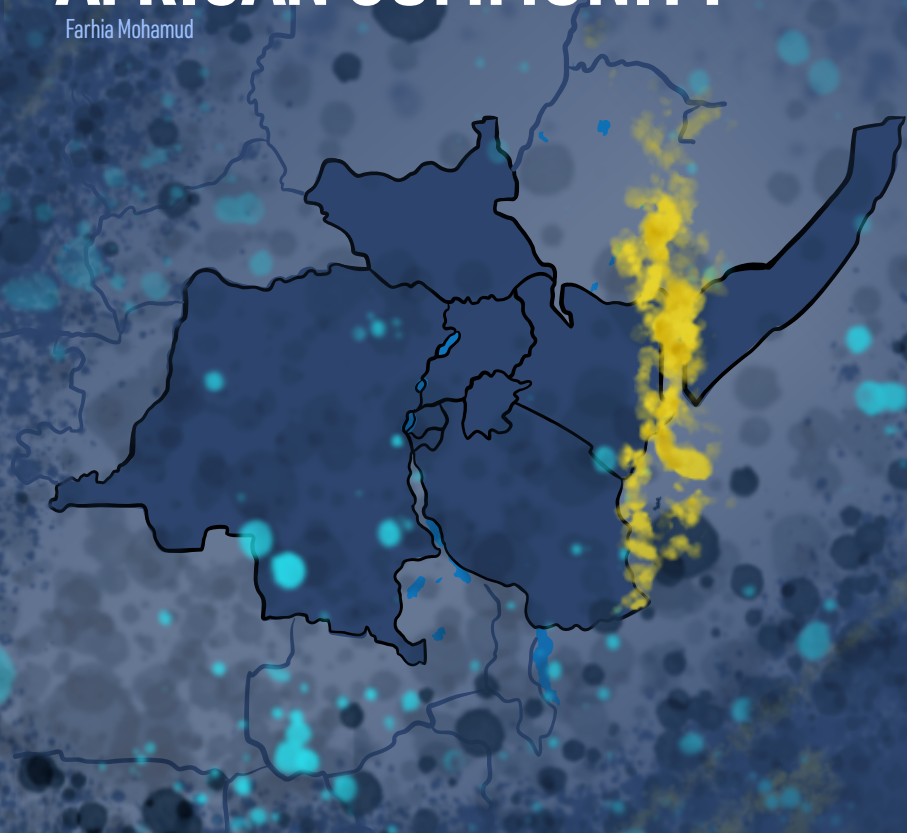


# OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR SOMALIA'S MEMBERSHIP TO THE EAST AFRICAN COMMUNITY

Farhia Mohamud



**Rift Valley Institute**  
MAKING LOCAL KNOWLEDGE WORK



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## DESIGN

Designed by Maggie Dougherty

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With Somalia's official entry into the East African Community (EAC) on 24 November 2023,<sup>1</sup> this paper intends to present and analyse the challenges and opportunities its integration might have. Thus, the study uses primary data collected from 20 government officials, members of think tanks and academia, and other professionals, supplemented by secondary data and information taken from media monitoring.

The paper establishes deep-rooted and pervasive challenges to Somalia's membership of the EAC. Some emerge as a result of structural barriers: These include insecurity, the absence of political harmony in power and resource-sharing, weak governance systems, and a lack of physical infrastructure and the development of institutional capacity. Others include social and cultural differences between Somalis and other citizens of EAC member states, as well as different levels of skills and development.

The paper also indicates that there are, inevitably, opportunities linked to Somalia's new membership of the EAC. These include allying with the region against insecurity, the standardization of laws and procedures, and enabling the country to adhere to international systems of finance, economy and technology. Integration will allow Somalis from the blue economy (Somalia lies on the Indian Ocean and Red Sea) to invest competitively in the EAC, bringing with it the possibility of opportunities for job creation.

The study recommends that the Somali government carefully consider addressing the challenges presented both here and elsewhere.

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1 Vincent Owino, 'Somalia Officially Admitted into EAC', *The East African*, 24 November 2023. Accessed 27 November 2023, <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/somalia-officially-admitted-into-eac-4444168>.

# INTRODUCTION

A number of trade blocs exist in Africa based on the geography and state relations of their regions. Most are doing their best to foster economic and political ties among interested nations. They include the East African Community (EAC), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), Southern African Development Community (SADC), Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), and the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD).

East Africa is the top-most integrated region in Africa, outperforming west, central, southern and north Africa. This is because the EAC, the continent's foremost bloc, is the only one among them that has political federation as its agenda and ultimate goal. Most EAC states belong to several trade blocs, though to date this has not been a huge obstacle when it comes to the operations of the EAC customs union or the free movement of people.<sup>2</sup> A free movement protocol was successfully realized by the implementation of agreement on an EAC passport,<sup>3</sup> while its peace and security protocol has not been fully ratified by all member states. EAC member states have, prior to Somalia's accession, signed a mutual defence pact, the first step in this direction.<sup>4</sup>

The EAC's success or failure highly depends on the friendship or rivalry between its head of states. This was proven when member states fell out in the late 1970s. The EAC bloc was founded in 1967 by Kenya's first president, Jomo Kenyatta, as well as by President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania and Uganda's President Milton Obote. While the EAC is the oldest trade alliance between Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, trade associations between them date back many more years. In particular, trade ties between Kenya and Uganda can be traced to the construction of the railway (1897–1901) that connected the two nations.<sup>5</sup>

After being completely dismantled in 1977 as a result of Kenya's perceived economic dominance of the bloc and political tensions between President Kenyatta and President Idi Amin of

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2 Virtual interview with security and development expert, London, United Kingdom, 8 March 2023.

3 East African Community, 'EAC To Start Issuing EA e-Passport January 2018', 07 April 2017. Accessed 27 November 2023, <https://www.eac.int/press-releases/148-immigration-and-labour/754-eac-to-start-issuing-ea-e-passport-january-2018%20=>.

4 Virtual interview with security and development expert, London, United Kingdom, 8 March 2023.

5 The East African Community (EAC) treaty.

Uganda,<sup>6</sup> the EAC was resurrected in 2000.<sup>7</sup> Following its re-establishment, it began to draw more members from other eastern African nations, such as Burundi and Rwanda, which joined in 2007, and South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), which ratified the EAC treaty in 2016 and 2022, respectively.

The EAC's stated goal is to create a customs union, common market, monetary union, and ultimately a political federation among its member states. The EAC treaty establishes a legal framework for regional cooperation in justice, politics, economics, social welfare, defence security, as well as culture, research and technology.<sup>8</sup> Despite its optimistic outlook and ambitions, however, it faces major challenges. These include a low share of exports by most member states, relatively little financial depth or domestic savings, reliance on donor aid, and inadequate physical infrastructure and human capital development.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, Kenya and Tanzania dominate eastern African markets, and the issue of monetary union apparently remains unresolved.<sup>10</sup>

On the bright side, to some extent the EAC has so far brought economic growth to member countries. Kenya and Tanzania have, for instance, improved their net trade balance of manufactured goods to other EAC member states. The bloc has contributed towards improving efficiency at ports, reducing the cost of transit trade, and increasing the export of manufactured goods through economies of scale.<sup>11</sup>

The bloc's seemingly promising economic power has attracted Somalia to it, a country that is a prominent actor in the Horn of Africa. Somalia's current president, Hassan Sheikh Mohamoud, attempted to join in his first term in office (2012–2017), but the bloc rejected his application, citing Somalia's state of sporadic conflict and the weakness of its institutions. Nonetheless, the Somali government's hopes of joining the regional bloc were revived when an equally troubled

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6 Elke Verhaeghe and Craig Mathieson, 'Understanding the East African Community and its Transport Agenda: Informal Adaptation in Regional Trade and Transport Cooperation', ECPDM, 4 December 2017. Accessed 7 January 2023, <https://ecdpm.org/work/the-east-african-community-informal-adaptation-in-regional-trade-and-transport-cooperation>.

7 East African Community, 'Overview of EAC'. Accessed 12 January 2023, <https://www.eac.int/overview-of-eac>.

8 East African Community, 'The Treaty for the Establishment of the East African Community', 2007. Accessed 18 January 2023, [https://www.eala.org/uploads/The\\_Treaty\\_for\\_the\\_Establishment\\_of\\_the\\_East\\_Africa\\_Community\\_2006\\_1999.pdf](https://www.eala.org/uploads/The_Treaty_for_the_Establishment_of_the_East_Africa_Community_2006_1999.pdf).

9 Catherine McAuliffe, Sweeta C. Saxena and Masafumi Yabara, 'The East African Community: Prospects for Sustained Growth,' Working paper, International Monetary Fund, 2012. Accessed 11 February 2023, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/256042206\\_The\\_East\\_African\\_Community\\_Prospects\\_for\\_Sustained\\_Growth](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/256042206_The_East_African_Community_Prospects_for_Sustained_Growth).

10 Annette Kuteesa, 'East African Regional Integration: Challenges in Meeting the Convergence Criteria for Monetary Union,' *International Journal of Economics* (2012): 156–157.

11 Hagumimana Moli Annick, 'East African Community as a Tool for Development: Prospects and Challenges for the Customs Union', Post-graduate dissertation, Uganda Martyrs University, 2008.

South Sudan was admitted in 2016.<sup>12</sup> The government of the next Somali president, Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed ('Farmaajo'), reapplied in 2019. Somalia is a member of COMESA, a regional trade bloc consisting of 21 countries in east and southern Africa, as well as of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), which includes some EAC member states.<sup>13</sup> These acted as additional impetus for Somalia's application for membership to the EAC. In the 1990s, following the 1991 collapse of the Somali state, the country experienced a severe economic hardship. It also experienced a breakdown in its institutional development. More recently, however, the economy has been growing and has stayed relatively resilient despite climate shocks, conflict and the outbreak of the pandemic in 2020. Yet, this gradual economic growth has not allowed Somalia to fully participate in international markets. This is largely due to the absence of effective government, the lack of a strong financial system, weak physical infrastructure, and poor quality control standards for exports.<sup>14</sup>

Two opposing views have emerged among the Somali political and economic elite and the larger Somalia community regarding Somalia's joining the EAC. The first is that the country's economic growth and development will increase with the free movement of labor, fewer financial restrictions, a free market for goods and services, and a greater flow of investments. Somalia's coastline, one of mainland Africa's longest, offers fish, pristine beaches, seaports and strategic routes to landlocked Burundi, Uganda, Rwanda and eastern parts of the DRC. Conversely, erstwhile opponents of Somalia's membership argued that Somalis were not culturally, historically, socially or religiously aligned with other members of the bloc. They believe Somalia's relatively small population could be overrun by immigrant labor and weaken its infant economy, and that the cultural and Islamic religious values held dearly by many Muslim residents in the Horn of Africa could be violated.

Given these opposing views, this paper analyzes the potential benefits and difficulties Somalia's integration into the EAC may breed. Its findings are intended to help Somalia's policymakers determine whether joining the EAC is a viable way to usher in new economic opportunities and growth. Without preconceived notions, the paper hopes to add some clarity to the future of Somalia–EAC relations.

The paper grapples with a number of questions: Will Somalia's political economy be better or worse off now that it has officially joined the EAC? What difference to Somalia will it make? And are Somalia's institutions ready for EAC membership? These questions are pertinent to Somalia's future, considering the potential challenges and opportunities confronting its economy.

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12 Aggrey Mutambo, 'Somalia Renews Push to Join East African Community', *The East African*, 21 July 2022. Accessed 2 February 2013, <https://www.theeastafican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/somalia-renews-push-to-join-east-african-community-3887168>.

13 Mutambo, 'Somalia Renews Push'.

14 Abdirizak Ali Abdullahi and Hassan Arisoy, 'Agricultural Structure in Somalia,' *Eurasian Journal of Agricultural Economics* 2/1 (2022): 11.



## RESEARCH METHODS

In this paper, qualitative research methods were used to assess Somalia's potential gains and losses, relative to those of other EAC countries. Specifically, 20 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were conducted in Mogadishu between 6 February and 30 March 2023. The respondents included members of the Ministry of Planning, Investment, and Economic Development (MoPEID), Ministry of Commerce, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs; technocrats in the customs union, trade departments, and Somali Bureau of Standards; religious Sheikhs, economists, people in business, finance, and international relations; security sector experts (practitioners and academics); entrepreneurs in the agricultural sector; and other Mogadishu residents.

The primary data collected is supported by secondary data on regional integration, the political economy of Somalia, and members of the EAC. The secondary data includes articles from journals, books, media reports, online sources, and reports from governmental and non-governmental organizations. A thematic analysis of the qualitative data was done.

The study's limitations include a dearth of respondent availability in the month of Ramadan, when primary source data was collected, as well as the unwillingness of some technical personnel and politicians to speak on behalf of the offices and organizations they represent. The timeline for data collection meant the study was unable to gather the perspectives of a wider range of Somali citizens on what was then the prospect of EAC integration. Their voices would have been critical in determining whether EAC integration was more or less driven by the elite or, alternatively, a priority for the mass of the country's population.

## ORGANIZATION OF THE PAPER

The next section is dedicated to examining the potential challenges arising out of integration, followed by discussions on the potential opportunities Somalia will have after joining the EAC bloc. The final section pulls out recommendations for the Somali government, the private sector, civil society, and the EAC.

# ASSESSING SOMALIA'S READINESS: POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DIMENSIONS

In late January 2023, following Somalia's application for admission to the union, the EAC sent a verification mission to Mogadishu. EAC officials visited the Villa Somalia (the presidential palace); the Office of the Prime Minister; the ministries of Planning, of Commerce, and Foreign Affairs; Mogadishu's seaport; the Immigration Department; and other institutions and locations. They were examining the institutional capacity of Somalia, and their immediate verbal feedback was promising. They recommended that existing trade laws, mostly enacted in the 1960s, should be updated, and digitalization adopted.<sup>15</sup>

Most notably, a number of trade-related and other laws crucial to the economy and the development of the country were being passed by the Somali parliament. These included the Investments and Investors Protection Bill, as well as a bill on financial management systems for natural resources found under the ground, and the National Identification and Registration Authority Bill. Other legislation had already been passed, including the National Security and Intelligence Agency Act, Anti-Terrorism Act, the Somali Immigration and Citizenship Agency Establishment Law, the Public Data Protection Act, and the Somali Fisheries Development and Management Law. A bill on energy, the Electricity Bill, as well as the Specific Financial Sanctions Bill and the Immigration Bill were also being tabled.

These efforts show that Somalia was dedicated to a debt relief initiative and preparing itself for EAC admission.<sup>16</sup> Even so, laws are rarely implemented and operationalized in Somalia, due to weak public institutions and weaknesses also in the rule of law.<sup>17</sup> Admission to the EAC offered Somalia many opportunities if its corresponding institutions were well set up and aimed at introducing uniform taxes, as well as uniform immigration, business, and market infrastructure in keeping with the rest of the bloc.

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15 Interview with senior official in Somali Bureau of Standards, Mogadishu, Somalia, 7 February 2023.

16 Interview with senior official in Somali Bureau of Standards, Mogadishu, Somalia, 7 February 2023.

17 Virtual interview with trade expert, 18 March 2023.

On Somalia's readiness for EAC membership, the study shows challenges still remain alongside the opportunities its membership portends. The challenges revolve around Somalia's security problems and its ethnic and religious distance from the rest of the EAC. The opportunities include trade benefits.

## CHALLENGES FOR EAC INTEGRATION

Study participants who maintained Somalia was unready for EAC integration said it faced substantial and structural challenges within itself. They argued that, for minimum mutual benefit, a country joining a regional bloc needed to be equally or nearly as competitive as other members. Several interviewees indicated that Somalia's lingering setbacks to integration revolved around the fact that it lacked full control of its territory, together with other economic, security and socio-cultural challenges.

### *Territorial control*

Somaliland declared its independence from Somalia in 1991. It has since had its own governance system as *de facto* state. Its eastern neighbour, Puntland, maintains it also has a separate (though not independent) status, with special rights under Somalia's federal constitution.

Conflict between the Dhulbahante clan and Somaliland in and around the town of Laascaanod has fuelled grievances between Puntland and Somaliland. The Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) has not yet accepted that the regions dominated by the Dhulbahante—Sool, Sanaag and Ceyn (SSC)—could become another federal entity under it, outside Somaliland.

Somaliland lies at a strategic point on the Gulf of Aden, a stretch of sea connecting the Horn of Africa to the Arabian Peninsula. It is not far from the Bab al-Mandab Strait that links, in effect, the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean, forming a key global trade route between east and west.

Somaliland's location means it was able to work with DP World of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to build a trade corridor to its port at Berbera. In 2019, the Lower House of the Somali parliament deemed the Berbera port agreement invalid.<sup>18</sup> That the development of the Berbera Corridor went ahead regardless in 2021 demonstrates accommodation on the part of the FGS, as well as Somaliland's interests in expanding its own infrastructure for integrating regional trade.

On the other hand, Puntland's absence from a number of National Consultative Council (NCC)<sup>19</sup> meetings could put Somalia's federal government in a constitutionally untenable position. The

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18 Abdul Rahman Alfa Shaban, 'Somalia Parliament Rejects Somaliland's Berbera Port Deal with DP World, Africa News, December 2019. Accessed 24 June 2023, <https://www.africanews.com/2018/03/13/somalia-parliament-rejects-somaliland-s-berbera-port-deal-with-dp-world-ethiopia/>.

19 A formal meeting where the president, prime minister, state presidents of Puntland, Jubbaland, Galmudug, Southwest, and Hirshabelle, and Mogadishu's mayor is held once every three months to resolve contentious issues that prevent the finalization of Somalia's provisional constitution.

historic port of Boosaaso and newly built port of Garacad fall, for example, under Puntland's authority: If the federal government outlawed the import by sea of certain commodities, currently this regulation would apply to Mogadishu and other federal member states but not to the seaports of Bosaaso and Garacad in Puntland, Kismaayo in Jubbaaland, and Berbera in Somaliland.<sup>20</sup> Thus, Somalia's inability to control what happens in the entirety of its territory jeopardizes its sovereign ability to comply with EAC commitments.<sup>21</sup>

Such concerns are accentuated by the possibility of Kenya expanding its interest in Somalia via the southern Somali state of Jubbaaland. An almost 30-year history of intervention by Rwanda and Uganda in the DRC demonstrates that becoming an EAC member does not make a country immune to intervention, armed and otherwise, by a fellow member. Thus, Kenya's influence in Somalia could increase.<sup>22</sup> Somalia has accused Kenya of encroaching its territorial waters in the Indian Ocean and, at times, its land. The two countries share a long border, added to which Jubbaaland's leader, Ahmed Mohamed Islaan ('Madoobe'), has forged strong ties with Kenya in his more-than-a-decade-long administration of the state.

Before Somalia was accepted into the EAC, a senior official at a Somali federal government ministry said all of Somalia's territory, including rebellious Puntland and breakaway Somaliland, would be included in the EAC bloc. Somalia itself, he said, had the sole legitimate right to represent the nation.

The almost 700-km border between Kenya and Somalia is viewed as dangerous bush territory with little government presence. The area is known for informal cross-border trading and daily interaction between Kenyans and Somalis. Students from Beled Xawo town in Somalia study in Kenya during the day before returning home for the night. A portion of the Kenyan town of Mandera is served by Hormuud Telecommunication Inc., the top telecom provider in South-Central Somalia, while in Beled Xawo, residents can use MPESA, the Kenyan mobile money service belonging to Kenya's Safaricom. With Somalia's border not fully regulated, the EAC customs union—a fundamental component of EAC integration—poses the prospect of becoming not a door to trade but a barrier.<sup>23</sup>

Some Somali officials are wary of being part of a regional customs union. The Somali official defending Somalia's territorial integrity, made a distinction between regional cooperation and regional integration:

The domestication process will provide Somalia the chance to gather its strength and catch up with the region gradually, until complete integration is achieved. Somalia will not

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20 Personal interview with an economist, Mogadishu, Somalia, 5 March 2023.

21 Virtual interview with Horn of Africa regional analyst, Nairobi, Kenya, 18 March 2023.

22 Virtual interview with Horn of Africa regional analyst, Nairobi, Kenya, 18 March 2023.

23 Virtual interview with Horn of Africa regional analyst, Nairobi, Kenya, 18 March 2023.

be required to open its doors the day after it is admitted.<sup>24</sup>

A former trade envoy echoed this, saying he believed EAC integration and membership were different, that 'if Somalia is not ready now, the country can ask to be a member and wait for several years to fully integrate'.<sup>25</sup> His implication was that becoming a member was more than enough for Somalia for now. Somalia would have the rights of EAC members, be able to attend EAC meetings and add input, but would not be a part of the customs union.<sup>26</sup>

### **Security**

In assessing Somalia's readiness for EAC membership, security was a priority for other members of the EAC. After the inclusion of the South Sudan and DRC, however, the Somali government itself grew less concerned that its problems of insecurity would damage its prospects of joining. One expert nonetheless cautioned that the insecurity caused by the civil wars in the other two countries could not be compared to the global threat posed by the level of terrorism that has plagued Somalia. Unless the threat was addressed, she said, Somalia's inclusion in the EAC would increase the level of danger in the region.<sup>27</sup>

Large swathes of Somalia are under the control of al-Shabaab Islamist militants, who primarily occupy areas of Southwest and Jubbaland states, where they control a state capital, Bu'aale. A security expert in London also considered wider regional concerns regarding the presence of al-Shabaab in Somalia valid. The expert suggested EAC members strengthened their security and undertook risk analysis and preparation the moment they are granted Somalia admission.<sup>28</sup>

Interestingly, Somalia sought EAC accession partly to combat al-Shabaab, searching for regional support to help wrestle the insurgents through advocacy and military backing. EAC member states may want to see a more peaceful Somalia to protect their own people or property.<sup>29</sup> But most regional members are themselves too financially troubled to support Somalia militarily.<sup>30</sup> While EAC member states do not have to finance security operations in Somalia, Somalia's membership could help it secure broader support in the EAC rather than relying on only three existing members, Kenya, Uganda, and Burundi.<sup>31</sup>

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24 Interview with senior official at Ministry of Planning, Investment, and Economic Development, Mogadishu, Somalia, 9 March 2023.

25 Interview with an economist, Mogadishu, Somalia, 5 March 2023.

26 Interview with an economist, Mogadishu, Somalia, 5 March 2023.

27 Interview with International Relations expert, Mogadishu, Somalia, 18 February 2023

28 Virtual interview with security and development expert, London, United Kingdom, 8 March 2023

29 Interview with an economist, Mogadishu, Somalia, 16 March 2023.

30 Interview with International Relations expert, Mogadishu, Somalia, 6 February 2023.

31 Interview with senior official at Ministry of Planning, Investment, and Economic Development, Mogadishu, Somalia, 9 March 2023.

## Economy

The economy is a major factor in any regional integration. It becomes even more vital if the EAC's pursuit of Somalia is solely economic-driven and trade-oriented.<sup>32</sup>

After decades of instability, Somalia has tried to rebuild its physical infrastructure, mainly in telecommunications and remittance services. Those of its Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)—mostly in retail, agrobusiness, tech and merchandise—that thrived alone during civil wars and their aftermath, could find themselves challenged post-integration. Somalia's SMEs have had to deal with a lack of law on property rights and with navigating an informal, dollarized economy, a weak central bank, the lack of subsidies, high energy prices, and inefficient microfinance and investment capital. They have been growing over the years but these industries are small compared to their regional counterparts. The Somali telecommunications sector, though, provides better, cheaper internet and mobile money services than other countries in the region.<sup>33</sup> Still, local companies will be threatened by the competition from the massive ventures existing in some EAC member states, such as Kenya.

One trade expert described Somali concerns of economic dominance by outsiders as a legacy of the communist-style economy that existed under the military regime of the late President Siad Barre (1969–1991). Anti-competition businesses still dominate the Somali market, with its high rate of imports linked to specific companies and individuals. It is not uncommon for importers to have strong leverage in a particular industry or sector, without competitive, open bids.<sup>34</sup>

Somali businesspeople must prepare themselves for an upcoming competition. Competition is what develops and sustains the market. Also, businesspeople must think big and expand their horizons. The importation business in Somalia will be a slice of a cake compared to the massive market in the EAC countries. Thus, they can better focus on production and exporting goods and services.<sup>35</sup>

In Somalia, the fundamental policies for trade and regulation are absent. The licences issued by the federal ministry of commerce do not align with those of the Federal Member States (FMs) in either appearance or regional jurisdiction. Without synchronizing the FMSs and the FGS, this creates the duplicate licences across multiple jurisdictions. Companies nonetheless have to rely on FGS-issued licences for import and export. And there is no unified tariff, nor are there commercial courts or intellectual property rights laws<sup>36</sup>. The federal quality control department is not equipped with a lab and relies on the physical inspection of goods.<sup>37</sup>

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32 Virtual interview with security and development expert, London, United Kingdom, 8 March 2023.

33 Virtual interview with trade expert, Tokyo, Japan, 18 March 2023.

34 Interview with an economist, Mogadishu, Somalia, 5 March 2023.

35 Interview with an economist, Mogadishu, Somalia, 5 March 2023.

36 Virtual interview with trade expert, Tokyo, Japan, 18 March 2023.

37 Interview with senior official in Somali Bureau of Standards, Mogadishu, Somalia, 7 February 2023.

There are concerns that the EAC's labor force may overwhelm Somalia's, where linguistic and other skills are more limited. Foreigners might occupy local positions. Many locals lack the skills and motivation to do physical work, in particular.

In the service industry, though, a senior Somali politician cum entrepreneur thought Somalis would hold their own:

No one in this country wants to bring foreigners to work for them and pay for their work permit, visa, tickets and income tax to work in hotels or restaurants when they can get a competent native in Mogadishu.<sup>38</sup>

One economist talked about the existence of egalitarianism in the labor market, suggesting the government should come up with strategies for creating incentives, such as recognizing manual and technical workers as professionals, providing them certification, equating their wages with those of non-manual jobs, increasing public awareness, and teaching people how to be disciplined and courteous. Others would be drawn to do this work too, once they saw their peers developing their lives.<sup>39</sup>

Widespread corruption exists in Somalia. The federal government's primary sources of revenue are Mogadishu's seaport and airport, and they are not taxed effectively. Many services are monopolized, often by affluent persons connected to the government, collectively known as the corporatocracy.<sup>40</sup>

### **Social and cultural barriers**

It is interesting to look at the societal linkages between Somalis and other East African communities, their historical ties and shared values, and the possible harmony or friction that might arise during Somalia's integration into the EAC.

Somalis are scattered all over EAC countries, mostly in Kenya, where there are Kenyan Somalis, Somali refugees, businesspeople who took up Kenyan passports, diplomatic officials from Somalia, and high-income Somalis, some of whom work for international organizations. Kenyan Somalis are represented in the Government of Kenya.

According to some participants in this study, a portion of Somalis is not happy with joining what they perceive as larger blocs of people of Bantu and Nilotic origin. Muslims and Cushites themselves, this makes Somalis a minority in the regional bloc. A Somali official comparing the relationship between Somalis and others in the EAC to their relationship to Somalia's own

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38 Interview with senior politician, Mogadishu, Somalia, 21 March 2023.

39 Interview with an economist, Mogadishu, Somalia, 16 March 2023.

40 Interview with an economist, Mogadishu, Somalia, 5 March 2023 .

Bantu minority, said: 'How can we, for example, accept to integrate and marry each other?'<sup>41</sup> (Somali Bantus are marginalized by most Somali people.)

Another respondent sought tolerance:

Know as much as you can about the person with whom you conduct business with. They are more than just clients. They also have lives of their own. They get married, have children, and sometimes bury loved ones. The Somali people must understand that integration entails sharing feelings with one's neighbour without compromising one's values and showing respect for the various cultures and rituals that neighbouring people follow.<sup>42</sup>

Somali communities in the US state of Minnesota, as well as Somalis living in the neighbourhood of Eastleigh in Nairobi, are an illustration of how little large Somali communities integrate socially with others. Yet Somalis are always frightened of being outcasts. For their part, others in the EAC worry about Somali businesses dominating those of their local business people.<sup>43</sup>

As citizens of their own sovereign nation, Somalis in Somalia have the autonomy to live freely by their cultural values. Many interviewees said guidelines should exist to continue these despite integration. As Somalia continued to develop, clear guidelines and safeguarding measures were needed to ensure alignment with Islamic values in areas such as commerce, education, media, and social norms.<sup>44</sup>

Language is also seen as an issue for Somalis working as members of the EAC. The dominance of Kiswahili, while only one of the EAC's three official languages (the others are English and French<sup>45</sup>), could pose a challenge to the degree to which Somalia integrates. Somalis who speak Kiswahili are usually those who hold Kenyan citizenship, as well as Somali businessmen residing in Kenya and Somali Bantus living closer to the border with Kenya, particularly the Mushunguli, Tunni and Baajuun clans.

However, not every EAC member state uses Kiswahili: South Sudanese do not fully speak the language, while only a relatively small portion of Ugandans (in the police and army, plus business people on the borders) speak the language frequently. Not everyone in Burundi, Rwanda and the DRC speaks Kiswahili.

When it comes to the Somalis who have neither left the country nor spoken the Swahili language

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41 Interview with former diplomat, Mogadishu, Somalia, 15 March 2023.

42 Interview with International Relations expert, Mogadishu, Somalia, 6 February 2023.

43 Interview with International Relations expert, Mogadishu, Somalia, 11 February 2023.

44 Interview, National Trade Facilitation Committee Official, Mogadishu, Somalia, 11 February 2023.

45 'EAC Mulls Adopting French as An Official Language of the Community,' East African Community. Accessed 28 November 2023, <https://www.eac.int/press-releases/151-international-relations/1697-eac-mulls-adopting-french-as-an-official-language-of-the-community>.



before, adapting to it is quite a challenge. While some maintain that 30 per cent or more<sup>46</sup> of Kiswahili could be understood by Arabic speakers, the majority of Somalis do not speak or understand Arabic either. In the EAC, Somalis may have to resolve this challenge by hiring young, educated Somalis to translate and facilitate business deals on their behalf.<sup>47</sup> Opportunity inequality may emerge as a result, with Somalis living in towns and regions nearer Kenya arguably welcoming integration into the East Africa Community, while residents of the riverine states or regions in the hinterlands farther away may be less enthusiastic.

Some Somalis associate Kiswahili with what they see as crueller aspects of the Christian faith, and its use is tinged with trauma for them.<sup>48</sup> Others associate it with their outsider status: returnees to Somalia from Kenya, for instance, find the Kiswahili phrase '*Leta kipande*', which translates to 'show your identity card', to be quite scary.

Another concern is religion. Somalis are predominantly Muslim. This fear could be allayed as EAC member states are secular, and all religions, including Islam, are practiced freely in them. In the minds of some outsiders, however, Somali Islam is associated with al-Shabab, which has carried out large-scale terrorist attacks in Kenya, Uganda, and elsewhere.<sup>49</sup>

The governments and citizens of Uganda, Burundi, and Kenya, all contributors to the African Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS)—formerly the African Union's Mission in Somalia (AMISOM)—deeply understand the threat posed by al-Shabaab in Somalia: Each country has sent troops to Somalia and suffered casualties.<sup>50</sup> This poses a substantial challenge for fruitful social cohesion between the EAC societies and Somalis.

A Somali Muslim scholar who was interviewed said that, through a religious lens, there is no harm for the Somali Muslim community in joining the EAC. In fact, he sees the EAC's membership as an opportunity to spread the Islamic religion throughout the region. Outsiders in Somalia would abide by Islamic rules. The Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, had agreements and security pacts with non-Muslims, but:

Our Islamic values must be maintained. Our ladies wear Hijab, but be aware of the impact of uncovered women, as well as the effects of drugs, nightclubs, and alcohol. We can limit their interaction when in public locations. We can tolerate that people consume wine in their residences and import it for their drinking reasons, but we will not accept them

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46 Mohamed Abdulmajid Akidah, 'Phonological and Semantic Change in Language Borrowing,' *International Journal of Education and Research* 1/4 (2013): 2.

47 Virtual interview with Horn of Africa regional analyst, Nairobi, Kenya, 18 March 2023.

48 Virtual interview with security and development expert, London, United Kingdom, 8 March 2023.

49 Virtual interview with security and development expert, London, United Kingdom, 8 March 2023.

50 Harun Maruf, 'Exclusive: At Least 3,500 AU Soldiers Killed in Somalia Since 2007,' *Voice of America*, 11 April 2023. Accessed 5 June 2023, <https://www.voanews.com/a/exclusive-at-least-3-500-au-soldiers-killed-in-somalia-since-2007/7045982.html>.

selling alcohol and narcotics openly. Though, in general, their effect will be smaller since we are in our nation practising our faith and we are the host majority.<sup>51</sup>

Another interviewee believed Somali societies would benefit from the interaction and diversity EAC membership could bring. However, he wanted Somalis to be prioritized in employment opportunities within Somalia, and their values be respected.<sup>52</sup>

## FOREIGN POLICY AND IMMIGRATION CHALLENGES

Relations between Kenya and Somalia have been through rough and smooth patches, depending on which presidents hold office. This demonstrates personalization in politics.<sup>53</sup> Their relations survive: At times, the authorities in Mogadishu and Nairobi have used the trade in the narcotic leaf khat, which is grown in Kenya and exported by air and road to Somalia daily, to express their external policy. Even though the EAC adopted a more people-friendly focus in 1999—introducing the East African passport, anthem, and the Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA)—the role individual leaders play in this bloc is clear.<sup>54</sup> Somalia's concerns are otherwise focused on the limited negotiating strength it has in the bilateral agreements in which Kenya has an advantage.

Somalia's lack of an immigration policy is also a challenge. A Somali Kenyan, Djiboutian or Ethiopian can come to Somalia and integrate with the local population as a Somali. Some Somalis from the Federal Republic of Somalia take an Ethiopian, Kenyan and Djiboutian citizenship as well to make it easier to travel around the world for business, health, education and tourism. This is because Somali passport holders encounter problems with getting visas for a wide range of countries.

Some Somalis maintain a closed-door or isolationist policy should be pursued until Somalia is more self-sufficient and has more choice in who to partner with.<sup>55</sup> The problem of borderless Somali citizenship is worsened by the absence of a full census and the lack of registration of Somali people living in Somalia. As a result, the Somali government knows little about its country's demographics.<sup>56</sup>

## OPPORTUNITIES IN THE INTEGRATION

Despite the challenges discussed, Somalia is likely to benefit from EAC integration, which

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51 Interview with Islamic scholar, Mogadishu, Somalia, 5 March 2023.

52 Interview with an economist, Mogadishu, Somalia, 16 March 2023.

53 Virtual interview with trade expert, Tokyo, Japan, 18 March 2023.

54 Virtual interview with security and development expert, London, United Kingdom, 8 March 2023.

55 Interview with International Relations expert, Mogadishu, Somalia, 6 February 2023.

56 Virtual interview with Horn of Africa regional analyst, Nairobi, Kenya, 18 March 2023.

may bring about the financial and technical support it needs to speed up its economic and institutional development and to stimulate job creation and the expansion of its fishery and ICT sectors. Somalia stands to profit from this integration in the short and long run. In the short run, Somali traders and businesspeople, managing capital worth millions of dollars, may gain the legal protection they have not previously had. Some Somalis have been murdered, kidnapped, and imprisoned for alleged business or financial irregularities and their properties confiscated on suspicion of financing or supporting terrorism. They are not respected as foreigners, citizens, or regional investors.<sup>57</sup>

Somali nationals living in the EAC and elsewhere will be safeguarded by this integration. During this year's Umrah, a Somali student from Ummul Qura University met a Somali sheikh in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. The sheikh was interviewed for this study. The student explained to the scholar that he was unable to bring his wife to Saudi Arabia, whereas the spouses of other students—such as those from Ethiopia and Kenya—were brought there and their travel and accommodation paid for. 'Only those who go to and live abroad might comprehend the necessity for this integration,'<sup>58</sup> the student quipped.

Somalia should not, however, focus on the convenience of passport acceptance and travelling abroad. Instead, it should improve its security, its foreign policy towards the region and the rest of the world, and its infrastructure for education, health care and domestic tourism to reduce migration and the desire for travel among Somalis.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, the country's economy is still suffering from the lack of functioning government institutions and the extensive monitoring of the financial transactions due to the emergence of al-Qaeda and other global extremist groups, such as al-Shabaab.

Interlocutors believed the EAC, as a regional bloc, could be a stepping stone for Somalia to access and use the international financial system. Somalias' advanced use of the remittance system proves their adherence to effective banking systems. Somalia has now completed debt relief milestone.<sup>60</sup> Several interviewees indicated that EAC membership would aid Somalia in post-debt initiatives, where countries lobby for support from other countries in the region.

The prospect of Somalis facing marginalization in jobs and being deprived of employment was often emphasized by interviewees in the study. But some interviewees said that joining the EAC would smooth the path to Somalia's joining the World Trade Organization (WTO) too. The investment generated by WTO and EAC memberships would, they believed, open

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57 Interview with senior official at Ministry of Planning, Investment, and Economic Development, Mogadishu, Somalia, 9 March 2023.

58 Interview with Islamic scholar, Mogadishu, Somalia, 5 March 2023

59 Interview with International Relations expert, Mogadishu, Somalia, 6 February 2023

60 International Monetary Fund, 'IMF and World Bank Announce US\$4.5 Billion in Debt Relief for Somalia', 13 December 2023. Accessed 24 January 2024, <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2023/12/13/pr23438-imf-and-world-bank-announce-us-4-5-billion-in-debt-relief-for-somalia>.

limitless job opportunities. Somalia would gain access to over 300 million people, bringing opportunities for businesses and economic expansion. An economist said that Somali traders in the EAC countries were given too much credence and that retail shops do not make a country economically competitive.<sup>61</sup>

In addition to importing goods and services from Kenya, Somalia could also have access to a wider range of goods and services from other nations. EAC nations may make investments in Somalia. Somali society will profit from different commodities. On the flip side, corporations might take advantage of Somalia's weak governance and make it a dumping ground for goods and smuggled drugs.<sup>62</sup> Somalia imports many of its goods from the United Arab Emirates (UAE), including some that originate in the EAC. For example, wood from the DRC, which arrives in Somalia, is exported to the UAE, where it is dyed, polished, and exported to Somalia. Even some food products, imported from the UAE, originate in the EAC.<sup>63</sup>

In the recent past, Kenya and Somalia took a dispute over territorial waters to the International Court of Justice (ICJ). EAC integration could serve as an alternative platform for business negotiations between the two nations, with Kenya allowed to explore petroleum investments at sea and Somalia signing a lease or concession agreement that would primarily benefit Somalia.

## TRADE—WHAT CAN SOMALIA OFFER?

Somalia has the longest coastline in Africa, which makes its blue economy stand out. These underused resources suffered from decades of illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing until the Somali government issued its first fishing licence in 2018.<sup>64</sup> Fish are the primary commodity that Somalia could export to the rest of the bloc, including Kenya, as Kenya faces deficits of fish and imports some of its fish from China.<sup>65</sup> Given Somalia's prolonged trade deficit, one economist believes that Somalia could recoup an export surplus in a short period of time with investment in its blue economy.<sup>66</sup>

The blue economy also has a substantial logistics business, which has an undeniable influence on the economy of the twenty-first century. The Red Sea and Indian Ocean offer natural and man-made ports. Some EAC nations, including Uganda, have been looking for ways to diversify their trade routes and, as Uganda anticipates oil production and export, could seek locations for

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61 Interview with an economist, Mogadishu, Somalia, 5 March 2023.

62 Interview with Security and International Relations expert, Mogadishu, Somalia, 10 February 2023.

63 Interview with senior official at Ministry of Planning, Investment, and Economic Development, Mogadishu, Somalia, 9 March 2023.

64 'Somalia Issues Fishing Licenses: Fees Will Help Develop Fisheries Sector', Ministry of Fishery and Marine Resources. Accessed 17 May 2023, <https://mfmr.gov.so/en/2019/03/15/somalia-issues-fishing-licenses>.

65 Interview with senior official at Ministry of Planning, Investment, and Economic Development, Mogadishu, Somalia, 9 March 2023.

66 Interview with an economist, Mogadishu, Somalia, 5 March 2023.

refineries and pipeline routes.<sup>67</sup>

Somalia may also exploit the import–re-export system. Building free export zones and providing inexpensive labor would help, as would investing in port and road infrastructure, cheap electricity, and advanced technology. The shipping route via the Red Sea and Indian Ocean is used for commerce by Turkey, members of the European Union, China and India. Somalia can provide a quicker path to it than any other EAC nation.<sup>68</sup> Somalia took a step towards this by establishing the only privately owned port in eastern Africa in Garacad in Puntland.<sup>69</sup>

The blue economy has the potential to expand lobster, tuna and other seafood exports and canning enterprises and factories across the seaways.<sup>70</sup> Secondary businesses, such as food oil producers, drug makers and cosmetic producers may spring up, as well as others that process and export raw materials and by-products. Each port or factory that is developed, leased or just used in transit will provide jobs for citizens, while also generating revenue for Somalia's central government and federal member states.

Somalia might also be competitive in its thriving telecommunications system and ICT system in general, in which the nation is already strong and can provide services to the regional bloc. Its large agriculture and livestock sectors form the backbone of its exports. It can supply agricultural products less widely grown in the EAC, such as sesame and the *spondias dulcis* (*Isbaandhees*) fruit, the June plum.<sup>71</sup>

Somalia can work on modernizing and expanding its export industry. The types of goods Somalia can trade with EAC members could be diversified by strengthening value chains in sectors such as agriculture and fisheries. As Somalia strengthens its processes for implementing a single tariff schedule and building trade institutions, there may be opportunities to better position itself in membership.<sup>72</sup>

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67 Virtual interview with security and development expert, London, United Kingdom, 8 March 2023.

68 Interview with senior official at Ministry of Planning, Investment, and Economic Development, Mogadishu, Somalia, 9 March 2023.

69 'Somalia looks forward to joining, supporting EAC initiatives – envoy', The New Times (2023). Accessed 16 March 2023. <https://www.newtimes.co.rw/article/5031/news/africa/somalia-looks-forward-to-joining-supporting-eac-initiatives---envoy>.

70 Interview with official from ministry of fisheries and marine resources, Mogadishu, Somalia, 15 March 2023.

71 Interview with senior official at Ministry of Planning, Investment, and Economic Development, Mogadishu, Somalia, 9 March 2023.

72 Abdighani Hirad, 'Somalia's Membership to East African Community (EAC): Gradual Approach is Best After Institutional Reforms' Eurasia review, 3 June 2023. Accessed 21 July 2023, <https://www.eurasiareview.com/03062023-somalias-membership-to-east-african-community-eac-gradual-approach-is-best-after-institutional-reforms-analysis/>.

# CONCLUSION

This paper shows that institution building and law and order restoration in Somalia are not enough for it to make full use of regional integration: Instead it could sink under the exploitation of relatively developed members of the bloc. The proponents' view is that remarkable opportunities for the country exist provided that membership of the EAC is different from integration into it. Merely being accepted as a member, as Somalia was in October 2023, assists it in resurrecting itself from the ashes.

This includes the help it needs in drawing in international organizations, receiving security help and signing security pacts, improving diplomatic relations, and protecting the Somali diaspora in EAC member states.

In general, despite their hesitation, interlocutors emphasized the importance of regional integration for Somalia but differed on timing. Opponents suggested that the country ought to first resolve its internal challenges and build its institutions. Otherwise, it was 'putting the cart before the horse.'<sup>73</sup>

Some scholars believed the EAC was interested in bringing Somalia on board because of the potential of long-term benefit. Somalia is seen as the jewel in its crown, with the EAC hurrying Somalia to join. The EAC sees the Gulf, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey, as having considerable influence on Somalia—at its expense. The EAC is late in its pursuit of Somalia, 'but it is better late than never'.<sup>74</sup> A veteran Somali politician believes that the country cannot be an isolated island and should seek integration and collaboration with the region. She compared EAC integration to an external audit:

No one says I will be audited when my firm is clear of all misconduct and is compliant. Companies are audited and their pitfalls are exposed in order to deal with those challenges and improve. It is time to accept that we can cooperate with the world and with the region, to begin with, and adhere to international standards and laws.<sup>75</sup>

The study concludes that Somalia will profit more from EAC membership if the country's rule of law, institutional and physical infrastructure, economic growth, and security are strengthened,

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73 Virtual interview with Horn of Africa regional analyst, Nairobi, Kenya, 18 March 2023.

74 Virtual interview with security and development expert, London, United Kingdom, 8 March 2023.

75 Interview with senior politician, Mogadishu, Somalia, 21 March 2023.

with an emphasis on giving the nation adequate time to restore its institutions and human capital before implementing the EAC's customs and economic integration pillars.

Therefore, the most pressing question remains: Will Somalia be able to address all of these difficulties within the negotiated framework and reap the benefits, or will it fall from the tree and break its back? The study encourages follow-up research to look into these potential futures.

The EAC itself needs to ensure its mechanisms for a people-centered regional bloc are kept and create an environment to accommodate Somalia's differences.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations in this report are addressed to the key stakeholders involved, commencing with the Somali government, civil society organizations and the private sector, and the EAC.

### *To the Somali government:*

- Establish and enhance strong government structures that will be resistant to the interests of political groups and individuals.
- Prioritize completing the provincial federal constitution and enhance the rule of law and justice systems and their mechanisms.
- Improve the capacity of the security institutions, including the army, police, intelligence, and financial institutions, as well as physical infrastructure and energy.
- Strengthen anti-corruption policies and laws, which will in turn reduce the corruption and mismanagement of public funds for maximum benefit.
- Deploy key clerical personnel, technocrats, and experts to the EAC on Somalia's behalf. Also deploy geopolitical experts, lawyers, businesspeople, economists and other pertinent technocrats who can bargain in the interest of the country.
- Aside from collective discussion, there must be improvement of bilateral ties between the EAC members and Somalia.
- To close the gaps between Somali people and others in the EAC and provide the best chance for integration, the government must completely revamp the educational system and incorporate the study of English and Kiswahili in the curriculum.
- Improve labor rights and the minimum wage, and introduce labor courts and regulations that prevent the exploitation of employees.
- For a more competitive labor force, invest in the knowledge and education system by increasing the numbers of school goers, ensuring the quality of primary and higher education, and introducing technical or vocational schools.
- Be attentive to the potential economic and social inequality this integration may impose within our country. There is a possibility it could negatively impact equality across income levels, social status, and geographic regions. Proactive steps should be taken to promote fairness and prevent marginalization of vulnerable groups as integration moves forward.

***To the civil society organizations and the private sector***

- Investigate the difficulties presented by this integration and encourage the government to refrain from any action that would jeopardize the sovereignty of the nation.
- The private sector is set to face competition from EAC members. They need to get ready to step up their research and development operations and ensure standardized quality with their products.
- The private sector ought to adopt measures for economies of scale to increase production and promote the export of goods and services to the region and beyond.

***To the EAC:***

- Strengthen bilateral relations between member states. Somalia and Kenya, for instance, faced off at the ICJ, and yet the latter is yet to accept the verdict in Somalia's favour even though the case is closed.
- Underpin the community's voice in the bloc rather than that of heads of states.
- Be mindful that some of the member states though geographically close are divided along racial, religious and language lines. It is thus important to establish a peaceful environment for all members.



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