

Minutes of Meeting

Date & Format

Date: 14 November, 2024

Format: hybrid, presential & online

Participants (present)

1. Alexander Zhukov
2. Lilian Andrade
3. Maciel Santos
4. Michael Walls
5. Peter Chonka
6. Virginia Cattolica

Participants (online)

1. Aaron Tesfaye
2. Abdifatah Abdi
3. Amanda Rasmussen
4. Alexander Zotin
5. Éva Sebestyén
6. Idil Osman
7. Jama Musse Jama
8. Mourad Aty
9. Tirsit Yetbarek

A brief summary

This was an experimental workshop with the aim to discuss and conceptualize an agenda for a larger conference on the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea politics (to be organized in fall 2025).

It was also a follow-up from the first discussion event on this subject, which CEAUP organized in 2022 in Porto (a conference about the Berbera Corridor).

Discussion Points

1. The participants discussed possible ways to define the geographical focus of the future 2025 conference and agreed on the following:

- to stick to the commonly used denominations like ‘Horn of Africa’ and ‘the Red Sea’.
- not to use the terms that are politically marked and/or may be perceived as controversial or divisive.

The latter group includes such terms as ‘Greater Red Sea’, ‘Greater Horn of Africa’ or, on the other hand, the ‘Somali Horn of Africa’ in particular.

2. One of the ways to organize a discussion on the present-day political and socioeconomic dynamics in the region is by employing the concepts of flows and identities.

The participants singled out a number of issues (‘flows’), which are, as the group agreed, transcendental to the regional political economy. Each of them deserves separate attention and may eventually become the thematic focus of its own panel. These are, namely:

- flows of oil and oil products (both at a macro- and micro levels)
- flows of capital and investment
- cash flows, including remittances to home countries
- flows of agricultural produce (e.g. sugar, bananas, fish, khat)
- flows of people on the move, including labor migrants, etc.

3. The participants then spoke about political identities and how these are intertwined with different projects, primarily at the level of national politics. The discussion first focused on Somalia, following which the participants spoke about a possibility of applying the same paradigm (political identities juxtaposed with political projects) to discuss the politics in

other countries of the region. Ethiopia and Yemen were mentioned in particular. Djibouti remains another option.

It may be a good idea to propose several country-focused panels united by the same logic: e.g. ‘Somali political projects’, ‘Ethiopian political projects’, ‘Yemeni political projects’, etc. Such panels should create a conducive environment to discuss identities as well.

As the participants proceeded to tackle the diaspora factor, an issue of digital communication was brought up. The participants agreed that this is another essential topic for the conference. A possible option to address it is to explore the nexus between digital communication and roles of the diasporas in their home countries’ policies (which is another idea for a panel proposal).

4. Speaking about political projects, the participants pointed out the issue of political Islam. This topic is especially relevant for Somalia and Yemen in particular, but also for other countries of the region - and, to a certain extent, for the regional politics overall.

5. Road map & schedule

It was agreed to open a call for panel proposals, which will define the thematic scope of the conference and streamline its discussion events. It will then lead to a call for papers.

The participants defined the following schedule:

- A) Call for panels - deadline 30 Nov 2024
- B) Notification of acceptance - 31 Jan 2024
- C) Call for papers - 15 Feb 2025
- D) Notification of acceptance - 20 Jun 2025.

5. Website and other platforms

The participants agreed to create a website for the conference. The issue of fees and waivers was then brought into the discussion. There are several options at hand and a final decision on this issue (types of fees and amounts to charge; platforms to use) will come later.

6. Venue & date

The third session of the workshop focused entirely on the organizational and logistical matters.

The panelists agreed that the venue should be as close as possible to the region (area of study).

A suggestion was made to hold the conference in Hargeysa. Tirsit Yetbark, who represented Hargeysa Cultural Centre/Hargeysa University at the table, signaled their Centre's readiness to host the event. The offer was accepted.

The participants identified the first week of November (3-6/11) 2025 as the most suitable time for everyone at the table.

7. Co-organizers and other potential partners

This project requires coordination of efforts and should be co-organized. There is a need to bring onboard more partners, in addition to CEAUP and Hargeysa Cultural Center/Hargeysa University, and the selection criteria are different. Financial capacity is one of them, but not the only one. Other potential partners will be invited to the project based on their expertise, unique experience, access to not easily accessible areas or their potential for networking.

For example, CEAUP will seek collaboration with institutions representing Yemen and Yemeni diaspora.

8. Organizing Committee

The participants agreed to establish an Organizing Committee for the 2025 conference. A proposal was made to nominate Tirsit Yetbarek Head of the Organizing Committee. It was accepted.

Confirmed as Members of the Committee are:

- Michael Walls
- Peter Chonka
- Aaron Tesfaye
- Abdifatah Abdi
- Maciel Santos
- Alexander Zhukov

More invitations to join the Committee will be sent to other workshop participants (those who were not present in the third session).

The Organizers will eventually establish a Scientific Board of the conference as well. It will also be responsible for the publications that are expected to result from the conference.

Conclusion

It was a good discussion that established a solid foundation for the planning of the 2025 conference. The participants identified a number of follow-up actions and set their deadlines. More preparation work will be done online. The members of the Organizing Committee will be informed by e-mail as for the final composition of the Committee, the format of communication, and the next steps to be taken.
