia/the Horn of Africa/the Global South), as well as constructs (the 'liberal' and the 'local') are discursively represented in EU discourse.

For this research, secondary data from EU documents, such as mission mandates and strategy papers, are analyzed (appendix 1). The data is retrieved from EU websites and constitutes the study's empirical material. The timeframe for the data collection spans from January 2008 to January 2024, so that the informal and formal initiation of both CSDP missions is included. Furthermore, in the data collection, emphasis is on EU institutional representation rather than discourses of individual EU actors. For the data analysis, a pre-defined codebook is used (appendix 2), which encompasses the 4 distinct perspectives on local ownership. This codebook facilitates, in practice, the identification of discursive themes and patterns in the data analysis, as well as the reflexive interpretation of the selected discourses.

Analysis and findings

The analysis discusses and explains the key themes and insights stemming from the data interpretation.

The ‘local’ in general EU strategic frameworks

Is there a ‘local’ in the European Union’s discourses regarding its integrated approach to Somalia, with emphasis on the CSDP missions EUNAVFOR Operation Atlanta and EUCAP Somalia? The discursive mentioning of local ownership is limited in EU discourses and at times when this does become evident, it often reflects general language without specifics. Interestingly, the EU does refer to the ‘local’ and incorporates discursive elements of local ownership in its discourse in general strategic frameworks vis-à-vis the Horn of Africa as a region, but this local ownership element does subsequently not become noticeable in EU discourses in operational documents concerning this paper’s specific CSDP missions.

In the EU’s 2021 general new strategy for the Horn of Africa, it is, inter alia, stated that “*The EU will pay special attention to inclusivity. Civil society, women and youth are key drivers of change and must be included in peace and state-building efforts*” (Council of the European Union, 2021). This statement, to some extent, refers to the maximalist perspective of local ownership, in which the genuine leadership of the local and the broad-based participation of the local is emphasized. In the same strategy and with regard to the same perspective of local ownership, it is also maintained by the EU that “*It (the EU) will engage closely with the private sector and members of the diasporas and will promote and strengthen civil society including at the grassroots level*” (Council of the European Union, 2021).

Furthermore, in the EU’s Horn of Africa Regional Action Plan, it is articulated that “*The EU should continue to be involved in conflict prevention and mediation processes at various levels – from the governmental to local communities - and at different stages - from preliminary talks to the implementation phase of peace agreements*” (Council of the European Union, 2015), as well as “*the EU should also support efforts by civil society organizations and local communities to facilitate local conflict mediation and resolution (...)*” (Council of the European Union, 2015). This type of discourses indicate that the EU does, although to a limited extent and typically in general strategic documents, align in some of its aims with the maximalist perspective of local ownership. In other words, in these instances the EU shows that it puts discursive emphasis on the importance of local decision-making power and local participation in peace activities. These types of discourses, as claimed by this paper, counter the liberal peace logic to an extent in which the ‘liberal’ and the ‘local’ as two constructs or narratives, and the EU and the Horn of Africa as distinct spaces, are put side by side on an equal footing in which the ‘local’ is constructed not as hierarchically lower than the EU but as even and valuable in the peace process. Or as Richmond puts it (2010, 668), local ownership is seen as discursive ‘webs of meaning’.

Other local ownership statuses are evident in the same documents to the Horn of Africa as well. In the EU’s 2021 new strategy for the Horn of Africa, it is, inter alia, stated that “*The EU will support and promote mechanisms – especially African-owned – for further effective prevention, de-escalation and peaceful settlement of disputes and for reconciliation by encouraging dialogue and mediation as*

well as increasing capacity to analyze, monitor, prevent, mitigate and resolve emerging conflict issues, including on borders” (Council of the European Union, 2021). These discourses do not explicitly refer to the genuine and broad-based participation of local communities in peace activities as observed in the maximalist perspective, but they do indicate that the EU acknowledges, to a certain extent, local agency in emphasizing that specifically African-owned mechanisms are encouraged. In the same manner, the subsequent statement is visible in the 2021 new strategy for the Horn of Africa, in which it becomes evident that the EU emphasizes an inclusive decision-making process in its actions vis-à-vis the Horn of Africa as a region and Somalia: *“The EU remains committed to continue supporting Somalia’s reform and reconciliation agenda, while the federal and regional leaderships must considerably step up efforts in a consensual and inclusive manner”* (Council of the European Union, 2021).

These discourses correspond with what has been conceptualized in the theoretical framework as the middle-ground perspective, in which local ownership is delineated as striking a balance between the minimalist and maximalist idea. In both discourses, the EU does stimulate local agency in the decision-making process, but at the same time remains vague and distant from the actual event, and by doing so maintains ownership itself. These discourses do not construct and reduce local ownership to a simple transfer of responsibility or a buy-in of local elites to externally designed peace operations, and they do not consider local ownership as something that is deeply tied to a process which is bottom-up, grass-roots, or as embedding the leadership of the ‘local’ in the decision-making process either. In other words, this paper argues that this type of discourse inherently maintains the status quo; these discourses do not stimulate the liberal peace logic through which an uneven relationship between the ‘liberal’ and the ‘local’ is constructed, but they do not actively counter the same logic either.

Moreover, the EU remains distant from discourses that align with the minimalist perspective, in which local ownership is reduced to a simple transfer of responsibility or a buy-in of mainly local elites into externally designed peace activities. The same applies to the skeptical perspective, in which local ownership is framed as something unwanted due to the lack of responsibility of the ‘local’ and the lack of preparation and capacity building. As the minimalist and skeptical perspective are not observed in this specific data analysis, and with regard to the above findings, this paper claims that the EU tends to lean towards the middle-ground perspective of local ownership in its language in the general strategic frameworks vis-à-vis the Horn of Africa and Somalia, while at the same time putting emphasis on local ownership as understood in the maximalist perspective in some (but less) instances as well.

The ‘local’ in CSDP operational frameworks

Does the mentioning of implementing the ‘local’ in peace activities in the Horn of Africa and Somalia become apparent in the actual operational frameworks of Operation Atalanta and EUCAP Somalia as CSDP missions as well? Or alternatively, is there a substantive gap between the construction of local ownership in the EU’s general strategy regarding this region and the eventual operationalization of it?

In the mandate of the Operation Atalanta mission, labelled “The Council of the European Union Joint Action 2008/851/CFSP of 10 November 2008 on a European Union military operation to contribute to the deterrence, prevention and repression of acts of piracy and armed robbery off the Somali coast (EUNAVFOR Operation Atalanta)”, no mentioning of involving the ‘local’ in the mission’s objectives, or of local agency in general, is observed. The EU, in its discourses, does refer to partnering with other actors in this specific mission, but remains detached from discourses that emphasize the importance of local partners in this process. The EU, inter alia, discursively refers to working with other actors and agencies in Operation Atalanta as “*Liaise with organizations and entities, as well as States, working in the region to combat acts of piracy and armed robbery off the Somali coast, in particular the ‘Combined Task Force 150’ maritime force which operates within the framework of ‘Operation Enduring Freedom’*” (The Council of the European Union, 2008). Here, Operating Enduring Freedom falls under an US-owned framework, with Western countries such as France, Germany and the UK contributing to the mentioned Combined Task Force 150 (Royal Navy, 2024). This is far from any actual local involvement.

EUCAP Somalia, in comparison with Operation Atalanta, has more peacebuilding elements, such as strengthening the capacity of local police authorities to combat wider national instabilities. But here, in the analyzed documents, no explicit position or references to local agency or incorporation of the ‘local’ in the mission’s discourses is observed either. So, in short, whereas the EU is active in mentioning the ‘local’ and emphasizing the involvement of local agency in its general strategic frameworks vis-à-vis the Horn of Africa and Somalia, adhering to what in this paper has been theorized as the maximalist and middle-ground perspective of local ownership, the same logic does not become visible when analyzing the operational frameworks of CSDP missions in the same region. In other words, there is a gap between what the EU aims to organize in the Horn of Africa and Somalia with regard to the ‘local’, and what it says in the actual documents where these objectives must be applied.

Conclusion

How is local ownership constructed in the European Union's integrated approach to Somalia? The EU's integrated approach to Somalia reflects varying amounts of emphasis on local ownership. In its broader strategies vis-à-vis the Horn of Africa region, the EU emphasizes inclusivity and local agency in the decision-making processes of peace activities. The maximalist and middle-ground perspective of local ownership are visible here, accentuating broad-based participation of the 'local' and a balancing act between acknowledging local agency and maintaining international agency. As such, in the EU's general discourse on the operational region, discourses to some extent counter the liberal peace logic by constructing the 'liberal' and the 'local' on an equal footing, emphasizing the value of the 'local' voice in peace activities. At the same time, most discourses tend to not stimulate the liberal peace logic while not countering it either, as it constructs local ownership as a constant interaction between the local and the international. In short, here, the EU seems to be engaged in embedding the 'local' into its strategies.

However, a gap emerges when examining the operational frameworks of its CSDP missions. In the EU's discourses on Operation Atalanta and EUCAP Somalia, mainly in the mandate documents, there are no references to the 'local' or any mechanisms for involving local communities. Here, the EU does speak about collaboration with other actors but prioritizes external ones. This suggests a disconnect between the EU's discursive aspirations vis-à-vis local ownership in its integrated approach to Somalia and the operationalization of this in the relevant CSDP missions. To conclude, in general, local ownership is therefore absent in the EU's discourse on Operation Atalanta and EUCAP Somalia. Yet, this does not mean that local ownership is ignored by the EU at all. As this paper was interested in the institutional representation of the EU, it exclusively analyzed the formal discourses of EU institutions. This unlocks a potential avenue for future research, as it is relevant to assess EU discourses on the same issue from a non-institutional context to which discourses of individual EU actors are central. This approach could result into different findings. Furthermore, as this paper is merely interested in the construction of local ownership in EU discourse, it is interesting to assess how the operational framework of both missions, thus its strategies and aims, are executed on the ground in Somalia. Only when these avenues are utilized, a complete understanding of local ownership in the EU's integrated approach to Somalia can be achieved.

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Appendix 1: Data collection

1. The Council of the European Union JOINT ACTION 2008/851/CFSP of 10 November 2008 on a European Union military operation to contribute to the deterrence, prevention, and repression of acts of piracy and armed robbery off the Somali coast (EUNAVFOR Operation Atalanta)
2. The 2011 European Union Horn of Africa Strategic Framework
3. Council Decision 2012/389/CFSP of 16 July 2012 on the European Union Mission on Regional Maritime Capacity Building in the Horn of Africa (EUCAP NESTOR)
4. The 2015-2020 European Union Horn of Africa Regional Action Plan
5. The 2020 agreement between the European Union and the Federal Republic of Somalia on the status of the EUCAP Somalia mission
6. The 2021 European Union new strategy for the Horn of Africa

Appendix 2: Codebook

<i>Discursive type/category</i>		
Minimalist perspective	<p>Code 1.1. A buy-in from local elites</p> <p>Description: Focus on instances where local ownership is portrayed as involving the support or cooperation of local elites without broad-based (and bottom-up) local engagement</p>	
Maximalist perspective	<p>Code 2.1. Genuine leadership of the local</p> <p>Description: Focus on instances where the authentic leadership, agency, and decision-making power of the local is being emphasized</p>	<p>Code 2.2. Broad-based participation</p> <p>Description: Focus on instances where the active involvement and collaboration of a broad range of local actors is emphasized, not just elites</p>
Middle-ground perspective	<p>Code 3.1. Balancing between the international and the local</p> <p>Description: Focus on instances where a balance is emphasized between adhering to international norms and respecting the local voice</p>	<p>Code 3.2. Local norms and agency</p> <p>Description: Focus on instances where the importance of local agency and/or local practices is generally emphasized in the decision-making process</p>
Skeptical perspective	<p>Code 4.1. Premature responsibility transfer</p> <p>Description: Focus on instances where local ownership is being constructed as undesirable due to a lack of preparation and capacity building</p>	<p>Code 4.2. Irresponsible actors</p> <p>Description: Focus on instances where the capacity and responsibility of local actors in taking ownership is being questioned</p>