

**Forum:** African Union

**Issue:** The Question of Diplomatic Recognition of Somaliland

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## Introduction

Somaliland is a former British Protectorate land. On 26<sup>th</sup> June 1960 became British Somaliland independent for a short time before uniting with Italian Somalia. In 1999 they won their independence after the collapse of Somalia. Since then, Somaliland has had its own government, election systems, currency and army forces. Still the country is not recognized by the United Nations or any other African countries and internationally accepted as a part of Somalia.

The basis of the conflict is disagreements between Somaliland and Somali because of Somaliland's claims of their use of self-determination right in 1999 as they became independent and fulfilled the conditions (permanent population, a specific territory, effective government, capacity to establish relations with other states) to be an internationally recognized country. On the other hand, the Somalian government announced that Somaliland is an integral part of Somalia state and that its secession will violate the country's territorial integrity. Therefore, the conflict stems primarily from a legal and political disagreement between the demand for independence and the preservation of state sovereignty.

The issue is particularly important for the African Union as one of the main fundamental purposes of the Union is the protection and the presentation of colonial-era borders in Africa. Many AU-Members are concerned that the recognition of Somaliland will encourage other separatist movements. However, after the difference of the separatist movements in Africa and Somaliland situation being reported, AU started to try to develop a specific approach to the issue.



## Definition of Key Terms

### Diplomatic Recognition

A state being internationally recognized in diplomatic relationships by other states and the United Nations.

### Self-Determination

The right of a state to appoint their own political statue in the international area. This right, which was Somaliland's basis for its claims, was maintained by the UN in 1960 and 1970 to protect the sovereignty of protectorate areas.

### Territorial Integrity

The principle of states protecting their existing borders. The Somalian government and many other countries support this principle by claiming that the recognition of Somaliland violates the national integrity of Somalia.

### De Facto State

An entity that functions technically like a state but fails to achieve a widespread recognition. Somaliland is seen as a De Facto State.

## Background Information

### Historical Background

British Somaliland became independent in 1960. Then it united with Italian Somalia, and these two countries formed the current Somalia state. In 1991, after the Civil War as the dictatorial regime in Somalia had fallen, the northern area of Somalia



organized to establish a new state which was independent from Somalia and established Somaliland.

### Current Situation of Somaliland

Somaliland has been governed by its own government, parliament, security forces and electoral system, although the African Union and United Nations do not recognize the land as a state. To the latest Commission Statements of AU, the Union is supporting the national integrity of Somalia. Only the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia has signed a Memorandum of Understanding in 2024 with Somaliland upon Ethiopia's access to Somaliland's coasts and cooperating on maritime collectively, however Ethiopia did not officially recognize Somaliland either.

### Territorial Integrity and Self- Determination

Although Somaliland lacks formal international recognition, it has established stable political institutions, a functioning economy, and a relatively secure environment, making it a de facto self-governing entity that is often considered more stable than Somalia itself. However, between the years of 1960 and 1991 Somaliland has been a part of Somalia, therefore the African Union and United Nations protect the territorial integrity of the Somalian government. Because it violates the national sovereignty of a country to separate an economically crucial ports and trade area of a country.

### Economical Aspects

Somaliland's current economy is based on agriculture, livestock farming and trade revenues from the Port of Berbera. Although Somaliland is believed to have potential in renewable and non- renewable energy sources, the lack of international recognition and infrastructure problems deter investors. It is thought that increased international recognition would boost foreign investment in Somaliland. The Port of Berbera, the biggest economical benefit of Somaliland, is very close to the Red Sea and located on important sea routes for world trade. In case of international



recognition, more foreign investment would come, it could establish direct relations with organizations such as the World Bank and IMF, the banking system could develop, and the volume of Berbera's water usage could increase.

### Security of Berbera Port

The Port of Berbera is located in an essential place, directly on the Gulf of Aden, which controls most of European and Asian trade. Somalia coasts have been struggling with piracy activities for a long time. As it is one of the crucial parts of sea trade security is essential. The Port is strategic for maritime security operations, combating piracy, Red Sea security and combatting terrorism. More international cooperations for port security could be provided, more investments for stability could be made and Somaliland could be able to defend its own economy with local security forces. On the other hand, tensions with Somalia could escalate and regional power rival army could intensify.

### Similar Situations in Africa

The biggest concern of the African Union and United Nations upon this issue is that the independence of Somaliland could be an encouragement for the other De Facto states in Africa to violate the territorial integrity. Areas like Biafra (Nigeria), Azawad (Mali) and Cabinda (Angola) would also want to be independent states as Somaliland. However, the uniqueness of the situation was reported in 2005 by Fact-Finding Mission.

## Major Countries and Organizations Involved

### Somaliland

As one of the main countries of the conflict, Somaliland is not a United Nations Member itself as it is not a diplomatic recognized state. Its government is a



democratic republic which gets ruled by a president and has the executive branch. Somaliland also has two Assemblies that has the right to legislate and independent courts that can control the judiciary. The main argument of Somaliland to be independent is its claim that Somaliland is able to act like a fully equipped state, even without international recognition. Therefore the government demands diplomatic recognition from the United Nations and African Union based on the state's self- determination right.

### Somalia

Somalia sees Somaliland as a natural part of Somalia state and claims that the demands of Somaliland violate the territorial integrity of the state. As Somaliland is the northern, the most economically active, part of the country, the government does not want to lay the groundwork for an economic or political loss. Despite being in an internal conflict for several years, Somalia still shows appearance in international discussions upon Somaliland issue.

### Ethiopia

In 2024, Ethiopia signed a Memorandum of Understanding upon the access of Ethiopian ships to the Somaliland coasts and a maritime connection. It was expected that Ethiopia would recognize Somaliland in return, however Ethiopia does not recognize Somaliland in the most current situation, even though it is seen diplomatically closest to Somaliland. The Somalian government considered the Memorandum as a violation and ignorance to its national sovereignty and reacted adamantly.

### Djibouti

Djibouti supports the territorial integrity of Somalia and does not recognize Somaliland. It observes Somaliland carefully as the sea trade of Ethiopia used to ran mostly from the Djibouti ports before MoU. The Memorandum and the strengthening



of Berbera Port creates a competitive environment between Djibouti and Somaliland.

### United Arab Emirates

United Arab Emirates is a big influence in the diplomatic relations of Somaliland. As Berbera Port is close to the trade routes of UAE, its state and non-state companies improved the port by investing hundred thousands of dollars for the port. It contributed to the establishment of the Berbera Economic Zone. Although UAE does not diplomatically recognize Somaliland, it is one of the economical supporters of Somaliland.

### Israel

Israel is the first country that has officially recognized Somaliland, as the security of Red Sea, the desire to balance Iran's influence in the region and the strategic importance on the Gulf of Aden get Israel's attention. The government of Somaliland gives importance to the diplomatic support from Israel. In 2025, after Israel became the first country to recognize Somaliland and faced the harsh protests from AU and UN. Currently, Israel is planning to open Somaliland's first embassy in Jerusalem and therefore, the tension between Somalia- Türkiye side and Israel's side keeps growing.

### Türkiye

Türkiye has a diplomatic role in the conflict between Somaliland and Somalia. It does not officially recognize Somaliland and supports the improvements of Somalia in terms of education and economy defending the territorial integrity of Somalia. However, Türkiye does not reject the meeting requests of Somalia and Somaliland. Between the years of 2012- 2015 and in 2024, Türkiye hosted the negotiations between Somalia and Somaliland. Türkiye reacted negatively to the recognition of Israel.



## African Union

African Union acts mostly politically and stays on the side of Somalia's territorial integrity and national sovereignty by not recognizing Somaliland. On the other hand, in AU Fact- Finding Mission to Somaliland in 2005, it was reported that the situation in Somaliland was an unique case and could not be compared with the other separatist movements in Africa. However, the latest Statements of AU from 2026 still rephrase that the diplomatic existence of Somaliland is a violation to the sovereignty of Somalia.

## Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
26 June 1960	British Somaliland gained independence
1 July 1960	Unite with Italian Somalia
18 May 1991	Somaliland declared independence
1992	The UN established the United Nations Operation in Somalia
2001	Somaliland held a constitutional referendum supporting independence
2005	AU Fact- Finding Mission visited Somaliland
2012	Somalia- Somaliland dialogue rounds
2013	Türkiye affiliated dialogue meetings between Somalia and Somaliland
January 2024	Ethiopia signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Somaliland
2014	Somalia appealed to the UN and AU about Ethiopia- Somaliland agreement



## Relevant UN Resolutions and Other Documents

- [United Nations Development Programme \(UNDP\) - Berbera Governance Report \(2025\)](#): Under the name of UNDP, the recent economic growth in Berbera was reported by UN officers. The optimistic report affirms that strong Governance is essential for happy lives.
- [African Union Commission Statement \(2026\)](#): The latest commission statement from 2026 calls again for the territorial integrity of Somalia and reassures Somalia about its national sovereignty..
- [AU Fact- Finding Mission to Somaliland \(2005\)](#): The AU Fact- Finding Mission concludes the investigations of AU in Somaliland upon Governance, economy and security situation of the state.
- [United Nations Charter](#): The article 1(2) stands for an explanation to the term of self- determination which Somaliland bases its claims on. The article 2(4) stands for an explanation to the term territorial integrity which Somalia defends.
- [United Nations General Assembly Resolution 2625](#): Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Cooperation among States in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations from 1970 supports self- determination protecting the territorial integrity.
- [United Nations General Assembly Resolution 1514](#): Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples from the year 1960. This resolution supports the independence of Somaliland as it was independent in 1960.

## Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue



## 2012 Somalia- Somaliland Dialogue

After the London Conference in 2012, the international community encouraged Somalia and Somaliland to discuss the issue and further political relations to reach an agreement, so the negotiations between two countries started. Future political relations, security cooperation, development aid, combatting terrorism and piracy and issues of international representation were discussed; however, the şışesi could not agree on the status of Somaliland, therefore the negotiations stopped without a solution.

## AU Fact- Finding Mission

The reports clearly stated that the situation of Somaliland is different than the other separatist movements and unique as the union of Somalia and Somaliland in 1960 is legally controversial. To the mission, the issue of Somaliland would not encourage any other separatist groups in Africa. Therefore, it was suggested AU to develop a special approach however, AU did not recognize Somaliland and still ignores it in the international area.

## Türkiye's Attempts

Between the years of 2012- 2015, Türkiye hosted the negotiations between Somaliland and Somalia until the sides could not agree. After the MoU of Ethiopia in 2024, the Memorandum created a political crisis between Somalia and Ethiopia as it concluded close political relations with Somaliland, even though Ethiopia did not recognize it as a state. Therefore, Türkiye mediated between the countries and recalled the issues upon sovereignty, territorial integrity, UN Charter and AU Principles.

## Possible Solutions



As a solution to the aforementioned issue, a referendum for Somalia and Somaliland could be suggested. Other than that, the gradual diplomatic recognition of Somaliland should be internationally discussed and reached on an agreement. During the discussions the role of the African Union in terms of keeping the political statuses of the continent stable by observing the separatists groups in Africa. The global effects of the economical and security situation of Somaliland should be emphasized. Therefore, the foreign investments from state or non- state companies could be encouraged. Also, most importantly the balance between self determination and territorial integrity could be finalized.

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*"Why the UAE has incurred the wrath of Somalia"*

<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c99k4jxzondo>

*"Israel Recognizes Somaliland as Independent State, Netanyahu says"*

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