

Viktor MARSAI:¹ Somali elections in 2016-2017 – Business as usual or a new hope?

Executive Summary

- In 2012 Somalia held elections for the first time since its state collapse in 1991. As a result of a political compromise, the group of 135 traditional elders, officially nominated by the clans, selected the 275 MPs according to the 4.5 formula, providing representation for each four big clan families and for the minorities.
- The process lacked any transparency and was encumbered by bribery and corruption. Even though the elections managed to maintain clan balance and facilitate a relatively smooth transition of power without armed clashes, the parties promised to organize free, direct and democratic (one person – one vote) elections in 2016.
- Despite a 2-year negotiation process, the last parliamentary and presidential elections also failed to meet expectations due to strongly represented clan interests.
- As federal member states have fallen into the hands of wrangling clans and sub-clans, some people describe Somali federalism as the Balkanization of the country.
- The religious transformation of the society from moderate Sunnism to a more conservative Salafism is also ongoing.

Following decades mired in civil war and lacking a functional government, Somalia established a new Federal Government in 2012. Nevertheless, its leaders' (s)election process has been encumbered by corruption, bribery, and never-ending clan disputes. In addition, decision-making power has been concentrated in the hands of 135 traditional elders who were selected according to the 4.5 clan-formula without the participation of the wider society. To ensure the smooth transition from interim governments to permanent institutional structures, both the Somali elites and the international donors accepted the rules and handicaps of 2012. At the same time, they promised that the election will be credible, transparent and more democratic in 2016. The current analysis offers an evaluative overview of those circumstances that hindered the democratic transition, while also highlighting those features that offer hope for further progress.

General background and structural frameworks

Before delving into a deeper analysis of the development of electoral processes on the Horn of Africa in 2016-2017, it is necessary to develop a general framework for understanding political dynamics in Somalia. Clans, Somali elites, foreign actors, and last but not least al-Shabaab have played significant roles in shaping these dynamics.

Clans have always played a fundamental role in shaping political, social and cultural relations on the Horn of Africa. Although some researchers try to emphasise that the clan as a political category is much more an artificial construction than an organic one,² the earliest documents of Somali history demonstrate that, at least since the end of the 19th

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² See: KAPTEIJNS, Lidwien: *Clan Cleansing in Somalia. The Ruinous Legacy of 1991*. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2013.



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century, clans have operated as political actors too.³ Regardless of the origins of clans, almost all analysts accept the clan is a basic element of political life in present day Somalia. We can find clan dynamics not only in the competition for the control of the federal government in Mogadishu, but also in the political struggles among federal member states, the independence efforts of Somaliland, the strategies of al-Shabaab in the countryside, and behind the regular clashes between pastoral communities for grazing lands, cattle and water. Even such universalist entities as the Islamic State try to utilize old clan grievances and tensions during their expansions.⁴ This is also true of the Shura (Council) of al-Shabaab, which is currently building ties with old clan structures and elders to gain more support from society.⁵ Therefore, analyses of Somali political dynamics must address clans.

Somali elites are closely tied to clans. In 2000, during the Arta process in Djibouti, the international community and Somalis theoretically agreed that clans formed the basis of Somali politics and should play a role in forming transitional governments. The solution crystalized in the (in)famous 4.5 formula, which provided one-one portion for each four big clan families and a half for minorities (1+1+1+1+0.5=4.5). Garoweonline explains that the „formula... acknowledges the primacy of Somali clan loyalties,” and „ensured that the spoils of power can theoretically be divided between the four main groups – the Hawiye, Darod, Dir, and Rahaweyn – and the ‘others’, an amalgamation of smaller clans.”⁶ In the coming years both seats in the parliament and the positions in the cabinets were distributed according to this formula.

Nevertheless, since 2000 many politicians and civil society actors have criticized the 4.5 system. They alleged that the model favours majority clan families and discriminates against minor clans, which have only limited access to the political sphere. Although the supporters of the formula state that the four big clan families represent the overwhelming majority of the Somali citizens, critics counter this claim. Consequently, critics argue that the system contributes to the Balkanisation of the Horn and helps foreign powers to use the tool of „divide and rule” in Somalia.⁷

Others accept the legality of clan representation, but question whether the right people are sitting in Mogadishu, and whether they accurately represent their clans. Evidence suggests that a large portion of the Somali elite has already lost the confidence of the population. Trust in elites began to decline during the last years of the Barre era. The collapse of the state, the age of warlords and clan militias, and a series of unsuccessful national reconciliation meetings also eroded trust in the elites. As Ken Menkhaus demonstrated, most Somali politicians and businessmen were not interested in the rehabilitation of the central government, because it could endanger or at least limit their political and economic power and influence.⁸ Therefore, these meetings were not only unfruitful but also jeopardized confidence in traditional political groups. These circumstances directly contributed to the rise of Islamist political organisations on the Horn in the early 2000s because the population sought alternative political actors which they viewed as more credible than traditional elites.⁹ Al-Shabaab utilized and still utilises these emotions, capitalizing on their political and economic potential.

³ LEWIS, Ian M.: *A modern history of the Somali*. Ohio University Press, Athens, 2002.; DRAKE-BORCKMAN, Ralph E.: *British Somaliland*. Hurst and Blackett Ltd., London, 1912.

⁴ YUSUF, Zakaria – KHALID, Abdel: [The Islamic State Threat in Somalia’s Puntland State](#), [online], 17 11 2016. Source: *Crisis Group* [06 04 2017]

⁵ GRIDNEFF, Ilya: [Al-Shabaab Strategy Shifts Toward Clans as Presidential Election Looms](#), [online], 27 01 2017 Source: *Sahan Research* [06 04 2017]

⁶ HASSAN, Yusuf: [Somalia’s Path to Recovery is Not Just About Elections](#), [online], 09 02 2016 Source: *Garoweonline* [07 04 2017]

⁷ GELE, Abdi A.: [Four reasons to reject the Somalia’s 4.5 clan-based system of election in 2016](#), [online], 26 10 2015 Source: *Raxanreeb* [11 04 2017]

⁸ MENKHAUS, Ken: *Somalia: State Collapse and the Threat of Terrorism*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2004., Adalphi Paper 364, p. 15.

⁹ MENKHAUS, Ken: *The Crisis in Somalia: Tragedy in Five Acts*. *African Affairs*, Vol. CVI., Issue 204 (2007), pp. 357-390.



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Alongside clans and elites, foreign actors have played a significant role in shaping Somalia's political dynamics. During their history the Somali-inhabited areas were always influenced by external powers. External influence became even more prominent after the colonization of the region. The unique nature of this process stems from the fact that not only Great Britain, France and Italy, but also Ethiopia colonized parts of Somalia which determines Ethiopia-Somali relations even nowadays.¹⁰ In the last 130 years Ethiopia intervened in Somali politics several times, supporting different guerrilla groups in the Barre era, through the military invasion in 2006 to the efforts to shape Somali elections in 2016-2017.¹¹ In a more limited way, Kenya has also exerted influence, as its military forces (Kenyan Defence Forces – KDF) are in Somalia, too, as part of the AMISOM mission. Kenyan businessmen – and, according to rumours, the KDF¹² – also take part in economic activities in Southern Somalia, and Nairobi would like to control the political dynamics in Kismayo, too. Ahmed Madobe, the President of the Southern federal member state called the Interim Jubba Administration (IJA) is considered as the protégé of Kenya – although his loyalty and reliability are far from perfect.¹³ Thanks to their troop contribution to AMISOM, other African countries, like Uganda, Burundi and Djibouti also play minor, yet significant roles in shaping Somalian politics.

Although these states sometimes compete with each other, their main rivals are the countries of the Gulf. From this perspective, Somalia constitutes a battlefield between the mainly Christian African states and the Muslim Gulf nations plus Turkey, Egypt and Iran. However, this picture is clearly a simplification of the situation. While the Muslim Gulf states are engaged in their own internal conflicts – for instance, the tensions between Turkey and the United Arab Emirates, or the Sunni-majority countries and Iran – the Horn of Africa is affected by these rivalries as well. In this context, it is not accidental that al-Shabaab utilizes the narrative of a „clash of civilizations”, and often speaks about the „war against Islam,” the fight against „infidel crusaders” and the „apostate puppets of colonizing powers.”¹⁴ Once again, we must underline that this is an oversimplification of the processes and the facts. Yet, surveys suggest that this narrative remains powerful in Somalia, especially for the young: according to the research of Anneli Botha and Abdi Mahdi, 98 percent of interviewed al-Shabaab fighters felt that Islam is under attack on the Horn.¹⁵

To get a clearer picture of the ideological battles of the Horn, it is important to recognize that the region is fragmented by a clash not just between Islam and Christianity, but also between different Islamic schools and sects. Somalis traditionally follow the moderate Sufi scholars and imams, but in the last thirty years Salafist and Wahhabist groups managed to establish a bridgehead in the region. Some of them were even Jihadist, which gave an impetus for the establishment of al-Shabaab, while other fundamentalists chose a more peaceful way to seize power and transform society.¹⁶ What these groups share in common is that their primary enemies are not foreign Christian powers but moderate Sufi sects. Al-Shabaab regularly assassinates moderate imams,¹⁷ while the strongest political and military group of Sufis, the Ahlu Sunna Wal Jamal (ASWJ), is

¹⁰ See: LEWIS 2002, pp. 40-62.

¹¹ [CDRC Digest – A Special Issue in Connection With the Upcoming Elections in Somalia, Vol. 2. No. 1.](#), [online], January 2017, Source: *Cdrcethiopia.org* [12 04 2017]

¹² AGUTU, Nancy: [KDF in Sh41 billion illegal sugar, charcoal trade with al Shabaab – report](#), [online], 12 11 2015 Source: *The Star* [12 04 2017]

¹³ [The Kenyan Military Intervention in Somalia](#), [online], 12 02 2012, Source: *Crisis Group* [12 04 2017]

¹⁴ See the texts of al-Shabaab declarations: KRIEL, Robyn: [Al-Shabaab claims responsibility for Somalia in-flight jet blast](#), [online], 12 02 2016, Source: *CNN* [12 04 2017]; [Somalia's election is fraud, women not meant to be leaders, says Al Shabaab spokesman](#), [online], 06 01 2017, Source: *Garoweonline* [12 04 2017]

¹⁵ BOTHA, Anneli – MAHDI, Ali: [Radicalisation and al-Shabaab recruitment in Somalia](#), [online], September 2014, *ISS Paper 266* [12 04 2017]

¹⁶ MENKHAUS 2004, pp. 56-60.

¹⁷ [The brutal crime in Garowe: Killing our great cleric in between prostration or Sajud](#), [online], 19 02 2013, Source: *Shabelle* [13 04 2017]



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under continuous attack by the federal government,¹⁸ which has been in the hand of different orthodox or de facto Salafist groups since at least 2009.¹⁹

This internal war between different Islamist groups in Somalia is encouraged by foreign actors: Qatar, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and, according to rumours, Iran, all support different sects in the country. Accordingly, Somalia is home to a proxy war between Muslim countries not only for geopolitical reasons, but also for the souls and beliefs of the Somalis. It seems that Salafist groups tend to win this battle,²⁰ and their aim is to use Somalia as a bridgehead for the further expansion on the Horn and in the wider East African region.²¹

Last but not least, we have to mention the role of Western countries and organisations, including the United States, Great Britain, Italy, the EU and the United Nations. Contrary to the narrative of al-Shabaab, they are not necessarily the most important international actors in Somalia. Their financial contributions are essential in the deployment of AMISOM and in development activities, but the recent heated debates around the 20 percent cut of EU funding for the AU peacekeeping mission revealed that their options for directly shaping political dynamics on the ground are limited.²² Interviews in Nairobi and Addis Abeba also strengthen the idea that compared to their huge financial contributions – the EU is by far the biggest donor to Somalia – the political influence of Western actors is modest,²³ as it became evident during the 2016-2017 elections.

The fourth topic that we have to observe shortly is al-Shabaab. Although many politicians and analysts refer to al-Shabaab merely as a terrorist organisation, the group is a much more sophisticated entity. Al-Shabaab is by far the most unified and adaptable actor in Somalia, with a surprising capacity to renew itself and expand after repeated defeats.²⁴ Since its establishment in 2005, the organisation has lost two commanders, dozens of high-ranking commanders, and thousands of foot soldiers. It survived a large internal purge in 2013 and a split in 2015 when the supporters of Islamic State left the group. After its peak years, when the organisation controlled almost all of Southern and Central Somalia, it suffered serious military setbacks in 2011-2012, including the loss of Mogadishu and other big cities. Nevertheless, while these losses weakened the organisation, they did not break its back:²⁵ al-Shabaab simply changed its strategy and organisational structure, and adapted to the new circumstances.²⁶

The success of al-Shabaab stems from the fact that the Jihadist organisation is able to control inter-clan conflicts, utilise resentment against political elites, and build support on the basis of opposing foreign influence in Somalia. During its reign it kept clan grievances under control, while now it both plays minority clans against ruling ones and shifts its unionist strategy towards a more sensible, open and accommodating position with respect to clan elders.²⁷ Thanks to this approach al-Shabaab can benefit from the powerful political, economic and social influence of clans, which provide the group with money, warriors, shelter and information.

Al-Shabaab regularly points to the corruption, nepotism and inefficiency of the Somali Federal Government (SFG) and Somali elites, which, according to this narrative, make huge fortunes thanks to aid

¹⁸ [15 killed as govt forces, militants clash in Somalia](#), [online], 13 12 2014, Source: *Hiiraan* [13 04 2017]

¹⁹ Interview with a UN staff, Nairobi, January 2014.

²⁰ [Somalia takes teaching to the extreme](#), [online], 07 10 2013, Source: *Hiiraan* [13 04 2017]; ALLISON, Simon: [Somaliland: Losing patience in the world's most unlikely democracy](#), [online], 08 04 2015, Source: *Hiiraan* [13 04 2017]

²¹ Interviews in Nairobi and Mogadishu, October 2015.

²² [Somalia: EU defends its 20 per cent cut to Amisom funding](#), [online], 28 04 2016, Source: *Raxanreeb* [13 04 2017]

²³ Interviews with diplomats and analysts in Nairobi, October 2015, January-February 2017; and in Addis Abeba, January-February 2016.

²⁴ HANSEN, Stig Jarle: *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*, Hurst, London, 2013, pp. 2-3.; BRYDEN, Matt: [The Reinvention of Al-Shabaab A Strategy of Choice or Necessity?](#), [online], February 2014, Source: *Centre for Strategic and International Studies* [13 04 2017]

²⁵ [Somalia: Al-Shabaab – It Will Be a Long War](#), [online], 26 06 2014, Source: *Crisis Group* [13 04 2017]

²⁶ BARNES, Cedric – YUSUF, Zakaria: [Somalia's Al-Shabaab Down but Far from Out](#), [online], 29 06 2016, Source: *Crisis Group* [13 04 2017]

²⁷ GRIDNEFF 2017



from international donors and predatory state practices, while ordinary people are starving. Unfortunately, regular scandals around the SFG and the political institutions lend support to these views, independently of the efforts of some Somali politicians.²⁸

Jihadists also emphasise the destructive nature of foreign intervention in Somalia. Although they reject „nationalism” in their declarations, in the eyes of many Somalis al-Shabaab remains the only political group today which consequently rejects all external intervention in the Horn and acts as a pure Somali organisation, even if its members are actually connected to a wide foreign network. From this perspective, al-Shabaab is launching an independent war against „foreign crusaders”, similarly to the time of the Ethiopian invasion in 2006. Although it is evidently an oversimplification of complex circumstances, the political mistakes of external actors – which likely prolonged the civil war in Somalia²⁹ – and the regular atrocities of AMISOM³⁰ back up some of these perceptions. Therefore, al-Shabaab has remained the most powerful single actor in Somalia, and the lack of consensus between clans, politicians and external actors contributes to their survival.

Progress towards the elections in 2016

In 2012 Somalia held elections for the first time since its state collapse in 1991. In fact, considering the circumstances of the vote, it was much more a selection than a real referendum. Because of the security conditions and the resistance of the Somali politicians, organizing a one person – one vote election was not feasible. Furthermore, both the members of the Transitional Federal Government and the Parliament (TFG and TFP), including President Sheikh Sharif Ahmed, made serious efforts to prolong the transition and stay in power as long as they could. Finally the compromise emerged just before the elections in the form of the group of 135 traditional elders, officially nominated by the clans, who selected the 275 MPs according to the 4.5 formula. The process lacked any transparency and was encumbered by bribery and corruption. Therefore, the (s)election came under fire both by politicians, analysts, civil organisations and international donors.³¹ Nevertheless, supporters underlined the fact that the elections managed to maintain clan balance and facilitate a relatively smooth transition of power without armed clashes.³²

The biggest surprise was that instead of the big rivals, Sheikh Sharif Ahmed and Sharif Hassan Sheikh Aden, the „two Sharifs,” a newcomer, Hassan Mohamud won the presidency, although according to the rumours, the Sharifs wasted huge amount of money buying votes.³³ Mohamud’s unexpected victory promoted optimism among both internal and external actors. The „smiling President” did not come from the diaspora, and previously worked for humanitarian agencies. An attitude of hope and high expectations emerged in Mogadishu and beyond.³⁴ In the meantime, the donor community and Somali politicians swore that in the framework of the Vision 2016 programme they would develop a transparent and credible road toward a one person – one vote system for the next election.³⁵

After the initial months of optimism, disillusion set in. Hassan Mohamud was not able to unify the divided country and clans, and his presidency brought neither peace nor stability. Al-Shabaab has remained

²⁸ Although each index and organisation can be criticised, it should be considered that according to Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index, which ranks 176 countries, Somalia scored 10 points in 2016, the lowest of all sovereign nations. [Somalia ranked most corrupt country 10 years running](#), [online], 25 01 2017, Source: *Hiiraan* [13 04 2017]

²⁹ MENKHAUS 2007.

³⁰ [Somalia: SNA, AMISON Killed 92 Civilians in Last 4 Months – UN](#), [online], 18 01 2017, Source: *Allafrica* [13 04 2017]; [AU Peacekeepers Accused of Killing 11 Somali Civilians](#), [online], 19 12 2016, Source: *Hiiraan* [13 04 2017]

³¹ [Somalia: Constitution Qualms Could Jeopardize End of Transition Process](#), [online], 28 06 2012, Source: *Allafrica* [19 04 2017]

³² About the process in details: MARSAL, Viktor – HETTYEY, András: *Szomália – állami összeomlás és konszolidációs kísérletek Afrika szarván*. Publikon, Pécs, 2013.

³³ [Somalia – 2012 Elections](#), [online], 20 11 2016, Source: *Globalsecurity* [19 04 2017]

³⁴ [Somalia: A Smiling New President for a Country in Desperation](#), [online], 02 12 2012, Source: *Allafrica* [18 04 2017]

³⁵ Interviews with diplomats, Nairobi, January-February 2012



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lethal, the different interests of foreign actors jeopardize state building, and the President maintains strong relations with one of the radical Salafist sects, Damul Jadid. According to the report of the UN Monitoring Group, Mohamud also utilized the vote buying system during the elections in 2012 with the financial support of the Salafists, who successfully increased their political influence through backing the president.³⁶ Furthermore, the president came under accusation of bribery and corruption in connection with the reconstruction contracts of the Mogadishu port.³⁷ In general, the expectations for a more transparent and reliable government were met with disappointment: Somalia has remained one of the most corrupt countries in the world, with an estimated 1 billion dollars disappearing from the central government's budget between 2013 and 2015.³⁸

Given these circumstances, it was not surprising that the new leadership, much like the previous government, tried its best to stay in power. The new leadership succeeded, in part because it managed to delay both the federalisation and those constitutional processes which jeopardized the establishment of the new election's legal framework. It was not possible to launch the vote without a permanent constitution – Somali politicians only approved a temporary one in 2012 – and without the formation of federal member states which represented all parts of the country. The military successes and terrorist attacks of al-Shabaab also contributed to delaying the process and derailing *Vision 2016*.

Pressure from the Western donor community and the United Nations generated discussion about the nearing election in the spring of 2015. The main topics were the state of the interim administrations, the role of the two-chamber parliament, and a framework for voting without a constitution. Although the FGS raised the question of the extension of its mandate, both foreign actors and major clans opposed the plan. In July 2015 the first comprehensive meeting was organised with the participation of the federal government, the existing interim administrations and the donors. The High Level Consultative Forum (HLCF) agreed that the expansion of the current administration without new elections was unacceptable, and they underlined the importance of a roadmap process. By the summer of 2015 both Somalis and the donors realized that in the shadow of al-Shabaab – which still controlled huge territories – it was not possible to organise a one person – one vote election. Because of this decision and the lack of a detailed, permanent constitution, the parties agreed that they would develop options for the electoral process to be discussed in the next HLCF in October 2015.³⁹

To facilitate this process, the UN and the EU outlined the guiding principles for the electoral process in August 2015. The paper they produced emphasised that the one person – one vote scheme was not a nationally viable option at that point, and called for the formation of a Consultative Conference for political dialogue including federal and regional leaders, Parliamentarians, civil society actors and other stakeholders. Furthermore, the document proposed holding a consultative conference including representatives of all Somali groups by the end of 2015.⁴⁰

Nevertheless the year passed without significant results. Although in September and October, using the framework of the National Consultative Forum and with the support of foreign players such as the UN, EU, AU and IGAD, Somali actors developed options ranging from an electoral system to a clan-based vote. In October they failed to reach a consensus during the three-day HLCF meeting in Mogadishu.⁴¹ It is not a surprise that both the donors and some Somali parties lost their patience. Therefore at the beginning of the

³⁶ [UN monitors spotlight Vote-Buying, manipulation by Somalia President](#), [online], 22 10 2015, Source: *Garoweonline* [19 04 2017]

³⁷ [Somalia: Trading Companies Owned By President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud Awarded Contracts in the Reconstruction Process](#), [online], 13 09 2013, Source: *Allafrica* [19 04 2017]

³⁸ [Somalia lost \\$1b to graft](#), [online], 29 10 2016, Source: *Hiiran* [19 04 2017]

³⁹ [Somali National Consultative Forum convenes to discuss 2016 electoral process](#), [online], October 2015, Source: *AMISOM* [19 04 2017]

⁴⁰ [Guiding Principles for the 2016 Electoral Process](#), [online], 01 08 2015, Source: *UNSOM* [19 04 2017]

⁴¹ [Somalia concludes elections consultative forum with hope](#), [online], 21 10 2015, Source: *Hiiraan* [20 04 2017]



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session of the High Level Consultative Forum, the outgoing United Nations Special Envoy to Somalia, Ambassador Nicholas Kay, set out a four-point list detailing the international community's expectations for the results of the political deliberations. As Kay emphasised, „ first it must include an element of choice. No more nominations of MPs. There must be an opportunity for some people to vote for a choice of candidates. Secondly it brings the process closer to the people. So voting should happen not just in Mogadishu. Third it produces a parliament with at least 30% women and increases the representation of youth under 35 years which has already been committed to many times. Fourthly it uses a system that moves the country forward politically and provides a stepping stone and a bridge between 2012 and full democratic elections at the end of the next parliament.”⁴² Yet, the next meeting was also unsuccessful. The 4.5 formula stood at the focal point of the debate. The Hawiye-clan dominated the federal government and Galmudug. The Southwest Interim Administration, dominated by the Rahanweyn clans, insisted on the use of a census which would ensure their groups significant representation in the new government. Meanwhile, Puntland and the Interim Jubba Administration, which were dominated primarily by the Darood clans, wanted a new basis for the elections.⁴³ The majority of Somali society supported the position of the Daroods; as the report of the London based Conciliation Resources Centre stated: „many Somalis see the 4.5 power-sharing formula as crude and simplistic. Marginalised groups and minority clans in particular perceive it as having reduced their political representation and access to authority.”⁴⁴ According to CRC research, even in Mogadishu, where Hawiye make up a majority of the population, 70% of the citizens rejected the use of the 4.5 system. To bridge these gaps, by December 17th the parties agreed that they would apply a hybrid model to establish clan and territorial balance, but there were no details provided about it.⁴⁵ In January 2016, the next session of the HLCF was also unsuccessful in reaching an agreement in Kismayo, and Puntland left the negotiations because of the disagreement about clan-participation.⁴⁶ To increase the pressure on Somali parties and give a new impetus to the process after the deadlock, the donor community made a new statement in which they once again dismissed the possibility of term extensions for Somali leaders.⁴⁷

Hassan Mohamud and the Hawiye recognised that time was on their side, and that they could act as peacemakers without sacrificing their own interests. Therefore, at the end of January the federal government endorsed an electoral model. According to their proposal, the Lower House would be based on the 4.5 power sharing quota and the 54-member Upper House would have a total of 48 representatives to be divided equally among six Federal Member States: Puntland, Somaliland, Galmudug, Hiran/Middle Shabelle, Southwest and the Interim Jubba Administration. Somaliland and Puntland would both enjoy additional three seats, given their political maturity and size in the region, compared to other interim administrations and federal member states. A minimum quota of 30% has also been reserved for Somali women in the Parliament.⁴⁸

Although both Puntland and the IJA refused the proposal, foreign powers welcomed it. It was evident that after months of stalemate external actors were completely fed up with the never-ending talks and desired a solution. On February 4th, the new UN Special Envoy for Somalia, Michael Keating travelled to Kismayo and persuaded the IJA President, Ahmed Madobe, to accept the proposal. Although Madobe and the traditional elders expressed their concerns, they agreed to the use of the model, including the 4.5 formula. Their only condition was that they receive a guarantee that the formula would not be used again in 2020. Keating ensured

⁴² [Somalia political leaders discussing electoral model at critical forum](#), [online], 13 12 2015, Source: *Garoweonline* [20 04 2017]

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ [As election approaches, Somalis oppose clan-based power sharing system – report](#), [online], 15 12 2015, Source: *Hiiraan* [20 04 2017]

⁴⁵ [Somali Leaders Reach Agreement on Election Framework](#), [online], 17 12 2015, Source: *Hiiraan* [20 04 2017]

⁴⁶ [Somalia: Kismayo talks break down](#), [online], 16 01 2016, Source: *Garoweonline* [20 04 2017]

⁴⁷ [International community: No term extension for somali leaders](#), [online], 18 01 2016, Source: *Hiiraan* [20 04 2017]

⁴⁸ [Controversy after new election proposal](#), [online], 28 01 2016, Source: *Garoweonline* [20 04 2017]



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them that it was the last time the 4.5 formula would be applied.⁴⁹ In the next weeks the UN Special Envoy travelled to Garowe and Baidoa, and while he managed to get the support of Sharif Hassan Aden to the new model, Ali Gaas refused it.⁵⁰ The efforts of Keating failed in March too.

A breakthrough was achieved only in April 2016. During their meeting in Garowe, the Prime Minister of the FGS, Ali Omar Sharmarke, and the President of Puntland, Ali Gaas, agreed to the legitimacy of the 4.5 formula for selecting members of the Lower and Upper Houses. At the same time, they stressed that „, under no circumstances shall the 4.5 clan based power sharing arrangement be used beyond the 2016 elections.”⁵¹ They also underlined their commitment to the use of a one person – one vote model for the 2020 elections.

One week later the leaders of the central government, the federal member states, the interim administrations, and the representatives of foreign powers and organisations gathered for a three-day consultation in Mogadishu to determine the exact methods of the elections. They agreed that the members of the Lower House would be elected through the 4.5 formula. Each candidate would be elected by a 51-member Electoral College. Therefore, the number of total electorate would be 14,025. The members of the Upper House would be approved by the federal and regional administrations. Based on this process, observers expected Somalia to elect a two-chamber parliament by August 2016 and the combined MPs to elect a president in September.⁵²

This did not mean that the coming months passed without tension and heated debates. The parties only managed to reach compromise about the schedule in June. During the meeting in Baidoa Hassan Mohamud, Parliament Speaker Mohamed Osman Jawari, Prime Minister Omar Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke and leaders of Puntland, Jubaland, Galmudug, and Southwest State all endorsed the timetable that spans through September for the presidential election. Technical and implementation details for electoral processes have taken centre stage in the political deliberations. The National Leadership Forum stressed that politicians are committed to guaranteeing that 30 percent of seats are reserved for women in both the Upper and Lower Houses. A series of dates were set for votes by Electoral Colleges, with vetting and oversight committees to be entrusted with an electoral process that will culminate in the election of the President by September 10.⁵³ By June 2016 it also became clear that the electoral bodies would be selected by the 135 traditional leaders. Although these traditional leaders did not directly select the MPs, they exerted great influence over the process.

Nevertheless, debates among politicians and clans delayed the schedule. By August, it was clear that a new schedule was needed. Therefore, the National Leadership Forum's next meeting in Mogadishu accepted a new roadmap. According to this scenario the Members of the Parliament would be selected by the middle of October, and the next President would be chosen by the end of that month.⁵⁴

One of the biggest obstacles stemmed from the prolonged stalemate of the state formation process of Hiiraan and Middle-Shabelle Interim Administration. Local clans and influential politicians associated with the federal government struggled for control of the region. After almost a year of endless debates parties agreed on the place of the capital (Jowhar) and they elected the President of the regional administration, Ali Abdullah Osoble, a close ally of Hassan Mohamud, in the middle of October.⁵⁵ The creation of the sixth interim administration opened the gate for the continuation of the electoral process and the selection of the MPs for both Houses.

Delays were not the only challenges for the elections. In October, members of the donor community came out with a declaration in which they expressed their disappointment over the continuing allegations of

⁴⁹ [SRSF Keating welcomes Jubbalands reaction to the Federal Govt's decision on the electoral model](#), [online], 04 02 2016, Source: *Garoweonline* [20 04 2017]

⁵⁰ [Roundups of Somalia Election Model](#), [online], 12 02 2016, Source: *Garoweonline* [20 04 2017]

⁵¹ [Somalia: Federal Govt, Puntland agree on election model](#), [online], 04 04 2016, Source: *Garoweonline* [20 04 2017]

⁵² [Somalia leaders agree hold elections this year](#), [online], 14 04 2016, Source: *Hiiraan* [20 04 2017]

⁵³ [Int'l community hails decisions of NLF on electoral process](#), [online], 05 06 2016, Source: *Shabelle* [25 04 2017]

⁵⁴ [Somali presidential election date set](#), [online], 06 08 2016, Source: *Hiiraan* [25 04 2017]

⁵⁵ [Hir-Shabelle parliament picks a new president](#), [online], 17 10 2017, Source: *Shabelle* [25 04 2017]



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corruption in Somalia's electoral process and reports of recurring intimidation of prospective candidates for parliament, delegates of the Electoral College, and officials.⁵⁶ According to rumours, some candidates spent tens, if not hundreds of thousands of dollars to bribe electoral staffs.⁵⁷ The country's Auditor General, Nur Jimale Farah, said that Electoral College delegates, who elect MPs, were simply voting for the highest bidder. „Some votes were bought with \$5,000, some with \$10,000, and some with \$20,000 or \$30,000. But not all seats are equal. Some are influential seats and have a lot of candidates competing for them”, he said. The Auditor General told reporters that two seats cost their respective winners \$1.3 million each. He said his office recorded that one of the seats was won in Galmudug and the other in Hirshabelle.⁵⁸ Politicians not only used money to shape the results of the process; in Jowhar, gun fighting broke out at a voting centre, injuring three delegates.⁵⁹ It was too much not only for external actors but also for Somalis themselves. The Federal Indirect Electoral Implementation Team (FIEIT) dismissed the voting results of the Lower House elections in Hiiraan-Middle Shabelle.⁶⁰ Although FIEIT explained its failure to achieve the 30 percent quota for women, the high level of political violence also played a role in its decision to dismiss the results.

Thanks to similar scandals and setbacks, the electoral process was too slow to follow the original schedule. At the end of November, the Electoral Commission declared the third postponement of the Presidential election because only about the half of the MPs had been elected.⁶¹ December brought two new postponements⁶² and an increasingly intense struggle between the Presidential candidates, made clear in an open debate between the two most powerful candidates, Hassan Mohamud and his Prime Minister, Omar Abdirrahsid Sharmarke.⁶³ Tension was fuelled by the fact that by the beginning of January all MPs had been elected, and on 11 January the Parliament re-elected Osman Jawari, a Rahanweyn, as the Speaker of the Lower House.⁶⁴ It meant that because of the 4.5 formula, Rahanweyn clans lost their chance to appoint the President or the Prime Minister, which undermined the hopes of some candidates, including Sharif Sheikh Hassan, for leading positions. As usual, the campaign for the presidency remained in the hands of the Darood and the Hawiye clans. Although 24 people registered before the deadline, only some of them had a chance.⁶⁵ In late January and early February most observers, analysts and diplomats concluded that two politicians had become the defining players in the race: the Majerteen / Darood Prime Minister, who – according to rumours – besides his clans, also got significant support from Kenya and the United Arab Emirates, and the Abgal / Hawiye Hassan Mohamud, who was favoured by Ethiopia.⁶⁶ Although in the propaganda of al-Shabaab „Western powers” were the main organizers of political life in Somalia, they behaved much more as „sitting ducks” than the potent shapers of the events.⁶⁷

After the months of prolonged negotiations and stalemates the Presidential election, which was held in the Mogadishu International Airport for security reasons, was launched smoothly on 8 February 2017. The outcome was a surprise for both Somalis and foreigners: contrary to previous assumptions, neither Hassan Mohamud nor Omar Abdirrashid Sharmarke won the post. The winner was Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed

⁵⁶ [International community expresses grave concerns over corruption](#), [online], 30 10 2016, Source: *Hiiraan* [25 04 2017]

⁵⁷ Interviews with experts and UN staff in Nairobi, January-February 2017

⁵⁸ [Somalia Elections Not Credible, Country's Auditor General Says](#), [online], 20 11 2016, Source: *Hiiraan* [25 04 2017]

⁵⁹ [Somalia: UN envoy reaches Jowhar for discussions over violence at election center](#), [online], 20 11 2016, Source: *Garoweonline* [25 04 2017]

⁶⁰ [Somalia's electoral body nullifies election results in jowhar election](#), [online], 27 11 2017, Source: *Garoweonline* [25 04 2017]

⁶¹ [Presidential elections delayed in Somalia, again](#), [online], 29 11 2017, Source: *Hiiraan* [25 04 2017]

⁶² [Somalia: Presidential election postponed again, leaders agree on issues hindering the process](#), [online], 20 12 2017, Source: *Garoweonline* [26 04 2017]

⁶³ [Villa Somalia reacts to Prime Minister's speech](#), [online], 04 12 2016, Source: *Hiiraan* [26 04 2017]

⁶⁴ [Somalia: Jawari easily wins the re-election of Parliament Speakership](#), [online], 11 01 2017, Source: *Garoweonline* [26 04 2017]

⁶⁵ [Deadline: 24 candidates register for Presidential elections as registration officially closes](#), [online], 29 01 2017, Source: *Hiiraan* [26 04 2017]

⁶⁶ Interviews in Nairobi, January-February 2017; See also: [CDRC Digest Special Issue](#)

⁶⁷ Interviews in Nairobi, January-February 2017.



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Farmajo, a Marehan / Darood, who served as Prime Minister between 2010 and 2011 and acquired a reputation for fighting against corruption and for regular salary for the armed forces.⁶⁸ His election was celebrated by the whole Somali community not only on the Horn but even in the diaspora.⁶⁹ Expectations and optimism were extremely high, and at least for some time Somalis forgot the challenges of their nation in their shared victory.

After the euphoria – the assessment of the electoral process

When the author travelled to Nairobi and Addis Abeba between October 2015 – February 2016 and interviewed diplomats and analysts, he felt a strange *déjà vu*. In January and February 2012, he heard very similar sentences and explanations in Kenya by the related parties: the current roadmap process was imperfect, there were serious abuses and the election lacked transparency and democratic elements. But diplomats and analysts stated that in 2016 the process would go more smoothly and be more democratic. Four years later, the case was the same. The international community and Somali parties failed to organise a one person – one vote election, and the process was encumbered by corruption, bribery, abuses and an almost complete lack of transparency. But both foreigners and Somalis stated that in 2020 the country would organise an authentically democratic election with the participation of its own people.⁷⁰

At first sight it is very hard to see any other aspect of this approach than an unfruitful and dangerous model of wishful thinking. Parallels in the mistakes and failures are clear if we compare the roadmap and electoral process of 2011-2012 with that of 2015-2017. As we partly mentioned earlier, both were laden with bribery and corruption. The 135 traditional elders played decisive roles in the process, and in the (s)election of the electoral candidates in charge of deciding about MPs, neither the Somali people nor external powers had real influence. The fragmentation along clan lines jeopardized broader cooperation and sometimes led to open armed clashes as it happened in Jowhar. In addition, many actors pursued their own interests contrary to the interests of their clans. The critics of the 4.5 formula emphasized not only the unequal nature of the system but also the fact that few people knew whether the (s)elected politicians were really the most influential elders of their clans and represented their people, or whether they were selected by other powerful politicians because of these politicians' interests.⁷¹

Lastly, it is important not to forget that during the administration of the first Federal Government of Somalia, it made only modest achievements in the fields of security and economy. The level of corruption has remained the same as in the age of the „two Sharifs”; al-Shabaab is still strong and capable, and the countryside remains an operational area of the Jihadists; the Somalia National Army is weak and acts actually only as a loose alliance of clan militias; and federal member states have fallen into the hands of wrangling clans and sub-clans, so it is not a surprise that some people describe federalism as the Balkanization of the country.⁷² The religious transformation of the Somali society from moderate Sunnism to a more conservative Salafism is ongoing.⁷³ Donors are tired and frustrated with the Horn of Africa.⁷⁴

Nevertheless, we should acknowledge the achievements of the region as well. In spite of corruption and foreign intervention, MPs elected a person for presidency who is perhaps the most unifying politician in the

⁶⁸ Mohamed Abdullahi Farmajo elected Somalia's next President, [online], 08 02 2017, Source: *Hiiraan*, [26 04 2017]

⁶⁹ Streets of Mogadishu bursting with optimism, hope after historic election, [online], 08 02 2017, Source: *Hiiraan* [26 04 2017]

⁷⁰ Interviews in Nairobi, Addis Abeba and Mogadishu, January-February 2012, January-February 2014, October 2015, January-February 2016.

⁷¹ Interview with Omar Mahmood and Christian Ani, African ISS, Addis Abeba, 27 January 2017.

⁷² SA'ID, Muhammad Suldaan: *The Balkanization of Somalia and the age-old Ethiopian conspiracy*, [online], 18 07 2016, Source: *Wardheernews* [30 04 2017]

⁷³ ALLISON, Simon: *Somaliland: Losing patience in the world's most unlikely democracy*, [online], 08 04 2015, Source: *Hiiraan* [30 04 2017]; Interview with a UN-staff, Nairobi, January 2014.

⁷⁴ Interviews in Nairobi, January-February 2014.



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country. The presidential elections also sent a warning to international actors engaged in Somalia: although Somalis may accept money which flows into their pockets from abroad, there is no guarantee that they will fulfil the requests of their donors. Somalis play their own games. External actors can influence them, but not unilaterally control them.

It is also true that despite decades of civil war, Somalia has experienced two relatively smooth transitions of political power in a row: first in 2012, from the TFG to FGS, and now from Hassan Sheikh Mohamud to Mohamed Abdiweli Mohamed Farmajo. Comparing the current period to the period of armed struggle in the 1990s and the early 2000s, it is a significant improvement.

Of course, there is a long way ahead. Farmajo arrived with big promises: less corruption, more security, the strengthening of the Somali National Army and the whole security apparatus, and the defeat of al-Shabaab⁷⁵ – an ambitious and robust plan. His predecessors made the same promises, but they achieved little. Farmajo seems to be aware of this. In his inauguration speech he underlined that the road ahead would be bumpy and would lack easy solutions.⁷⁶

Last but not least, it must be emphasized that future developments will depend not only on the President, but also on Somali politicians and society, as well as on the donor community. Somalia has already wasted decades embroiled in unfruitful political competition, armed struggle, misguided foreign interventions and clan fights, which stoked social tension and mistrust between different groups, while destroying the central government and social services. Since 2011 there have been signs of a light at the end of the tunnel. It will depend on the current administration whether the next four years will be a missed opportunity or a step toward the further stabilisation of the country.

⁷⁵ [Somalia's new leader Mohamed Abdullahi Farmajo vows to rebuild failed state](#), [online], 09 02 2017, Source: *Hiiraan* [22 05 2017]

⁷⁶ [Somali president says no quick fix for nation's woes](#), [online], 22 02 2017, Source: *Hiiraan* [22 05 2017]



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